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## Understanding Nigeria within the Context of the Atlantic World

Samuel Oluwole Ogundele  
*University of Ibadan, Nigeria, oluwoleogundele@yahoo.com*

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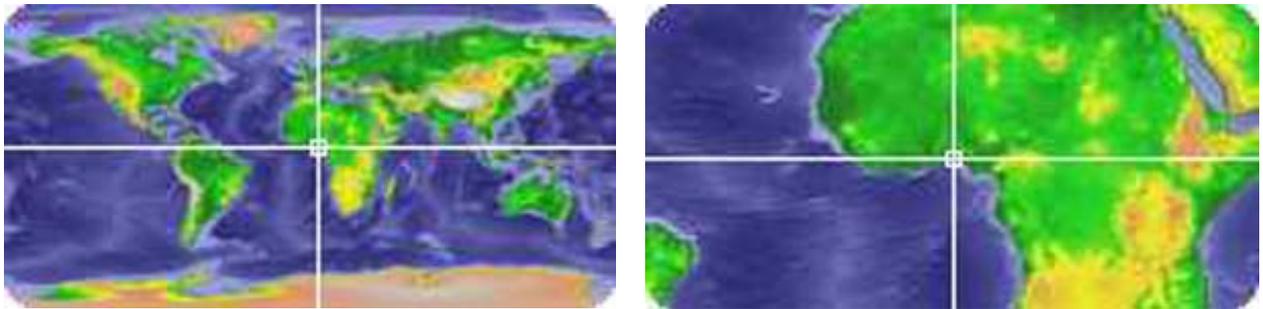
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## September 2010 Newsletter

### Understanding Nigeria within the Context of the Atlantic World

By Samuel Oluwole Ogundele\*



#### Abstract

The legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and its enduring impacts in Nigeria starting in the mid-15th century, present a paradox. Those oppressive activities, orchestrated by European interests, comprise a subject that evokes intense emotional reactions to condemn such incidents of slavery, economic exploitation, and political subjugation. Continuing, damaging effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade can be seen in the cultural landscape of Nigeria today. In turn, enduring lessons of human character, aspiration, and resilience can also be learned from these histories. In this regard, a paradigm shift presented by trans-disciplinary approaches involving such subjects as archaeology and anthropology presents a promising development. For too long, attention has been almost totally focused on the debilitating effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on facets of Nigerian cultures. Such an approach was derived from a discourse of condemnation that tended to inhibit the full potentials of modern education and appreciation of cultural accomplishments in Nigeria's history. The lacunae of silences created as a result of this condemnatory focus and related parameters of authenticity or truth can be filled in through the lenses of archaeological and anthropological sciences among other disciplines.

Such trans-disciplinary research efforts provide new insights into the resilience and achievements of Nigerian cultures. For example, agricultural, culinary, and architectural knowledge and heritage were greatly modified over time in Nigeria as a result of the historical processes and entanglements generated during the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The dietary practices of Nigerians were enlarged and enriched, thus paving the way for a healthier society. Similarly, aspects of Nigeria's sociocultural heritage were adapted in the general lifeways of many people on the other side of the Atlantic. Large social networks in Argentina, Brazil, and Puerto Rico were some of the populations involved in this historical phenomenon of

cultural flows and interconnections. This is one example of how Nigerian cultures contributed to the development of the modern world system following their encounters with expanding European colonial enterprise. Today's Nigerians need to learn to participate in the global community in a critical manner, working to prevent political and commercial elites from once again enslaving and oppressing citizens in a short-sighted engagement in "do-or-die" political contests and financial recklessness in the continuing fall-out of the post-colonial era.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, the most populous nation in the African Atlantic 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 the Niger and Benue, which 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 networks of rivers, creeks, and streams, as well as a belt of mangrove swamps (Balogun 2000; Nzewunwa 1983). These geographical and coastal characteristics of Nigeria played significant roles in the shaping and reshaping its chequered past.

This essay engages in a critical examination of the Atlantic slave trade and its impacts. This is undertaken with a view to deepening our understanding, appreciation and knowledge of the subject, from the inception of the trade in mid-15th century up to the ethnographic present. The central role played by the region of Nigeria is examined. This geopolity remains today a landscape of exchange and a cultural crossroads, given the transformation of much of its agricultural, culinary, and architectural traditions by external forces.

Any study of slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade proceeds within a context 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 conventional politics. Put differently, some of the current parameters of authenticity or historical truth would be transformed through the lens of open discourse. This takes us from the realm of mere knowledge acquisition to the domain of wisdom and knowledge applications. The bottom line of all these engagements is that much of the old historiography of the Atlantic slave trade pales into insignificance in the face a trans-disciplinary approach and a related demand for openness in appraising the elements and significance of past actions and effects. This appears to be one major way of escaping from some of the pains of Nigeria's slave heritage,

so that we can make enormous gains from human responses and efforts to overcome such ugly and malevolent experiences.

### **The Gravity of Slavery and 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 covering time periods from its inception up to around 1807 when the latter was abolished at least on paper by the British Government. A lot of these publications derive from conferences and workshops among other broadly similar academic and professional meetings. This is not a surprise given the fact that the trans-Atlantic slave trade affected so many populations of humanity in different ways. No matter what culture and heritage we each subscribe to, the enduring impacts of that monumental human phenomenon have become an important component of modern global heritage (Ogundele 2004; 2006).

There is no doubt that our social and political consciousness will be enhanced 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 in the future. The Atlantic slave trade discourse is 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. Such an openness is capable of providing a wider perspective of a subject that often evokes emotional responses. By adopting the principles of multivocality and mutuality of respect, stakeholders can increase the amount of knowledge of the history of the slave trade in Nigeria and the world at large. Such an initiative is vital if local, regional, and global peace, as well as material progress on a sustainable scale, are to be promoted and achieved.

### **Impacts of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Nigeria**

Understanding the facets of slavery generally is a pre-condition for developing a clear understanding of the origin and dynamics of the slave trade in Nigeria. Slavery and the 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 slave trade is far deadlier and 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 disorientation. But despite the minimum oppressive and exploitative nature of domestic slavery, it was a recognised social institution in Nigeria, as well as other parts of West Africa, before the coming of the Europeans. Domestic slavery was a global experience in the past, and can be seen as far back in time as the dawn of human civilizations. The rise of kingdoms and empires was typically linked to significant social stratification, which often included domestic slavery. This facet of human experience is embedded in past trajectories of the increase in social complexity and stratification. 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 an example of abuse of fundamental human rights, because human dignity is carefully woven with the thread of liberty. This underscores the reason why no human will likely risk losing 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 later return to their original communities. Similarly, captives from internecine wars were sometimes put to domestic service or labour in the fields. Stubborn or lazy slaves could be sold as chattels. Sometimes, strong slaves were enlisted in the local armies. Nigerian culture, with a long history of agricultural productions going back to prehistoric times, saw domestic slaves as a form of private investment.

There is evidence in Nigeria's history that well behaved slaves could own property and were protected from undue hardships or cruelty (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 traditions. 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 was in culinary behavior and food traditions. Indeed, domestic slavery in Nigeria (despite our disapproval of it), had a robust human face when compared with the Atlantic slavery and European slave trade that later followed.

Nigeria and indeed the entire West African sub-region began to experience the phenomenon of Atlantic slavery and European orchestrated slave trade from about mid-15th 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 the Nigerian economy to the apron strings of the European capitalist economy and its trans-Atlantic extensions from the late 15th century onwards. Plantation economies 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 indigenous peoples 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 in 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. In fact, there were no undeveloped lands for Europeans to acquire in Africa in this period. However, the Europeans viewed the situation of land and natural resource controls in the New World as in total contrast to that of West Africa and Nigeria in particular.

In the New World, the Spaniards and Portuguese began to expropriate lands 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 Native Americans. While the West Africans were lucky in the first instance that their lands could not readily be taken by the Europeans for plantation purposes, the European demand for forced labour was not satisfied by exploitation of Native Americans and led to devastating

impacts on West Africans (Webster 1969; Afigbo 1975). European plantation owners began to look for an expansive supply of forced labour from West Africa and in particular from Nigeria. Such labourers were prized for their physiological resilience in adverse environments, physical prowess, and skills in myriad enterprises, such as the complex agricultural methods of rice cultivation.

Small numbers of African captives worked in private homes and mines in the New World, while the majority of them were in the plantations facing all kinds of brutalities from their supervisors and owners. The period between 17th and 18th centuries that coincided with the flourishing of the trans-Atlantic 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 cultural roots.

Slave traders were interested in young people (particularly males) between the ages of 14 and 35 years. These were strong and healthy individuals who could do considerable amounts of work in the plantations over an extended period of time. About 66 percent of the captives taken 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 enslaved Africans successfully resisted oppression and economic exploitation in the plantations and mines.

Although these enslaved Africans usually suffered constant oppression and heavy casualties, a few of them still managed to obtain their freedom. For example, the role of Boukman, a charismatic Vodou priest in the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, in liberating a number of enslaved labourers cannot be over-emphasized. In August 1791, some 12,000 slaves began to rebel and 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 revolutions 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. 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).

Evidence shows that the 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. The African generals who staged this successful revolution declared independence in late 1803 (Bentley and Ziegler 2003). By 1804, Haiti became a self-governing geopoly. 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 today as a proud heritage for all contemporary Africans at home and in the diaspora.

### **Malevolent Legacies of the Atlantic Slave Trade**

The carting away of young Nigerians adversely affected the region. Although it started small, this trade in human cargoes reached monumental proportions during the 17th and 18th centuries, as more and more European nations like Holland and France established plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean. They too added to a growing demand for African slave labour. This situation coupled with the Islamic slave trade that started from the end of the 8th century and continued up to the early 20th century (early modern era) no doubt led to a decimation 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, for example) up to now continue to suffer from the traumas of cultural and racial oppression. These traumatised African descendants have through time developed some hybrid cultural traditions as a result of the contingencies of their transoceanic encounters.

The slave trade experience shook Nigeria to its 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. The whole region, and Nigeria particularly, were ravaged by diseases and illnesses arising from heavy malnutrition of vast populations. These circumstances were undoubtedly also worsened by acute psychological disorientation and hopelessness at its peak.

Hitherto flourishing local industries were also gradually crippled, including enterprises that involved such knowledge systems as iron metallurgy (smelting and blacksmithing), soap making, textile productions, and salt making. This was a tragedy of monumental proportions, because the indigenous knowledge systems represented the engine of economic systems in Nigeria and West Africa as a whole. These developments meant an end to an age-old internal self-reliance of the peoples. The eclipse of such industry and indigenous knowledge marked the beginning of underdevelopment in the region and all its ramifications. It was a major turning point in West Africa's chequered history.

Archaeological evidence of iron metallurgy has been obtained from many locations. 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 traditions, thereby putting an end to an age-old industrial enterprise. For example, 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 induced by the European Atlantic slave traders, so that they could collaborate with them to plunder human capital 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 an exchange inducement. Indigenous legal systems in Nigeria also suffered a devastating blow. Local leaders and kings were no longer really protecting their subjects. Those found guilty of petty crimes, like stealing goats and fowls, were quickly sold into slavery, instead of receiving correctional punishments.

Indeed, the 17th century was extremely turbulent as the demand for West African slaves increased tremendously. Consequently, European slave traders incited one local leader against another. Firearms were exchanged for slaves and this development turned local armies into militias to dragoon human captives. During this period, Nigeria's culture of fellowship, 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 the slave trade.

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 19th century.

The Idanre hilltop settlement near Akure, the capital of Ondo State, was 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 combat the incursions 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 have yet to be rigorously investigated from the perspective of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by archaeologists and anthropologists. Although there are numerous published works on the general subject of Atlantic slavery and the slave trade, more insights are needed from detailed archaeological investigations.

One other negative effect of the slave trade on Nigerians and West Africans in general was the de-Africanization of a lot of the local cultural values. Nigerians were taught the basics of European culture in schools and churches. They were taught to adopt and admire Western values, and to 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 with indigenous heritage and knowledge systems. European cultural values were not assimilated in a critical manner.

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 labeled unorthodox medicine -- a derogatory term being used up to now, by many Nigerians despite their numerous facets of proven reliability. Not unexpectedly, European and American forms of

medicine continue to flourish at the expense of the indigenous Nigerian medical practices. Most Nigerians continue to suffer from a form of mental enslavement -- a major encumbrance to material progress on a sustainable scale (Addo-Fening 2007; Ogundele 2006).

### **Nigeria's Cultural Interconnections**

Nigeria had been experiencing the phenomenon of flows and interconnections for over two millenia, 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. These Asian crops were successfully adapted to the West African agricultural environment.

From about mid-15th century onward, Portuguese nationals brought maize and cassava from the New World to the region of Nigeria. This was in exchange for slaves, gold and ivory among other items (Agorsah 1996). These were some of the unique crops of Native Americans. Many Nigerians, especially from the coastal region, helped in spreading the cultivation of these crops as well as techniques for processing them into edible food products. 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 the 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 contributed cultural knowledge to other areas of the world. For example, oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), a West African tree crop was taken to Asia in remote antiquity. The Malaysian oil palm was derived from the West African variety. 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 earlier antiquity (Flint 1974; Ogundele 2004).

Some West African slaves of the Yoruba area 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 from the second half of the 16th century onward. Indeed, Puerto Rican cuisine is a blend of African and South American food experiences (Cuadra 2004). Rice cultivation was also practised in such parts of the United States as South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana. By this development, West African slaves contributed to the enlargement and enrichment of modern American diets and the health of populations there.

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 methods are needed to convert it to edible food products (Flint 1974; Ogundele 2004). The Portuguese, having mastered the art of cassava processing from Native Americans of the Amazon Basin, started teaching those methods to West Africans in the 15th century. The Portuguese and Afro-Brazilians taught many Nigerians and West Africans in general how to prepare *gari* flour as early as circa 1700. *Gari* production became popular in such coastal settlements as Lagos, Warri, and Porto Novo during that period.

Some Afro-Brazilians, particularly F. F. de Sousa (an ex-slave trader of great repute), taught many people in the Benin Republic (then called Dahomey) how to process cassava into *gari* flour (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 phenomena of global exchanges. That is to say that Nigeria, like other parts of West Africa, drew insights from other continents for enlargement, enrichment and innovations in agricultural and culinary practices and cultures.

Ex-slaves, particularly from Brazil who returned to Nigeria in the 19th century, also introduced new cultural traits to Nigeria. One of the most prominent influences in this respect was 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 19th century onward. From here, Brazilian architecture began to spread to the hinterlands of Nigeria, especially the southwestern part. One thus sees myriad ways in which the trans-Atlantic slave trade drastically

changed the shape and content of the human condition on local, regional, and transregional scales in West Africa.

### **A 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 violations. The enormity of human migrations today with the attendant risks of spreading epidemic diseases and socio-economic as well as political insecurity shows that national boundary lines are fast diminishing in significance. This calls for an integrated, open and international approach to modern education. Such efforts can be addressed as well to the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade -- one of the greatest tragedies in human history (Bentley and Ziegler 2003).

Suffice it to say, 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 dynamic continues today with greater intensity. This does not mean that African nations should remain puppet geopolitics of the developed, industrialised world. Internationalisation does not mean that African destinies should be in the hands of nations from the other side of the Atlantic or other continents.

We need not limit ourselves to the ugliness of the trans-Atlantic 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 lessons and possibilities develop their cultures and nation in a positive and strategically sound manner. For example, how did our ancestral fathers and leaders go wrong when the European colonial agents used diplomacy and bribery to undermine the socio-political institutions of Africa? Those past Nigerian rulers 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 imbalances?

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 and conflicts. These conflicts end up turning more and more Africans into political and economic refugees in their

continent. A fundamental cause of all these problems is the lure of personal aggrandisement for the few at the expense of many. 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 appears to be a toothless organisation?

Meetings and decisions of African Union members appear to a large extent as merely cosmetic, given the fact that the continent they claim to represent is torn by numerous ongoing 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 to find solutions to the myriad of challenges and problems that actually need African solutions. This is a good example of mental enslavement and unproductive dependency. 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 new forms of subjugation and therefore should be avoided at all costs. This form of self-imposed oppression 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 African captives throughout the western hemisphere. Turning to more mundane impacts, captive Africans introduced elements of their original culinary traditions, 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, 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 industriousness. 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, material progress, and transformation of the modern world cannot be 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, through plantation and mining economies, among others. They played a central role in the production, enlargement, and enrichment of the Atlantic world system.

Slaves of African heritage, numbering 450 out of 650 workers, built Washington's White House as well as other edifices (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 discourse. Europeans and members of the Euro-American world reaped the fruits of such African labour. This is one of the reasons why contemporary African nations must unite, more than ever before, for the collective good so that posterity does not condemn them. Modern research must remove slavery and the slave trade discourse from the shadow of rhetoric or narrow conventional wisdom. This takes us from the sphere of mere knowledge acquisition to wisdom and knowledge applications. Today, the subject of "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 education policy makers erroneously believe that lessons of science and technology do not need the context and insights of history. This is another good example of self-imposed slavery. Slavery is still with us many decades after the collapse of the Atlantic slave trade. Therefore, a revolution by education is most inevitable.

Archaeology of the impacts of Atlantic slavery is a very young and underdeveloped field of research in Nigeria. Such efforts, for example, can focus on hilltop settlements and the fortifications or ramparts constructed around 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 an expanding research program will enable us to fill in some of the lacunae of silences as regards the living conditions of slaves inside those 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 enslaved individuals. Archaeology as a material science, can fill in some of the gaps in the documentary record of Atlantic slavery and the slave trade. Archaeology can successfully complement

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

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Many African slaves in the Western hemisphere resisted oppression and managed to secure their independence. The ancestors of the contemporary people of Haiti provide a proud example of African slaves who successfully staged a revolution for self-determination. 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. 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 reckless 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 financial aid and 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 trans-Atlantic slavery and the slave trade should be appreciated beyond the domain of knowledge for knowledge sake or whipping up of condemnatory 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.

### **Note**

\* Samuel Oluwole Ogundele, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Archaeology, Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; e-mail [oluwoleogundele@yahoo.com](mailto:oluwoleogundele@yahoo.com); phone 08036533430.

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