

## Understanding Nigeria Within The Context Of The Atlantic World

### **Abstract**

*The Trans-Atlantic slave trade that started about the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in Nigeria by some Europeans particularly the Portuguese, was/is a paradox. It is also a subject that evokes a lot of emotions understandably because slavery and slave trade are firmly enshrined in the domains of economic exploitation and to a lesser degree, political oppression among other reactionary complexes. Up to now, some debilitating effects of this Trans-oceanic phenomenon can be gleaned from the socio-cultural landscape of Nigeria. But despite the ugliness of this experience with emphasis on the collective memories of the people, there are certain foundational lessons that we can learn from it. In this regard, a paradigm shift embedded in trans-disciplinary approaches involving such subjects as archaeology and anthropology is most desirable. For too long, attention has been almost totally focused on the debilitating effects of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Such an approach derives from closed ideologies – a major encumbrance to modern education. The lacunae of silence created as a result of these traditional parameters of authenticity or truth can be significantly filled in through the lenses of archaeological and anthropological sciences among other disciplines. For example, the content and form of the grammar of agricultural, culinary and architectural history and heritage were greatly modified with the passage of time in this country as a result of the above entanglement. The dietary culture of Nigerians were enlarged and enriched, thus paving the way for a healthier society. Similarly, aspects of Nigeria's socio-cultural heritage were adapted to the general lifeways of a lot of peoples from the other side of the Atlantic. The Argentines, Brazilians and Puerto-Ricans are some of the peoples involved with this phenomenon of flows and interconnections. This is one good example of how Nigeria contributed to the evolution of the modern world system following her encounter with the Western world willy nilly. It reminds us all, of the oneness of humanity even in the face of racial/cultural diversity and tendencies that are indeed, largely arbitrary and/or superficial in several senses. Today's Nigerians and Africans in general need to learn to belong to the international community in a critical manner. The political elites should also stop enslaving their subjects as a result of do-or-die politics and financial wrecklessness.*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, the most populous nation in the black world was one of the African geopolities which experienced the phenomenon of the Atlantic slave trade. This region with about 140 million people and over half a thousand languages and dialects, is a rich store house of natural and cultural resources. The two most prominent rivers are Niger and Benue that meet at Lokoja. From here the waters continue their southward journey to the Atlantic Ocean. The country's over 800-kilometre stretch of coastline is intersected by the Niger Delta – a region of intricate network of rivers, creeks and creeklets as well as a belt of mangrove swamps (Balogun 2000; Nzewunwa 1983). This geographical factor or the coastal character of Nigeria played a significant role in the shaping and reshaping of its chequered past.

In this piece of work, a critical analysis of Atlantic slave trade is done. This is with a view to deepening our understanding, appreciation and knowledge of the subject, from the inception of the trade in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century up to the ethnographic present. The central role played by the region later christened Nigeria is examined. This is in addition to the fact that the geopolity remains up to now, a landscape of exchange, given the transformation of much of its agricultural, culinary and architectural essence by external forces.

There is no gainsaying the fact that our analysis of the saga of slavery and more importantly, slave trade is firmly enshrined among other things, in the domains of contemporary circumstances, needs and aspirations. Such an effort is capable of generating new questions and new possibilities so that the discourse, can be carefully disengaged from the shadow of narrow conventional wisdom. Put differently, some of the current parameters of authenticity and/or historical truth would be shattered through the lenses of open ideologies. This takes us from the realm of mere knowledge acquisition to the domain of wisdom (knowledge applications). The bottomline of all these engagements, is that much of the old historiography of Atlantic slave trade pales into insignificance in the face a transdisciplinary approach and considerable openness. This appears to be one major way of escaping from some of the pains of our slave heritage, so that we can make enormous gains from the ugly experience. Consequently, three temporal levels have been identified as follows:

- A. 1450 to 1807 (direct slavery/slave trade)
- B. 1807 to 1960 (indirect slavery)
- C. 1960 to-date (self-imposed slavery)

### **The Excitement of Slavery/Slave Trade Discourse**

The Atlantic slave trade discourse is gaining in popularity more than ever before. The recent upsurge of interest in this subject is a healthy development in several respects, although caution must not be thrown to the winds. So many articles, monographs and books have been written on slavery and Atlantic slave trade in West Africa since its inception up to around 1807 when the latter was abolished at least on paper by the British Government. A lot of these derive from conferences and workshops among other broadly similar academic and professional meetings. More of these would follow. This is not a surprise given the fact that the Transatlantic slave trade saga affected/affects the whole human race in different ways. No matter where we belong to, this monumental human phenomenon has become an important component of modern global heritage (Ogundele 2004; 2006). There is no doubt, that our social and political consciousness will grow larger as new facts and insights are revealed through meticulous research. However, what Nigerians and other members of the global village do with these new facts and insights would go a long way in charting or not charting the pathways of our destinies. The Atlantic slave trade discourse is unending and complex. This underscores the reason why different people examine the subject from different perspectives. Their divergent views and positions must be listened to and respected. This openness is capable of providing a wider perspective of the subject that often evokes a lot of emotions among other things. By adopting the principles of multivocality and mutuality of respect, stakeholders can increase the amount of knowability of the history of slave trade in Nigeria and the world at large. All the above points are non-negotiable if local, regional and global peace as well as material progress on a sustainable scale must be made.

### **Slavery and Slave Trade in Nigeria**

Appraising slavery is a pre-condition for developing a clear understanding of the origin and dynamics of slave trade in Nigeria. Slavery and slave trade are very closely related, although they are not exactly the same thing in scope and character. Both concepts connote some amount of oppression, economic exploitation and abuse of fundamental human rights.

In this connection, the latter (slave trade) is far deadlier and/or more oppressive in many senses. Slavery is the act of making somebody lose much (if not all) of his freedom and serve another person by force. It is about physical captivity with all its inherent problems of psychological/mental disorientation. But despite the minimum oppressive and exploitative nature of domestic slavery, it was a recognised social institution in Nigeria, same as other parts of West Africa before the coming of the Europeans. However, domestic slavery was a global experience in

the past. This can be stretched as far back in time as the dawn of human civilizations. The rise of kingdoms and empires was linked to domestic slavery. This facet of human experience is embedded in cultural evolution. For example, Britain and France are some of the developed nations that once practised slavery within their domains (Andah and Akpobasa 1996; Andah 1994; Bentley and Ziegler 2003).

No matter how subtle or mild, slavery is a good example of abuse of fundamental human rights, understandably because man's texture is carefully woven with the thread of liberty. This underscores the reason why no human being will like to readily lose his freedom even in the face of abject poverty (Ahmad 1998).

But domestic slavery in pre-European Nigeria was not rooted in unfettered brutalities. There was room for a wide range of individual freedoms arising from the amount of hard work and level-headedness of a given domestic slave. To a large degree, some minimum human dignity still featured in the consciousness of the master or slave owner. For example, convicts serving as domestic slaves on other people's farms free of charge for some time, were usually allowed to return to their original communities later. Similarly, captives from internecine wars were sometimes put to domestic service or labour in the fields. Stubborn and/or lazy slaves could be sold as chattels. Sometimes, strong slaves were enlisted in the local armies. Nigeria with a long history of agricultural productions going back to prehistoric times saw slaves as a form of private investment.

It is on record, that well behaved slaves could even own property and were as noted above, protected from undue hardships or cruelty from any direction (Osae and Nwabara 1982; Rodney 1966; 1968). Among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, a female slave or captive might end up getting married to her master or master's son. At this point, her slave status ceased or disappeared and the children resulting from this union were regarded as free-born. In addition, a hard-working and amiable male slave could become a community leader through time. Aside from this, domestic slaves in pre-European Nigeria, were normally from within the geopolity and not from foreign countries with different socio-cultural expressions. As a result of this, slaves were usually able to fit in with many of the cultural practices of their masters with relative ease. One important component of this experience, is culinary behavior or food culture. Indeed, domestic slavery in Nigeria (despite our disapproval of it, as a bad man-made institution by the standards of today), had a robust human face when compared with the Atlantic slavery and slave trade that later followed.

Nigeria and indeed, the entire West African sub-region began to experience the phenomenon of Atlantic slavery and slave trade as from about mid-15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This was in total contrast to the African domestic slavery. The discovery of the New World (with its extremely rich soils that could sustain several crops like cotton, sugarcane and tobacco) by some Europeans particularly, the Spaniards, ended up tying Nigerian economy to the apron strings of the European capitalist economy and its transatlantic extensions as from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Plantation economy could not be established in Africa (despite its similar ecological conditions to that of the New World) because lands were difficult to take from the peoples (Africans) who had by this time, developed powerful political structures. Kings and other lesser community leaders often worked closely to distribute lands among the subjects for agricultural productions among other purposes. Indeed, African legal systems did not create space for private ownership of property particularly land. Ownership of land was vested in local communities. This was a major encumbrance to the acquisition of land for plantation purposes in Nigeria and West Africa by the Europeans as from the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, there were no "virgin" lands for Europeans to acquire in Africa as of this period. However, the situation in the New World, was in total contrast to that of West Africa and Nigeria in particular.

In the New World, there were no strong political structures and the indigenous populations especially the American-Indians were basically hunters/food gatherers who were extremely

mobile and were known to have flimsy shelters. Consequently, the Spaniards and Portuguese began to acquire lands in the New World (the Americas and the Caribbean) in order to establish plantations for mass cultivation of such crops as sugarcane and cotton to feed their rapidly expanding home industries in Europe. Forced labour was initially sought from the natives (American-Indians), but unfortunately for these plantation owners, they (the natives) were too lazy and weak to do heavy farm work. Suffice it to say that they were not used to farming having been depending on game hunting and food gathering as a form of livelihood. While the West Africans were lucky in the first instance that their lands could not be taken by the Europeans for plantation purposes, the inability of the American-Indians to do manual labour in the fields (in a satisfactory way), later dealt a devastating blow on the West Africans (Webster 1969; Afigbo 1975). This was because plantation owners began to look for adequate supply of forced labour from West Africa with reference to Nigeria.

Suffice it to say, that Africans generally were much more hard-working and stronger. A single African slave could do the job of four to five American-Indians, who were usually feeble. But at the initial stages, this trade in human cargo was done on a modest scale. However, there was an upsurge of interest in slave trade during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as more European nations such as England, France and Holland started to establish plantations in the New World. They too needed African slaves who were of course, rugged and hardworking.

Small numbers of these slaves worked in private homes and mines, while the majority of them were in the plantations facing all kinds of brutalities from their supervisors and plantation owners. The period between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that coincided with the blossoming of Transatlantic slave trade, was marked by severe droughts in Nigeria and the rest of West Africa. This was calamitous for the local peoples. Both the forces of nature and man disintegrated the West African collective landscape as more and more able-bodied Nigerians were carted away from their roots. Precious metals mined from the Americas included gold and silver. One very prominent settlement in this regard, was Potosi where there were many rich mines. Here some Spanish overlords held sway for many decades.

Slave traders were interested in young people (particularly men) between the ages of 14 and 35 years. These were strong and healthy individuals who could do considerable amount of work in the plantations over an extended period of time. About 66 percent of slaves tunneled from the West African coasts into European plantations in Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Haiti (then a French sugar colony) and Puerto Rico among other locations were men. But despite the superior technological powers of the Europeans which contributed immensely to their carting away of huge numbers of Africans (running into millions), many of the slaves restricted oppression and economic exploitation in the plantations and mines.

Although these enslaved Africans usually suffered heavy casualties on many occasions, a few of them still managed to obtain their freedom. But if you assumed that the European overlords were always having things easy with the slaves, then you would need to do a rethink. Thus for example, the role of Boukman, a charismatic Vodou priest in the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, in liberating a lot of slaves cannot be over-emphasized. In August 1791, some 12,000 slaves began to kill white settlers. They destroyed many plantations and homes of their masters. Within a short period of time (4 to 5 weeks), almost 100,000 slaves joined the victorious revolutionary army. The slaves had drawn inspirations from the enlightenment ideals of the American and French revolution rooted in freedom, equality and sovereignty. In 1789, when the French revolution broke out, the white settlers in Saint Domingue sought the right to self-government, but opposed the idea of giving political and legal equality to the free people of colour, including mulattoes and freed slaves. Second, many of the slaves were battle-tested veterans of wars in their African countries before they were captured and sold into slavery (Bentley and Ziegler 2003).

It is on record, that the remote ancestors of most of the people of modern Haiti, were African slaves who successfully staged a revolution to liberate themselves from the bondage of

oppression and economic exploitation from their French masters. This was on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. The African generals who staged this successful revolution declared independence in late 1803 (Bentley and Ziegler 2003). By 1804, Haiti became a self-governing geopolity. This development shows clearly that man is the epitome of liberty. Undermining liberty, is an invitation to violence. The Haitian revolution was a well organised one, that was second to none in the western hemisphere. The courage and resilience of these slaves in successfully fighting dreadful brutalities remain up to now, a big plus for all contemporary Africans at home and in the diaspora.

### **Negative Impacts of Atlantic Slave Trade**

The carting away of young Nigerians with men in the majority adversely affected the region. Although it started small, but this trade in human cargoes reached monumental proportions during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as more and more European nations like Holland and France established plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean. They too, needed African slave labour. This situation coupled with the Islamic slave trade that started from the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and continued up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (early modern era) no doubt led to a haemorrhage of populations. At least 20 million Africans must have been consumed by these two trades in human cargoes. The African slaves in the Americas and other parts of the western hemisphere lost touch for ever with the communities of their origin. Their descendants (African-Americans, African-Portuguese, African-Spaniards and African-Britons) up to now continue to suffer from the traumas of cultural/racial discreditation. These traumatised Africans have through time developed some hybrid cultural traditions as a result of the accident of their transoceanic encounters.

The slave trade experience shook the country to its solid foundations. The haemorrhage of populations led to the collapse or drastic reduction of agricultural productions. This situation (marked by chaos and confusion) was exacerbated by drought and famine between 1630 and 1860 in West Africa. Not unexpectedly, the whole sub-region particularly, Nigeria was ravaged to a large degree, by diseases and illnesses arising from heavy malnutrition and undernutrition of the vast populations. These were also worsened by acute psychological disorientation and hopelessness at its peak.

Apart from the above, the hitherto flourishing local industries involving such knowledge systems as iron metallurgy (smelting and blacksmithing); soap making; textile productions and salt making were gradually crippled. This was/is a tragedy of monumental proportions because the indigenous knowledge systems represented/ represent the engine complex of Nigeria and West Africa as a whole. It meant an end to the age-old internal self-reliance of the peoples. By this token, their (industries) eclipse marked the beginning of underdevelopment (of the region) in all its ramifications. It was a major turning point in Africa's chequered history.

Archaeological evidence of iron metallurgy has been got from many locations in the country. These are relics of indigenous science and technology. They include smelting furnaces or combustion chambers, tuyeres (cylindrical clay pipes for forcing additional draught into the chamber with the aid of foot- or hand-operated bellows) and iron slag (impurities from smelted iron ore). Many of these industrial relics abound in Tivland, Igboland, Yorubaland and Hausaland among other places in Nigeria (Ogundele 2006). The steady process of change or development in Nigeria was halted. For example, scrap iron or bloom from Europe replaced the indigenous iron metallurgical practices and/or traditions, thereby putting an end to the age-old industrial behavior. By about 1850, iron working activities had almost completely stopped among the Tiv of the Middle Benue Valley region of Nigeria.

Some Nigerians served as enslavers and intermediaries between European slave traders at the coasts and the hinterland peoples. These intermediaries were usually local leaders or chiefs who were (seductively) induced by the Atlantic slave traders, so that they could collaborate with them to plunder human and to a lesser degree, material resources such as gold and ivory in the region. Such luxuries as walking sticks, alcohol, tobacco pipes and mirrors (Rodney 1968; Brooks

1986) were used as a bait. Indigenous legal systems in Nigeria also suffered a devastating blow. Local leaders and kings were no longer really protecting their subjects in total contrast to African culture. Those found guilty of petty crimes like stealing goats and fowls, were quickly sold into slavery, instead of giving them correctional punishments.

Indeed, the 17<sup>th</sup> century was extremely turbulent as the demand for African slaves increased tremendously. Consequently, slave traders incited one local leader against the other. Firearms were exchanged for slaves and this development turned local armies to man-hunters. During this period, Nigeria's culture of fellow feeling, caring and sharing disappeared from the vocabularies of popular discourse. But despite this ugly scenario, the basic elements of local institutions managed to survive. Not everything was consumed by the ravaging stream of Atlantic slavery and slave trade.

There were crises all over the region and people began to settle in difficult locations like hilltops, swamps and caves as well as rockshelters. Demographic and settlement patterns changed drastically in Nigeria. The vibrations of the Atlantic slave trade reached as far afield as Tivland in central Nigeria. People began to occupy fortified hilltops, slopes and rockshelters because of the need for security from external aggression. In Tivland, hilltops were usually fortified with stone walls. Similarly, the early settlers of Abeokuta, a prominent town in southwestern Nigeria occupied rockshelters on the slopes of the famous Olumo rock formation during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Idanre hilltop settlement near Akure, the capital of Ondo State, is also a reflection of the level of insecurity arising largely from the Atlantic slave trade. Other prominent towns in southwestern Nigeria that experienced these demographic and settlement changes include Orile-Owu (Ipole), Apomu, Iwo and Ijaye. Defensive ditches and walls (banks) were constructed round each of these metropolises in order to reduce to the barest minimum, the incursion of external aggressors. The ruins of these gargantuan artifacts are still lying silently within the forested areas of southern Nigeria. Most (if not all) of these relics of socio-political and ecological adaptations are yet to be rigorously investigated from the perspective of the Transatlantic slave trade by archaeologists and anthropologists. Although, there are numerous published works on the subject of the Atlantic slavery and slave trade, more insights are needed from the archaeological point of view.

One other negative effect of slave trade on Nigerians and Africans in general was the de-Africanization of a lot of the local cultural values. Nigerians were taught in schools and churches, the basics of European culture. They were taught to adopt and admire Western values, and reject the fundamentals of their own cultural heritage. Consequently, such areas of African life as medicine, agriculture, marriage, kinship and political organization were to some extent, crippled. This was as a result of the clash with foreign values and value systems. European cultural values were not critically assimilated and this is a tragedy.

In the area of medicine, Nigerians and West Africans as a whole, began to lose memories of the age-long knowledge of herbs and their efficacies. Nigerian medicine was labelled unorthodox medicine – a derogatory term being used up to now, by many Nigerians despite their numerous certificates. Not unexpectedly, European/American form of medicine continues to blossom up to now, at the expense of the indigenous Nigerian medical practice. Most Nigerians continue to suffer from mental enslavement – a major encumbrance to material progress on a sustainable scale (Addo-Fening 2007; Ogundele 2006).

### **Positive Impacts on Nigeria**

Nigeria had been experiencing the phenomenon of flows and interconnections as far back in time as about the time of Christ, with the introduction to the region of crops like water yam, a variety of plantains, and bananas, Asian rice and onion. These new crops were brought by some

Indonesian colonists, explorers and traders, to East Africa. This was through the Swahili coasts and were transmitted gradually across the Sahara to West Africa often by Africans. These Asian crops were successfully adapted to the West African agricultural environment.

But as from about mid-15<sup>th</sup> century A.D., some Portuguese nationals had brought to the sub-region maize and cassava from the New World. This was in exchange for slaves, gold and ivory among other items (Agorsah 1996). These were some of the unique crops of the American-Indians. Many Nigerians especially from the coastal region helped in diffusing the crops as well as techniques of cultivation and processing into edible food. These crops are popularly grown in the forest area and the ecotone (zone between forest and savanna) of most parts of West Africa. By about 1800, maize had become a major secondary crop in the sub-region.

Maize is almost on a par with yam in Nigeria. The list of the uses of maize is a long one. For example, maize can be processed into flour and pap among the Yoruba. Maize can also be processed into local liquor called *pito* or *sekete*. It can be cooked with beans. This is a delicacy among the Yoruba. Nigeria also donated to other areas of the world. For example, oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), a West African tree crop was taken to Asia in remote antiquity. Malaysian oil palm derived from the West African one. Cocoyam among the people of Puerto Rico derived from West Africa, particularly Yorubaland in southwestern Nigeria. This was as a result of the transoceanic entanglements. However, cocoyam is not indigenous to the sub-region. It came originally from South East Asia in antiquity (Flint 1974; Ogundele 2004).

Some West African slaves of Yoruba extraction, were the main agents of dispersal of cocoyam, beans (for preparing bean cake called *akara*), rice and okro among other crops to Puerto-Rico, Argentina and Brazil etc. as from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Indeed, the Puerto-Rican gastronomy is a blend of African and South American food experiences (Cuadra 2004). Rice cultivation was also practised in such parts of the United States of America as South Carolina, Georgia and Louisiana. By this development, African slaves contributed to the enlargement and enrichment of modern American diets as well as health.

Within Nigeria and other parts of West Africa, cassava was also gaining in popularity, although rather slowly. Cassava tubers have a high toxic content and therefore, a set of rigorous techniques is needed to convert it to edible food items (Flint 1974; Ogundele 2004). The Portuguese having mastered the art of cassava processing from the American-Indians of the Amazon Basin started teaching West Africans on reaching the coastal parts in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They (the Portuguese) and Afro-Brazilians taught a lot of Nigerians and West Africans in general how to prepare *gari* flour as early as c. 1700. *Gari* production became popular in such coastal settlements as Lagos, Warri and Porto Novo during this period.

Some Afro-Brazilians particularly F.F. de Sousa (an ex-slave trader of great repute) taught a lot of people in Benin Republic (then called Dahomey) how to process cassava into flour (*gari*) (Osae and Nwabara 1982). Certainly, the introduction of these New World crops enriched and enlarged Nigerian agriculture and cuisines. Local Nigerians borrowed these new ideas and crops and reshaped them to meet their own needs. One concomitant effect of this exchange, was that the local Nigerian peoples began to enjoy better health and probably a steady increase in populations with the passage of time. This shows how the broad region which was later christened Nigeria (in 1914) began to experience the phenomenon of global exchanges. That is to say that Nigeria like other parts of West Africa draw insights from other continents for enlargement, enrichment and innovations in agricultural and culinary cultures.

Ex-slaves particularly from Brazil who returned to Nigeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also introduced a lot of cultural traits to Nigeria. One of the most prominent traits in this respect, is the Brazilian architecture. This style of architecture has to do mainly with arched windows and plastered surfaces with ornamental details (Duro-Emanuel 1989). The architectural form has a garret in the upper part of the house with a small window. This is a unique building heritage that

started to gain ground in Lagos and its environs from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. From here, Brazilian architecture began to spread to the hinterlands of Nigeria, especially the southwestern part. There is no gainsaying the fact that the transatlantic slave trade drastically changed the shape and content of the grammar of human essence on a local, regional and transregional scale.

### **The Way Forward**

The contemporary world is no doubt bedeviled by many problems and challenges that include widespread poverty, food insecurity, epidemic diseases, racism, climate change, terrorism and human rights violation. The enormity of human migrations today (from one location to another) with the attendant risks of spreading epidemic diseases and socio-economic as well as political insecurity among other things shows that national boundary lines are fast diminishing in significance. This calls for an integrated, open and international approach to modern education. This is with respect to the transatlantic slave trade – one of the greatest tragedies in human history (Bentley and Ziegler 2003).

Suffice it to say, that most societies were never totally isolated from the cross-currents of global history and cultural heritage. One part of the global village was indebted to the other in antiquity and this human trait goes on up to now even with greater intensity. This does not mean that the African nation should remain a puppet geopolity of the developed world. Internationalisation does not mean that African destinies should be in the hands of nations from the other side of the Atlantic or divide.

We need not limit ourselves to the ugliness of the Transatlantic entanglements as we chart this history especially in Nigeria. Contemporary Nigerians must reflect much more than hitherto on the lessons that can be drawn from the Atlantic slave trade experience. They should then use these new possibilities to take the region out of the woods. For example, where did a lot of ancestral fathers and leaders go wrong when the Europeans used diplomacy to undermine the socio-political institutions of Africa? Most Nigerian rulers then threw decorum to the winds by abandoning moral precepts because of materialism and greed. Why are contemporary leaders still finding it difficult to embrace the philosophy of collective group solidarity so that they can begin to redress the existing imbalance?

It is sad to note that most African political elites continue to play politics of do or die, and in the process plunge their countries into needless or avoidable wars or conflicts. These conflicts end up turning more and more Africans into political/economic refugees in their continent. The bottomline of all these problems, is the personal aggrandisement of a few people. Is the age-old European diplomacy of divide-and-rule still going on unabated and Africans find it difficult or impossible to construct effective home-grown ideologies to deal with it? For too long, the Euro-American world has been blamed for Africa's underdevelopment, instead of establishing appropriate mechanisms to move forward. Why is it that the African Union (AU) appears to be a toothless bulldog?

It seems to us that their (members of the African Union) meetings and decisions are to a large extent, cosmetic given the fact that the continent they claim to represent is torn between by numerous crises. Armed conflict, hunger of massive proportions and despondency are some of the problems to wrestle with. All these are vestiges of slavery imposed on contemporary Africa by its political elites. Most African leaders run everytime to Europe and America like babies to find solutions to the myriad of challenges and problems that actually need African solutions. This is a good example of mental enslavement. Such a mindset makes nonsense of Africa's political independence. Uncritical borrowing of ideas and services from the Western world under the guise of modern development, is an open invitation to slavery and therefore it should be avoided at all costs. This form of self-imposed slavery is worse than the Atlantic slave trade in several respects.

Contemporary Africans need to systematically and pragmatically reclaim aspects of their slave heritage and broadcast the lessons derivable from it, in order to have a rich present capable of providing an enlarged future. For example, despite the dreadful brutalities of the slave trade, courage and resilience were demonstrated by the African captives in the western hemisphere. Slaves introduced African cuisines like okro, bean cake (*akara*) and gumbo to the New World (Cuadra 2004; Halloway 1991).

These continue to form a component of the culinary heritage of such geopolities as Brazil, Cuba, Puerto-Rico, Argentina and parts of the United States of America, especially South Carolina and Louisiana. Africans and Nigerians in particular modified the agricultural and culinary history and geography of much of the western hemisphere. Therefore, the contemporary peoples of Africa at home and the diaspora, have a robust heritage of commitment, resilience and hardwork. They have to build upon this heritage in order to pave the way for spiritual and material abundance that is generally lacking in much (if not all) of today's Africa.

The history of the peopling and material progress and/or transformation of the modern world cannot be accurately or near-accurately narrated or analysed, without giving pride of place to Africa. For example, African slaves produced much of the wealth or technological progress of Europe and the United States of America, through plantation as well as mining economies among others. They played a central role in the production, enlargement and enrichment of the Atlantic World System.

Slaves of African extraction numbering 450 out of the 650 workers, built Washington's White House as well as other edifices. This was according to the US Treasury Department (Emeagwali 2005). But unfortunately, these contributions of monumental proportions, are yet to be acknowledged by modern scholarship, due largely to knowledge filtering and other reactionary complexes. It is a truism that despite this, African slaves did not enjoy the fruits of their labours. Europeans and members of the Euro-American world reaped/reap these fruits. This is one of the reasons why contemporary African nations must unite more than ever before for collective good so that posterity does not condemn them. Modern research must remove slavery and slave trade discourse from the shadow of rhetoric or narrow conventional wisdom. This takes us from the sphere of mere knowledge acquisition to wisdom (knowledge applications). Today, History has been deleted from the secondary school syllabus in Nigeria. How do we spur the children to greater action without an understanding and appreciation of their roots? Nigerian government erroneously believes that science and technology do not need history. This is another good example of self-imposed slavery. Slavery is still with us many decades after the collapse of the Atlantic slavery and slave trade. Therefore, a revolution by education is most inevitable.

Archaeology of Atlantic slavery is a "virgin" area of research in Nigeria. Such efforts will focus on hilltop settlements and the fortifications or ramparts constructed round them in different parts of Nigeria. This sphere of knowledge should also embrace underwater archaeological operations. There is an urgent need to begin to carry out research on the sunken slave ships within the Nigerian ocean waters. Such a historiographical mode will enable us to fill in some of the lacunae of silence as regards the living conditions of slaves inside these vessels.

The shape and size of each vessel as well as the types of other artifacts associated with the ocean journeys, would serve as the material correlates of the living conditions of slaves. Archaeology as a material science, could fill in some of the gaps in the documentary record of Atlantic slavery and slave trade. It (archaeology) could successfully complement information

obtained from archival sources and historical literature. By so doing, the story becomes much fuller, more socially engaging and more problem-oriented in the final analysis.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Nigeria is a highly populous country in Africa and the entire black world. The landscape is also rich in natural and cultural resources. However, it suffered from the Atlantic slavery and slave trade that started on a small scale in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of some Portuguese and Spanish nationals. The intensity grew between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with the establishment of new plantations in the New World by other European countries like France, England and Holland.

More Nigerian slaves were needed and the bulk of these enslaved peoples ranged between 14 and 35 years of age. The haemorrhage of populations, and the accompanying violence like kidnapping, skirmishes and raiding of settlements within the coasts and the hinterlands dealt a serious blow on local industrialization – a key to self-reliance. The West African sub-region necessarily experienced demographic and settlement pattern changes. Many African slaves in the western hemisphere resisted oppression and some of them managed to secure their independence. The ancestors of the contemporary people of Haiti, were a good example of African slaves who successfully staged a revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite enormous racial discrimination, oppression and repression among other reactionary tendencies from plantation overlords, African slaves managed to retain certain elements of their collective memories. This situation can be understood against the backdrop of the introduction of African cuisines and food crops to the western hemisphere. But self-imposed slavery continues to occupy the contemporary socio-cultural and political landscape of Nigeria and Africa as a whole. This has to do mainly with wreckless and corrupt leadership in the continent. As a result of greed and unbridled materialism, African leaders, today have been plunging their subjects and nations into armed conflicts. The numbers of refugees are fast increasing; thus paving the way for large-scale misery, abject poverty and disease to occupy an enormous space in Africa's popular vocabularies.

Uncritical borrowing of loans from Europe and America is also a form of self-imposed slavery. All these must be fought to a standstill by African leaders. Modern education on the Transatlantic slavery and slave trade should be appreciated beyond the domain of knowledge for knowledge sake or whipping up of sentiments. We do not believe that the contemporary world needs more emotions than hitherto, rather greater understanding and reasons are much more vital to global peace and progress. This position gains its relevance against the background of the ever increasing borderlessness of today's globe.

by

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