Cultural Perceptions of Africans in Diaspora and in Africa on Atlantic Slave Trade and Reparations

ROBERT DIBIE* AND JOHNSTON NJOKU**

ABSTRACT

This study examines the cultural perceptions of Africans in Diaspora on the Atlantic slave trade and reparations. It uses a cultural centered model to analyze the perception of Africans in Diaspora about the issue of slavery and reparations. The paper also uses a survey method to explore the perceptions of African-Americans in the United States, Africans living in Europe, and Africans living in the African continent about reparations. It argues that the environmental, religious, occupational, social and political conditions that Africans in Diaspora currently live in will determine their perception of slavery and reparations. Despite this argument, the paper stresses that it is a violation of the established precedence in law that is based on the principle of unjust enrichment to not pay some reparations to the present generation of Africans. This principle stipulates that if a person, a corporation or a country profit from the criminal treatment of a group of people, such a person, corporation or country is subject to the payment of reparations on the basis of unjust enrichment. The study further attempts to explain why it has been difficult for the western industrial world to agree to pay reparations to the children of over 25,000,000 Africans who were wrenched out
of Africa as slaves. The concluding section of the paper suggests different reparation methods that would help create a permanent solution that might be acceptable to all.

Introduction

Africans living in the African continent, Blacks or Africans living in Europe, and African-Americans in North America suffered the impact of the Atlantic slave trade from different perspectives. Africans or Blacks living in Europe refers to Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean who have some central cultural and social roots in Africa. On one hand African-Americans view slavery as the family history that defines their community. African-Americans as used in this paper refer to Blacks whose ancestors were enslaved and permanently lived in the United States. On the other hand, Blacks born in the African continent perceive slavery as an abreaction of the past against European colonial regimes under which their ancestors suffered. A combination of these perceptions help to rejuvenate the African reparations movement toward claims of oppression and unjust enrichment and the lingering economic effects which colonialism and slavery instilled on Africans in Diaspora. These differences in perception among Africans in Diaspora have led to a dichotomy in the ways that reparations have been demanded. While Blacks in the African continent sought debt forgiveness, African-Americans in the United States prefer reparations in the form of educational and social reforms. Manning Marable (2000), Richard America (2002), and Richard Sandbrook (1985) contend that due to slavery and colonialism income and wealth have been coercively diverted from Africans and African-Americans to the benefit of Europeans. Walter Rodney (1972) pointed out that the transatlantic slave trade and European colonialism were the major causes of the underdevelopment of the African continent over a period of six hundred or more years. He further argued that under colonial rule, vast amounts of wealth were transferred from Africa to Europe. Europeans and Whites in North America have introduced discrimination policies in education, employment, housing, and capital markets to make and reinforce the wrongful accumulation of wealth without equitable consideration for Blacks (Marable, 2000).

A review of the political economy of the European slave trade reveals that it was an inhuman act, precisely designed to create wealth for Europeans through exploitation of Africans. The slave trade also involved selling Africans as instruments of labor and as capital to finance the industrial revolution in Europe. Goods such as the Benin bronzes and services that were produced by black slaves benefited most whites indirectly and passively; however, the whites involved did not compensate
the slaves for their services. Europeans used racism as a social mechanism to justify a wide range of decisions. David Covin (2001) contends that for over three decades of active European slave trade twenty-five million people were wrenched out of Africa to work without pay in Europe and North America. If merchants from Europe and North America were committed to moral standards and justice, why did they not inform Africans that they only needed a labor force? At least they would have negotiated a payment plan up front for the labor they were getting from the African continent.

Despite this option available to the European and North American merchants, they opted for inhuman treatment that galvanized several hundred years of underdevelopment and severe economic devastation upon those who remained in the African continent. People of African descent around the world are still suffering from this inhuman experience that was inflicted on their ancestors. Africans in Diaspora often revisit this unhealed wound because of the continued manipulation, oppression, injustice, racism and discrimination they face in their daily lives.

In spite of the magnitude of the devastation created by slavery and colonialism to the African people, some Europeans and North Americans would prefer to blame Africans, the victims, for this holocaust. Others would argue that slavery was a little more than an unpleasant memory of a bygone and distant era, largely due to faded dreams of conquest and exploration (Spitzer 2002; Rodney 1972). Events in the past two decades in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Liberia, Uganda, Angola, Somalia, Nigeria, Sudan and Sierra Leone reveal that Africans are not totally blameless people. Certainly some Africans collaborated in the development of the European slave trade. It can be assumed that some African turncoats were not immune to the human nature of opportunism, greed, betrayal and self-centeredness. According to David Covin (2001), there were also Jews who collaborated in the holocaust. There is nothing new about turncoats. Africa has had its share. In the case of the slave trade, however, although Africans were present, they were always a smaller part of the greater population. To suggest, however, that the European slave trade was the result or the continuation of African social practices or African social organizations is tantamount to taking credit for dehumanizing Africans despite the humiliation and frustration that Blacks around the world continue to suffer.

The magnitude of the slavery the Europeans developed using Africans as chattel was different in kind from prior slavery and worlds apart from the dependency relations between Africa and the western world today. This was one of the reasons why delegates of the World Conference
against Racism, Racial Discrimination held in Durban, South Africa from August 30 to September 7, 2001 declared slavery as a crime against humanity (Lyon, 2002). Judge Fouad Ammoun of the International Court of Justice (1971) pointed out that the development of Africa before the devastation of slavery fell upon it can be described by two disastrous plagues: (1) the slave trade, which ravaged Africa for centuries on an unprecedented scale; and (2) colonialism, which exploited humanity and natural wealth to a relentless extreme.

What the slave trade introduced in Africa, colonization continued to actualize it. African peoples and lands were divided up and distributed by Europeans in the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 — without African consent, participation, or involvement — and they were divided up exclusively on the basis of European priorities and European purposes (Khapoya, 1998). Europeans such as King Leopold of Belgium, the benevolent philanthropist, under whose authority ten million people in the Congo were wiped out, were never charged for genocide (Covin, 2001; Marable, 2000; Lumumba-Kasongo, 1994; Mazrui, 1986). In other events the Europeans combined separate and often hostile nations into single territories, such as French West Africa, the Gold Coast, the “Belgian Congo, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) (Dibie, 2001; Khapoya, 1998; Tordo, 1997).

While colonialism provided markets, wealth and prosperity for European nations, it was more effective in destroying indigenous African political structures and cultures (Marable, 2000). The organizing principle was to take as much out of Africa as possible for the benefit of Europe, and to put or leave as little as possible in Africa (Mazrui, 1986; Rodney, 1972). Basically, the Europeans shifted from their zeal of humanitarian and civilizing mission to a calculated preoccupation of holding power. Walter Rodney (1972) pointed out that during colonialism African states politically lost their power, independence and meaning. It did not matter whether they were big empires or small polities. In some cases when some traditional rulers were kept in office, and the formal structure of certain kingdoms was partially retained, real political power was passed into the hands of European overlords. Rodney argued that racism as a social force in both Africa and the Americas was generally subsidiary to the dynamics of capitalist exploitation. They also shifted from rejuvenating to conserving the African society. The Europeans further transformed from being the torchbearers of individual freedom to being custodians protecting the customary integrity of dominated tribes (Tordo, 1997). According to Walter Rodney (1972) Europeans in Europe, North America and in the African continent found it necessary to rationalize the exploitation of Africans in racist terms. He stressed that oppression of African people on purely racial grounds accompanied, strengthened, and became indistinguishable from oppression for economic reasons.
Khapoya (1998) and Smith (1996) contend that indigenous political systems were replaced by European ones through the so-called indirect and direct rules, and rules of private corporations and those of the Christian Churches (Lumumba-Kasongo, 1994). Europeans also imposed colonial borders and laws. The colonial boundaries inherited by post-colonial African states often led to conflict. Indeed, counting all these inhuman treatments and references to well-established precedents, there are grounds for Africans in Diaspora to demand reparations.

Throughout the world, the wrongs of the institution of slavery are well established and documented. The condition of slavery helped the Europeans and Whites in North America create plantations, fortunes, merchant empires, canals, roads, railroads, cities, public buildings, colleges and universities, industries, shipping fleets, maritime trade, armies, navies – for the construction of which Africans went absolutely uncompensated. David Covin (2001) and Walter Rodney, (1972) pointed out that America had outstanding statesmen such as Washington, Jefferson, Randolph, Lee, Jackson, Davis and Vanderbilt because their labor was done by slaves. Slaves created their fortunes. So they could devote themselves to public life. Indeed, it would have been impossible to open up the new world and to use it as a constant generator of wealth, had it not been for African slave labor (Rodney, 1972).

History tells us that after the Civil War and during the Radical Reconstruction period, Black people in the United States were never compensated for the wrongs done them and their ancestors. As a matter of fact, during that period, a system of peonage developed in which Black people were forced to work without pay for white individuals, businesses, and governments. Bernard Boxill (1992) and Manning Marable (2000) contend that Blacks in the United States were murdered, lynched, faced mass assaults, beatings, arson, property destruction, public humiliation, rape, intimidation, and became institutionalized as a means of social control in the southern part of the nation.

Lyons (2002) and Spitzer (2002) pointed out that Black people in the United States were prohibited from participating in politics in the very places where their numbers gave them the best chances to succeed politically. Their land property, businesses, and inheritances were stolen from them routinely with the collaboration of the state. African people in the Diaspora currently suffer inhuman treatments in the form of racial discrimination, racial profiling, redlining, glass ceilings, and exclusive homeowner associations.

As described in our abstract, this study mainly examines the perceptions of Africans in Diaspora on the Atlantic slave trade and reparations. It uses a cultural centered model to analyze the perception of Africans in Diaspora about the issue of slavery and reparations. The
paper also uses a survey method to explore the perceptions of African-Americans in the United States, African living in Europe and Africans living in the African continent about slavery and reparations. It argues that the environmental, religious, occupation, social organization and political exposure that African in Diaspora currently leaves in will determine their perception of reparations. In accordance to the 1998 Rome Statute, the paper stresses that it would be a violation of the established precedence in law that is based on the principle of unjust enrichment to not pay some reparations to the present generation of Africans. This principle stipulates that if a person, a corporation or a country profits from the criminal treatment of a group of people, such a person, corporation or country is subject to the payment of reparations on the basis of unjust enrichment.

The study further attempts to explain why it has been difficult for the western industrial world to agree to pay reparations to the children of over 20,000,000 Africans who were wrenched out of Africa as slaves. The concluding section of the paper suggests different reparation methods that would help create a permanent solution that might be acceptable to all. It suggests that reparations could embody tremendous productive potentials such as: (1) foreign debt relief for African and Caribbean nation-states, (2) certain foreign assets turned over to African and Caribbean countries, (3) real implementation of race based affirmative action laws, (4) writing off the debt owed by every African-American 50 years and over, and (5) granting Black organizations free access to financing or some media licenses. The study recommends that the United Nations Conference on Racism will be a good place to begin, because the transformation of the global political economy means that any oppositional movement that largely or exclusively focuses on the political development within nation-state will not be successful. Africans in Diaspora should, however, be united and join the ongoing initiatives on reparations.

Reparations and Human Affairs

Reparations as used in this study refer to payments made by a nation-state for past injustice, and hardship caused to certain minority groups within a nation-state or outside it. The idea of reparations is to repay a people for significant harm done to them by the government of a nation. Implicit in this definition of reparations is the assumption that the problem of lack of wealth accumulation by Blacks in Europe, the United States and in the Diaspora is one of the consequences of the Atlantic slave trade. This is also tied to the injustice associated with slavery and colonialism. The severe exploitation of raw materials by west-
ern corporations without adequate payments made to the people or owners of the land in the African continent is another aftermath of the slave trade (Marable, 2000; Harbeson and Rothchild, 1991).

A review of the Atlantic slave trade and colonial experiences of Blacks in the African continent and those in Diaspora reveals that different European civilizations help to shape the status of Black people around the world. Walter Rodney (1972), Harbeson and Rothchild (1991) and Manning Marable (2000) rightly described the colonial situation in Africa as saturated with racism. They contend that Europeans and colonial administrators viewed African culture and religion as having little value and thus were uprooted through intensive Christian evangelical efforts which were state supported. According to Harbeson and Rothchild (1991) European languages supplanted indigenous ones for most state purpose. The African indigenes were required to master various European languages in order to achieve social mobility in the colonies. In different ways, colonial subjugation in Africa brought not only political oppression and economic exploitation but also profound psychological humiliation to Blacks in the continent and in Diaspora. Africans suffered from the debilitating effects of the slave trade well into the nineteenth century. When the slave trade ended European merchants continued to invade the African continent to seek other commodities for which a market could be found. The scramble and partition of Africa which followed the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 constituted an enhancement of the European desire to establish colonial regimes in the continent. As While colonial regimes in the African continent provided wealth and prosperity to the Europeans, it was very effective in destroying the indigenous African political, religious and cultural structures.

Manning Marable (2000) and Walter Rodney (1972) and Robert Dibie (2001) argued that imperialism and colonialism did encourage the development of capitalism, acting as an important instrument for social transformation of Blacks in the African continent and in those in Diaspora. Colonialism also changed societies in the African continent in ways that eventually led to the emergence of new social groupings and political forces. The practice of colonialism by Europeans in Africa also galvanized imperialism to employ coercion to enforce the introduction of commodity production and wage labor. The commodity production and wage labor were directly controlled by colonial authorities (Smith, 1996).

A major legacy of the colonial regime is the series of regional crises it left behind in South Africa and the Northeastern part of the continent. In South Africa, the racial conflict could be traced to the British mistake of transferring power to an exclusive white regime which eventually gave birth to the apartheid regime. The aftermath of the apartheid
regime was the total humiliation and destruction of Black civil societies in the Republic of South Africa. In the Northeastern region of Africa, a colonial mistake caused a thirty year war for independence, which took untold casualties and devastated Eritrea and Ethiopia. Sudan and Somalia also had their own experiences of the mistakes committed by colonial regimes.

The elemental notion of African solidarity by Black elites in Diaspora arose out of the shared experiences of racial oppression. Manning Marable (2000) exerted that Black elites has been a product of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. Black elites whom Africa expected to liberate her from the yoke of European capitalism have instead chained the continent to that yoke, perhaps even more tightly in exchange for crumbs of wealth and privilege (135-136). The activities of Black elites tend to reinforce the process of western capital accumulation and the underdevelopment of the African masses in the continent and in Diaspora. Thus, in various ways the Atlantic slave trade and European colonial regimes has intruded not only into post-independence African political and economic development but also to the well-being of Blacks in Diaspora.

In international law, if a person, a corporation, or a country profit from the criminal treatment of a group of people, such a person, corporation and nation is subject to the payment of reparations on the basis of unjust enrichment (Lyons, 2002; Spitzer, 2002; Westley, 1998). Mweti Munya (1998) and Main Brian (1972) postulated a principle that states “when current distribution of holdings has been shaped by past violations of rights, transferring some benefits from those who have been enriched to those who have been adversely affected must rectify it.” The West Germany payment of reparations to Israel for the past injustice on Jews established precedence in international law (Covin, 2001; Lyons, 2002).

The contract law stipulates that reparations paid to Africans or Blacks in the Diaspora encompass restitution of unpaid labor in addition to a sum for underpayment of Black people around the world (Spitzer, 2002). Dalton Conley (2002) pointed out that there is a long history and a wide range of precedence on reparations. Most commonly in the modern era reparations have been associated with wars and the cost of wars. Reparations normally are simply another means of expressing the proposition that, “to the victor go the spoils” (Covin, 2001; Marable, 2000). The World Conference Against Racism and passage of the International Criminal Court have propelled reparation debate among many nations. These international actions have stimulated many nations to demonstrate the growing intolerance for ongoing slavery, adding force to the reparations movement on the international law front (Lyons, 2002).
The World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) took place in Durban, South Africa between August 30 and September 7, 2001. The aftermath of the conference was the acknowledgement that slavery and the slave trade constituted a crime against humanity. 163 out of the 166 nations in attendance adopted a declaration. The conference declaration urged concerned states to participate in compensation for victims. In 1998, a Rome Statute was adopted. The Rome Statute was enacted after ratification by seventy-four nations. Both the WCAR and Rome Statute declaration specifically acknowledge slavery as a crime against humanity. These declarations stipulate that enslavement; imprisonment, deportation, severe deprivation of physical liberty, rape, torture, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution or sterilization, forced pregnancy and any other form of violence are crimes against humanity (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court Article 5 of 1998). A customary international law of human rights also stipulates that a nation will violate the law if it practices or encourages or condones genocide, slavery, murder, torture, racial discrimination, or arbitrary imprisonment (United States Foreign Relations Laws, 1987).

In the history of humankind, there have been several incidents where reparation has been paid. In 1952, the government of West Germany paid reparations to Jewish survivors of the holocaust (Westley, 1998). It was also pointed out that the reparations the victorious allied powers imposed on defeated Germany at the end of World War I were a contributing factor to Germany’s economic collapse and the subsequent rise of the Nazis (Covin, 2001). During this period, 26 percent of Germany’s export earnings were earmarked for reparations.

One of the best incidents of injustice and payment of reparations was during World War II, when Nazis forced Jews to surrender their jewelry and other valuables. The Nazis also froze their bank accounts, disinherited their survivors and subjected them to collective levies and fines. This inhuman action made several Jews abandon their homes, business, and to flee Nazis persecution. A set of Jews were concentrated in ghettos and other segregated areas by the government of West Germany (Lyons, 2002; Spitzer, 2002; Westley, 1998). After World War II, the Luxembourg Agreements became the basis for the demand for reparations. The Government of Germany paid reparations to the State of Israel for the past injustice on Jews. In 1999, German companies agreed to pay almost two billion dollars in additional reparations to Holocaust victims who had not received earlier restitution (Duetche Presse Agentur, 1999). This payment established precedence in international law, which is based on the principle of unjust enrichment. Several scholars find a correlation
between what happened to the Jewish people and the experience Africans had during slavery and colonialism (Conley, 2002; Covin, 2001; Browne, 1972; Marable, 2000; Masters, 1992; Westley, 1998).

In another occasion, the government of Australia gave its indigenous Aborigines more than ninety-six thousand square miles of land in 1976 because they appropriated it during European settlements in the 18th and 19th century (Lyons, 2002). The government of Canada, after World War II, granted land to its indigenous people after thirteen years of negotiations. In 1971 the United States Alaska Native Claims Settlements Act granted indigenous Alaskan monetary payments and land reparations. Despite this settlement, the United States government continues to redress its past transgression against Native Americans through reparation in different forms (Lyons, 2002; Obadele, 1988).

There is also evidence of reparation paid to Japanese Americans due to the World War internment. The Reagan administration signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 into law (Spitzer, 2002). The enactment of this policy shows the formal acknowledgement of the United States government of the injustice associated with the internment of Japanese Americans. To further acknowledge this injustice to the Japanese Americans, the United States Office of Redress Administration presented a reparations check for twenty thousand dollars to the oldest Hawaiian survivor of Japanese American internment camps in 1999 (Spitzer, 2002). Lyons (2002) pointed out that the Japanese reparation succeeded because of the narrow and specific legal claims advanced by individual plaintiffs. In each of these instances the precedent is clear and unequivocal.

In another development, the Japanese legislature in 1994 supported the government to establish a private fund of about six million dollars to compensate Asian comfort women forced to serve the Imperial Japanese Army in World War II (Duchte Presse Agentur, 1995). The harm was acknowledged. Compensation, in a specific form, was paid to victims.

African-Americans have also benefited from some form of reparation in the past. The United States Congress promoted measures to aid the transition of formal slaves to freedom and gain leverage during the Civil War through the confiscation of land from rebels; however, the Lincoln administration did not enforce the law as fully expected (Westley, 1998). In 1995, the United Nations formally issued a statement that the primary cause of present-day African-American suffering is due in part to former enslavement, segregation and racial discrimination of Blacks in the United States (Westley, 1998).

The African-American experience is one of the aftermaths of slavery and colonialism, which ravage the African continent (Masters, 1992; Rodney, 1972; Marable, 2000). Slavery and colonialism encourage
Europeans to exploit Africa’s human labor and natural wealth to a relentless extreme. The European imposition of mono-crop systems of agriculture destroyed local economies, contributing to periodic famines and extreme poverty. Walter Rodney (1972) stressed that European planters and miners enslaved Africans for economic reasons, so that their labor power could be exploited. Vincent Khapoya (1998), Ali Mazrui (1986), Robert Dibie (2003), and Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo (1994) also contend that the underdevelopment in Africa could be linked to the desire by Europe and the United States to install African leaders who are easy to manipulate. This involvement of the west in the affairs of African states has resulted in African nations producing commodities desired in Europe and North America at the expense of the continent. The aftermath has been massive debt burden and lack of sustainable economic development.

The evidence presented above shows that in international law, history, practice, and precedence in Australia, Europe, Japan, and North America, reparations are not new. Reparations, in fact, are not simply an idea – they are longstanding and established practices around the world. The claim that reparations constitute some radical idea for Blacks to seek “unnecessary” financial reward is simply not true.

It would be appropriate for humankind to ethically recognize the provisions of the international law of human rights. These provisions will help both European and North American nations on one hand, and African states and Blacks in the Diaspora on the other hand. It will help both groups to develop a framework that would help the disputed parties set aside issues of blame and apology to concentrate on what can be done to improve the sustainable development processes in the African continent as well as equitable treatment for all Blacks in the Diaspora.

Figure 1 shows a culture centered model. The model is used to explain the relationship between Blacks in the African continent and other Blacks in Diaspora. The relationship among Blacks around the world is due to the fact that they share a common horizontal cultural view, collective memories, and group knowledge of their ancestors from the African continent. When Africans in Diaspora, however, experience different vertical variables such as environmental conditions, religious, linguistic, occupational, social and political exposure they tend to depart somewhat from their original African culture and values.

This is why African Americans or Blacks in North America would demand different kinds of reparations when compared to Blacks living in the African continent or Blacks in Europe.

The perception among Blacks in Europe, Blacks in the African Continent, and African-Americans would vary due to the kind of vertical variables that they have been exposed to for several decades or a few centuries.
Figure 1. Cultured Centered Approach Model

Shared Horizontal Cultural Views, Collective Memories, and Group Knowledge of the African Continent

Vertical Variables:
- Environmental
- Language
- Religion
- Occupation
- Social Organ.
- Custom/Tradition

African Americans or Blacks in North America
Blacks in the African Continent
Blacks in Europe
Thus, slave trade, colonialism, and imperialism serve as instruments that have destroyed the African culture, religion, social, political and economic institutions. Further, the consequences of the damage to African culture and values are evident in the variation of policy and reparation outcomes that Blacks in Diaspora now seek.

Research Methods

This study examines the perceptions of Africans in Diaspora about the Atlantic slave trade and reparations. It attempts to explore the extent to which Africans in Diaspora would respond to the different debate of reparations and the framework on how restitutions could be paid.

The field research was conducted in the United States, Europe, and the African continent. Due to budget limitations, Blacks in Brazil and the Caribbean islands were not included in the survey of Africans in Diaspora. Future research will include the Brazil and Caribbean Blacks in the analysis of Blacks in Diaspora. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with African-Americans in the United States, Africans living in Europe and Africans living in several countries in the African continent. The data for this study was collected through both semi-structured interviews and a survey. Combining interview and administering questionnaires offered significant advantages to those other research methods that do not make this combination. In our view, it allows the researcher to collect more accurate data than other methods.

The study was conducted between 2000 and 2005. 250 questionnaires were administered to African-Americans in the United States. Another 250 were administered to Africans living in Europe. A set of 250 questionnaires was administered in various countries in Africa to only indigenous Africans. Out of the 750 questionnaires that were administered, only 580 people responded. While 220 responded in the United States, only 150 responses were received from Europe. 210 responses were received from the African continent. The data collected from the 580 respondents were analyzed using the SSPS computer program.

The following specific research questions provided the basis of this present research:

1. What is your perception of slavery and colonialism in Africa? Do you perceive it to be right or wrong?
2. Do you think Europeans and Whites in North America committed human rights violations by enslaving and persecuting the ancestors of the African people?
3. As a Black person, have you suffered any type of discrimination in your life?
4. Does your subordinate status on the world stage as Black entitle you to equitable tolling of your demand for restitution?
5. Do you believe that your ancestors were not paid for their work and that you have been deprived of your inheritance?
6. Do you perceive any form of unjust enrichment by Europeans and Whites in North America from slavery?
7. Do you think African-Americans and Africans in Diaspora should be paid reparations?
8. Do you think African states should pursue litigation to help African nations achieve their primary objectives of debt forgiveness and formal apology through international agreement?
9. What means of reparation would you refer? (a) Debt forgiveness; (b) Apology; (c) Education and social policy reform?
10. Do you think Africans in Diaspora would succeed in getting reparations?

Using the interview method in research allows the researcher to study a complex situation in great depth. We are convinced that the technique also provided us the opportunity to gain insights that would have not been possible if other methods were used.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 2 shows the responses to the ten questions that were administered to African-Americans in the United States, Blacks in Europe, and those in the African continent. The 220 respondents from the United States acknowledge that they perceive slavery and colonialism of the African people to be wrong. There was a general consensus among the 150 respondents in Europe and 210 Africans interviewed that slavery and colonialism were wrong. The 580 respondents in the three continents agreed that Europeans and Whites in the United States during slavery and the colonial period committed human rights violations. They contend that prosecuting and enslaving Black people from the African continent was wrong and inhuman. It is interesting to note that all the respondents from the United States and Europe concurred that they have all suffered or experienced racial discrimination in their life time. Only 141 respondents out of 210 in the African continent said they have experienced racial discrimination.

Table 1 also provided a detailed perception of what Africans in Diaspora think about their status in the world. 211 out of 220 respondents in the United States felt that their subordinate status on the world stage entitles them to equitable treatment and the demand for restitution. 137 out of 150 respondents in Europe and 208 out of 210 respondents in the African continent also supported that view.
Table 2
Profile of Africans in Diaspora who Responded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Africans in Diaspora</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Africans in the United States</td>
<td>Africans in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your perception of slavery and colonialism in Africa? Do you perceive it to be right or wrong?</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think Europeans and Whites in the United States committed human rights violations by enslaving and persecuting the ancestors of the African people?</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a black person, have you suffered any type of discrimination in your life?</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your subordinate status on the world stage as a black entitle you to equitable treatment and your demand for restitution?</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that your ancestors were not paid for their labor and that you have been deprived of your inheritance?</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you perceive any form of unjust enrichment by Europeans and Whites in the United States from slavery?</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think African-Americans and Africans in Diaspora should be paid reparation?</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think African states should pursue litigation to help African nations achieve their primary objectives of debt forgiveness and formal apology through international agreement?</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What means of reparation would you prefer? (a) Debt forgiveness; (b) Apology; (c) Education and social policy reform?</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think Africans in Diaspora would succeed in getting reparations?</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Computed from Survey Data.
When asked if they feel Africans in Diaspora should be paid reparation, 193 of the respondents in the United States said yes. 149 respondents in Europe also agreed that Africans around the world should be paid reparations. The 210 respondents interviewed in the African continent agreed that Blacks around the world should be paid some reparations. However, they seem to favor debt forgiveness to the African states rather than other forms of reparations. On one hand, 19 respondents in the United States and 99 in Europe favor debt forgiveness. On the other hand, 121 respondents in the United States and 51 in Europe favored education and social reform as a means for reparations. When asked if Africans in Diaspora would succeed in getting reparations, 189 respondents in the United States and 41 in Europe indicated that they do not think they will receive reparations. 151 respondents from the African continent were very optimistic that in the near future Africans in Diaspora might receive some form of restitution.

An interesting finding of this research is that economic progress and the political and social environment that Africans in Diaspora now live in strongly influence their demand for reparations. While Blacks living in the United States and Europe indicated that they would like to see reparations in the form of public apology, education and social policy reform, Blacks in the African continent desired debt forgiveness. This is probably because they have not experienced institutional racism like their counterparts in Europe and the United States. Further, Africans in the African continent also strongly believe that the deplorable underdevelopment in the continent is due to the present debt burden, corruption of public officials, and bad leadership. Generally Blacks living in the United States and Europe who currently earn $50,000 and above or 45,000 euro and above per year indicated that the demand for reparations by Blacks is not necessary. The differences in their demand for reparations could also be due to the nature of the vertical variables that they have been exposed to over several decades.

Although the payment of reparations might help to restore some dignity of labor and the integrity of individuals in the Black communities around the world, Africans in Diaspora should realize that the payment of reparations will not solve the various problems they currently face. Governments in Africa, Europe, and North America also need to address areas of concern that are closely associated with disparities between Whites and the Black race. Most of the concern of the Black people around the world relates to issues that the various governments can actively pursue through appropriate policies if there is the political will.
Dynamics of Getting and Implementing Reparations

The United States jurisprudence stipulates that a damage suit can be filed when one party has been found to commit preventable harm to another. In such a situation the party causing the harm is liable to pay damages to the extent of the harm caused the other (Covin, 2001; Spitzer, 2002). The jurisprudence states that such damages may include the actual, material damages inflicted on the injured party, and may also extend to immeasurable but also real injuries, identified as “pain and suffering.” David Covin (2001) pointed out that “you couldn’t replace a mother, a child, a wife, a husband, and a father. You cannot replace a dream. Governments of Europe and North America can, however, offer something as compensation . . . for the irreplaceable.” The precedent is well established in Australia, Europe, Japan and the United States. Thus, reparation payment as used in this study is rooted in the concept of avoidable harm.

Why is it that Europe and the United States find it difficult to acknowledge the injustice and avoidable harm done to Blacks during the slave trade? Why can’t they establish the very first reparations criterion for Blacks? Could it be that Africans have suffered no wrongful harm at the hands of others and therefore have no basis for reparations? Could it be that others have not unjustly enriched themselves by committing crimes against Blacks of African descent? According to David Covin (2002) and Michael Spitzer (2002), the major arguments against reparations are that there are no Black people alive today that were slaves. There are middle class, affluent, even rich Black people – how would reparations affect them? Many white people, and others, in this society today had ancestors who arrived in the United States long after slavery, and even for many of those whose ancestors inhabited the United States during slavery, those ancestors themselves did not own slaves. And no white person alive today owned slaves, so why should they have to pay for the wrongs of a slave society?

Scholars such as Browne (1972), Conley (2002), Covin (2001) and Krauthammer (1990) have exerted that societies, nation-states, and almost all human institutions are understood to have continuous existence. A nation’s existence is continuous, regardless of the people who constitute its population at a specific time. They cannot repudiate the actions of the country at an earlier time and hold themselves harmless from them. This is one of the reasons why nation-states can agree to treaties with each other and expect that they will be enforced, regardless of whether the government that made the treaty is still around later, and regardless of whether the existing government agrees with the treaty or not (Covin, 2001; Obadele, 1988).
For example, many Native Americans alive today were not alive during the Indian wars, and when the treaties with the Native American peoples were negotiated or originally violated. David Covin (2002) contends that some people who were recognized as members of Native American tribes and as beneficiaries of reparations were 7/8 white. They were paid reparations. There were middle class, affluent, even rich Indians who benefited from reparations. Nobody was forced to take reparations. In the case of the Japanese American survivors of internment, many of them were middle class, affluent, or even rich. They were all entitled to the $20,000 reparation (Lyons, 2002). Most United States citizens today did not participate in the Indian wars or personally violate the treaties with Indians. But the present day government, regardless of where their ancestors were and what they were doing, are the ones who pay the reparations. Most people in the country in 1942 did not intern the Japanese Americans, so certainly most people today did not, nor did their ancestors. Nevertheless, the United States government paid the reparations. Black people had no role in the state at that time they were forcefully removed from Africa, denied every kind of freedom, and unremunerated for their labor. Blacks were also denied equal access to various public facilities, the right to compete on an equal basis with whites for different opportunities, as well as suffering other violations such as violence and intimidation. In practice, however, no one asks whose ancestors signed the constitution, and if theirs didn’t, they don’t have to abide by it (Covin, 2001; Rodney, 1972; Obadele, 1988).

According to Andrew Valls (1999) and Manning Marable (2000) one cannot violate the rights of millions of Blacks over hundreds of years and then claim that no rectification is called for because the descendants of those who remained in Africa are worse off than the descendants of those who were ripped from it. This contention is misleading and stems from a deep seated misconception that should be modified. Many of the current problems in Africa today can be attributed to western slavery, colonialism and imperialism. As Lumumba-Kasongo confirmed:

The Colonial question is a permanent issue of discourse in African politics and in its possibilities for change due to the ramifications of colonialism and the impact of colonialism on contemporary African social formations, culture, and economics. In a significant way, it changed and shaped the course of African peoples and their cultures’ projection into the world system through a complex system of production, of consumption, and of political alienation (1994, p. 40).

It should also be noted that after every war, there is room for the process of rebuilding and re-habitation. At the end of the slave trade, however,
the Europeans and North American governments did not help to rebuild Africa. Instead they introduced colonial regimes to facilitate the extraction of raw materials.

Reparations should not be perceived in the form of money alone, it could take different forms. Native Americans, for example, have received some reparations in the forms of land, and of sovereignty. Blacks in the Diaspora could also receive reparations in the form of land, sovereignty, and the removal of duties from both imports and exports. African nations could receive reparations in the form of foreign debts forgiveness. After all, it was from plundering them — their people and resources — that Western countries developed the wealth to despoil them in the first place. Most African countries turn over more than twenty-five percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) or income from exports to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) every year (Covin, 2001). Similarly, the burden of debt servicing has made several African nations poorer. Most African nations pay about one sixth of their export earnings to service their debt and these payments go to the richer nations in Europe and North America.

European and North American governments should establish a resettlement project for Blacks living in their respective nations who want to return voluntarily to Africa or the Caribbean. This project should provide the cost of fares for Blacks and their family members plus a specific amount for the transportation of their belongings. Reparations in the form of return and reintegration of qualified African nationals would portray western recognition of the huge damage, which European and North American nations have done and continue to do to Blacks in Diaspora both now and in the past. Having exploited so much, it would be more than fitting at this time for the west to at least facilitate the return of those who wish to go back to their original native countries.

Some foreign assets could be turned over to African and Caribbean nations as part of their reparations. The government of the United States could establish several urban, rural, and suburban homesteads across the nation that could be opened to the Black population. It could have been appropriate to turn most of the several miles of inhabited city around the nation to Blacks free and tax-free or to Black Trusts.

Another method to pay restitution in North America and Europe is to write off the “official or legal” debt owed by every Black person that is 50 years and older. Obviously, those are the age groups of Blacks who have suffered most from the impact of the Atlantic slave trade. We are assuming here that Blacks would have achieved an economic status similar or close to that of Whites in the West were it not for the history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.
An affirmative action policy that is based on race is another means of addressing restitution demand for African-Americans. Race-based affirmative action policy is preferred to class-based policies because the purpose at stake is a program of reparations to remedy past injustice, not a poverty program. A race based affirmative action main objective will not be achieved by increasing social welfare benefits (Bittker, 1973). Manning Marable (2000) and Valls (1999) contend that affirmative action that is race-based can itself rectify the effects of past violations of the rights of African-Americans. Such race-based policy could be implemented by granting marginal preference for qualified African-Americans in admission to colleges, graduate and professional schools, and in employment. Bernard Boxill (1978) pointed out that such policy does not require young white males to pay an additional cost to themselves. He therefore proposed that the United States government should be mindful, however, to shift the race-based affirmative action policy from the areas of education and occupation to those of asset inequality.

Finally, this study suggests that the United Nations is a good place to begin because of its interest in a global diplomacy agenda and advocacy for human rights as well as equity treatment of people around the world. Spitzer (2002) contends that African states should actively pursue settlements by treaty or United Nations resolutions. He further exerts that the potential for litigation may help the African states to achieve their primary objectives of debt forgiveness and a formal apology through international agreement. To begin, Africans in Diaspora must be united in confronting the European and United States governments. They should not allow these western governments to continue to manipulate them. There are many ongoing initiatives, which have been reached. What is paramount, however, is that the underlying moral sentiments must be recognized and openly debated to reach a final peace that all involved might accept.

**Conclusion**

This study examines mostly the perceptions of Africans in Diaspora and but also those of Africans in Africa on the Atlantic slave trade and reparations. It used a cultural centered model to assess the perception of Africans in Diaspora about the issue of slavery and reparations. The study addressed the questions: Have Black people in the United States, Africa continent, Europe and around the world suffered wrongful harm from slavery, colonialism and imperialism? Have Europeans and whites in the United States unjustly enriched themselves at the expense of Blacks in Diaspora? It suggests that the terms of the debate over reparations,
race based affirmative action and other race conscious policies must be recast.

As human history and precedence around the world reveals, how can European and North American governments argue that wronged people such as Jews, Japanese-Americans, Native Americans, and car crash victims are due reparations, but Africans who suffered the devastation of slavery, colonialism and imperialism are not? There is no doubt that slavery, colonialism and imperialism destroyed African culture, religion, economy, social and political institutions. The twenty-first century question is not whether reparations should be paid to Blacks in Diaspora, rather how would it be implemented? The truth, justice, moral consequence and inhuman suffering of slavery, colonialism and imperialism need to be exposed.

The findings of this study suggest that on one hand, Blacks in the African continent prefer reparations in the form of debt forgiveness and formal apology. On the other hand, however, Blacks living in North America (including the United States) and Europe preferred reparations in the form of education and social policy reform. Generally the respondents agreed that the United Nations would be a good place to start the negotiations for reparations because in the twenty-first century the institution has been a major forum for diplomacy and the demand for a new world order, and political transformation of the global economy.

In order to effectively demand reparations, however, Africans in Diaspora need to reach a consensus on what they want as restitution for past injustice. There is the need for the people of African descent to form a unifying center that will provide a central database of information for Blacks seeking reparation around the world.

References

AMERICAN, Richard

BITTNER, Boris

BOVEY, Bernard

BROWN, R.S.
Conley, Dalton

Govin, David

Dibie, Robert

Duetche, Presse Agentur

Fouad, Ammoun

Harbeson, John and Donald Rothchild

Henry, Marilyn

Khapova, Vincent

Krauthammer, C.

Lumumba-Kasongo, Tekumbi

Lyons, Michelle

Main, Brian

Marable, Manning

Masters, Stanley

Mazru, Ali

Munya, Mweti


Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court Art 5 of


