

Mw★mko

REPARATIONS NOW:
A PRIMER

SUNGU OYOO

Forward by Alieu Bah

About Mwamko:

Mwamko is an idea turned organisation, whose gestation was born out of long conversations between young people who have spent a lifetime in the emancipatory currents and movements. It proffers a newness for a new context and age even as it connects itself to the longer genealogies of resistance and rebellion of the African people home and abroad.

We are coming together as a gathering of aspirations of a new generation of Africans who desire and want an Africa liberated from the clutches of both internal oppression and external dominance.

Mwamko focuses deeply on popular political education and knowledge production for liberation amongst and with organisers, activists and revolutionaries. It centres this as an ongoing need for clarity in our current struggles, which today are in disarray and fraught with confusion.

Join us then in this ongoing march to complete liberation and freedom!

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Dedication

This is for all those whose labour and life were stolen in the Plantations of the Americas, the Caribbean and on the Plains of Africa.

This is for those who chose the sea.

For the progressive forces, workers, peasants and revolutionaries of Africa and her diasporas.

Forward

Where do we situate reparations for black and African people? What canon is fitting to take on its analysis, its nuances and fullness? Reparations is about paying back for labour that was stolen, unpaid for and exorcised out of human beings as if a set of demons, and at its lowest as beasts of burden. In trying to understand this cold and calculated act, labour meets another one of its great antitheses, that of dehumanisation. Paying back what is owed to a people who were historically used to launch a global economic system that will keep them in their place until the end of time necessitates no easy and settled meditation.

The call for reparations then asks for a totalizing of the forces that enacted the stealing of bodies, minds and souls. We must look at this system's historical genesis, political core and economic roots. A scientific and materialist investigation that issues from a totality of different but related parts of a whole. We cannot pander to a sentimental approach without running the risk of mere invectives and platitudes that leads one nowhere near a politics of liberation and true reparation.

At the base of this cruel system, we must never forget, lies both the logic and law of a ruthless accumulative drive. It honours neither morals nor ethics, it only knows how to take by coercion or persuasion. And at its superstructural level an ideology, today known to the world as white supremacy, holds helm to convince that one race of humans are superior to another. To drive home the point, a strange irony ensues that without this labour that was stolen it—this deadly system—would have never existed. You see the coercion at its beginning and so it shall remain in the end so to speak. Both its psyche and materiality points to the violence it will continue to bring to the world.

I'm talking about capitalism. I'm sure you have already anticipated that.

Capitalism itself needed capital to start operating as both economic system and a political reality that subsume human dignity under the guise of promised freedoms and rights. While the founders of this system were busy taking over from their monarchical dynasties in Europe to bring to life another form of rule; there in the so called new world, black people are being subjected to the worst of all degradation, enslavement, to fund the take over of the capitalist class and provide its seedling. The black human snatched from their lands, taking long gruesome journeys filled with agony and pain are now put to work even as they're separated from kin and skin folk at will. A contradiction ensues that bewilders one: fighting for human rights on one side of the world, while stealing it continually from the other end of the Atlantic. Yet, there was no mistake here. It was systematic, calculated and accepted as the order of things in the very fitness of history.

The psychology of this system cannot work any other way. For even its workers down in the factories of Europe were reduced to nothing but appendages of the machine used to process

the raw materials from enslaved labour. The one who doesn't own the means produces the ends without pity or mercy. As the system matures and now goes from the factory to the offices of power under the newly founded nation state with its citizens, it expands and increases its pain to the whole world through colonialism and forms of domination. Through it all the enslaved African in the fields of the new world still receives the whip and the sting of death at every turning point. Thus western democracy came into the world funded by right-less, dehumanized beings with blood, sweat and death.

So why reparations you might ask? Well, I hope it is obvious now that that which is stolen must be returned; that which is lost restored; that which is owed paid? It is as simple as that. Period.

And yet it is still complex because those who have stolen and continue to steal, deny and swear in all holiness that nothing is owed to the sufferers of yesterday and today. These are claims made even more powerful by the painful fact that there have risen amongst the black masses a class of people who will conspire with capital to steal and snatch even more than ever. They claim to speak for our people but they're nothing sort of middlemen for the oppressors of yesteryears and today.

Yet as it's known that power concedes to nothing but power, then the sufferers too must build their power base to take back that which is rightfully theirs. This system must pay for every penny owed which numbers in the millions and billions. They must pay for the pain, the suffering and the death that was there in the fields of the Americas and the plains of Africa. In the process the masses of black people must also clear their ranks of those ruling class betrayers amongst them. This is reparations as class struggle in its conscious stage.

But what about the colonial adventures? How will those fit in this our conversation on reparations? What about the neocolonial state that now abounds in the black and brown world? What about the wage slavery that binds the human being to the machine without proper recompense for their labour?

Since it exists as a continuity without break, for as one system of domination dies, another is born to carry on the burden of providing the seed capital for capitalism —otherwise known as primitive accumulation. We can never see any breakages or discontinuities in how it flows through history. The payment owed then is ongoing which means the struggle for remuneration cannot be reparations for previous debt alone, but one that roots for a new world order that seizes domination by the neck.

Reparations has to be anticapitalist politics because its call, at its core, is about paying back labour power and natural resources for what it's worth. Since capitalism accumulates and refuses redistribution of produce, reparations stands at its polar opposite. Hence no call for reparations will be meaningful without a call for the dismantling of the capitalist mode of production.

It must be understood that the wage system under capitalism itself demands for reparations as it appropriates labour power as just another commodity in the market that it can exploit at will. Under the pretence of the worker being free to do as they will, they are bounded to a contract to produce much beyond their pay through a complex extension of the working day and time. The wage is only so they can reproduce and sustain themselves so as to go back to work for as long as the capitalist needs them. Their impoverishment builds wealth for the owner of the means of production.

At the bottom of this commodification of labour power of course lies the black worker today even as it was yesterday. With the racialization of capitalism from its very beginning blackness receives the brunt of its dispossession as it bends to carry the burden of the machine. Here the demand for reparations moves beyond the slave plantations and colonial plunder of capitalism and extends itself headlong against white supremacy writ large. To take it back to history: this system that was built by stolen black labour cannot advance black life without dying. To pay is one step, to die is its logical conclusion.

We are now left with one righteous alternative. Which is to build a socialist vision for a new world where value from labour is paid in full and a cooperative economy is built that is not run by a murderous market and the whim of a few people whilst the billion majority groans from poverty and dispossession. The ideological superstructure of white supremacy giving way to a world of the equality of all human beings without regard for the colour of their skin or their gender identity.

Babylon must pay. That's a fact of history. Capitalism must die. That is the truth of the present. We can't have one without the other. In the fullness of time, the nation state built on the back of enslaved Africans, which has now permeated every corner of the world, must also disappear. It must give way to a new state that is built on freedom and liberation of all toilers and workers. This is the verdict of history and it can't be any other way.

Alieu Bah.
Nairobi, January 2023

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INTRODUCTION

“Slavery is colonialism abroad. Colonialism is slavery at home” - Amzat Boukari

Our struggle for reparations is a just and righteous struggle, for it is a struggle borne out of the dehumanisation and subjugation of African peoples over the past 500 years. It is part of that long demand for justice by people from all corners of the world that arises from the brutal history, harm and human cost of enslavement and colonialism - whose legacies still influence the economic and political trajectory of people and countries across Africa, the Caribbean, Americas, and other territories. In engaging in this struggle for reparations, we are keeping alive memories of the people, cultures and nations that came before us - the seeds they tried to bury.

In this phase of the struggle for reparations, our generation is unapologetically pointing out historical facts and demanding reparative justice, because, as Milan Kundera reminds us, “the struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”.

This collection of notes and thoughts examines the historical context of slavery and colonialism from economic, political and social prisms, before illuminating their legacies, structures and manifestations in the neo-colonial era. These notes further outline what reparations mean to Africans based on our material conditions and lived realities, and highlights attempts at subduing and scuttling the struggle for reparations through non-meaningful recognitions, apologies and other short stories.

This pamphlet concludes by laying the framework for an African People’s Reparation Commission, a body tasked with establishing and actualizing Africa’s pathway toward reparations for her people, nations and nationalities through a framework with clear economic, political, socio-cultural and ecological dimensions and fronts.

Reparations Now is the product of reflections on and engagements in the struggle for reparations over these past years. It additionally borrows from two of my previous articles; *In Defense of the Westminster Three* which was published by Progressive International, and; *Our Struggle for Reparations: Recognitions, Apologies and other Short Stories* which was published by This Is Africa.

This written work is a pointer to one of the key directions of the African Revolution in its current dimensions, for in the 21st Century the struggle for reparations is at the centre of the struggle for complete decolonisation.

Reparations Now!

Sungu Oyoo.
Nairobi, January 2023

Chapter I

Elmina

It is the 20th day of October 2022. I am here in Elmina Castle along the Cape Coast of Ghana. This castle was built by the Portuguese in 1482 as a trading post. A few decades later, here in Elmina, capital declared war without terms against African people - inaugurating a dark period in history marked by the kidnapping, humiliation and subjugation of our people through a system of enslavement that would cement and power the economic base of Europe and the United States for centuries to come.

The construction of Elmina castle heralded ruthless phases of accumulation by empire, phases marked by epochs of enslavement and colonialism, whose legacies today inform the material conditions and lived reality both for Africans in the neo-colonial states and abroad. These legacies manifest, for instance, through colonial patterns of economics and systemic racism - and are every now and then brought to everyday view and attention, like through the brutally violent murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020.

I have travelled the length and breadth of Africa, lived and experienced, communed and broke bread with our people. Over this period, I have heard and seen many things, some evoking memories of joy and gratitude, and some disheartening. None of what I have seen before compares to Elmina and its dark structure of domination based on race, class and gender.

My comrades and I are in the main courtyard. We are guided through the imposing four-storey network of corridors, tunnels and dungeons that is Elmina by a Ghanaian sister, a historian par excellence. I follow.

We walk past a row of rooms on the ground floor of the main courtyard - these were the male dungeons, where male Africans were kept as they waited their voyage across the sea. She explains that the white soldiers lived on the floor above these male dungeons, that the deputy governor lived on the floor above the white soldiers, while the governor was housed above the deputy governor - on the highest floor. Though located on the highest floor, the governor's living area is connected to a smaller courtyard between the female dungeons on the first or second floor via a secret staircase. From one of his balconies, he ordered at will for the female captives awaiting shipment to unknown lands to be brought out to this smaller courtyard for him to choose which woman to rape. Any refusal was met with physical and psychological torture.

150 women passed through these female dungeons every three months. I look at the floor beneath my feet, wondering what memories it holds. Here, African women refused to die. Their captors threw them food on this floor. They would pick that food from this floor, eat it, pee and defecate on this floor, sleep their hunger away on this floor, and after long waits again have to eat food thrown on this floor. Their very survival, like our survival today, became a struggle.

Directly above the female dungeons are remains of a Church built by the Dutch. Here, the Dutch prayed for salvation - the enslaved subjugated below their feet. Many other slave trading forts also had churches within them, for religion historically was a key component of the superstructure, playing a key role in manufacturing submission and augmenting the economic base of Europe - later becoming an instrument of manufacturing submission in the colonies.

Elmina is a clear example of segmentation and hierarchy on the basis of race, class and gender.

Though designed to make the African surrender both physically and psychologically through an architecture of domination and subjugation, our people never gave up, never lost hope, never forgot home.

The West African Coast had tens of other Elminas - trading forts and ports from which at least 12 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean between the 16th and 19th Centuries - the largest enforced movement of humans recorded in history. These include James Island in Gambia, Arguin in Mauritania, Bunce Island in Sierra Leone, Goree Island in Senegal, Christiansburg castle built by the Danes in present-day Ghana in the 17th Century and countless other locations, some of which have been erased from history.

Conservative estimates place the number of African people who lost their lives during the trans-Atlantic crossing at 1.5 million. Many died from horrific conditions on slave ships, others threw themselves into the ocean and drowned in desperate attempts to avoid subjugation, while countless others were thrown overboard. Many ships also capsized during voyages and the ocean floor remains littered with bones that bear stories of pain, anguish and unimaginable suffering. Countless skeletons from this era have today been corroded and eroded by the sea, disappearing from the reach of history. But every other day new records and scars of slavery are being unearthed, like the oldest known wreckage of a slave ship, discovered in 2005 on the floor of the English channel.

Did someone call us children of a lesser God? They can go to hell...

Chapter II

Augmenting the Economic Base.

Portugal, Netherlands, Britain, Sweden, Denmark and France participated in the slave trade and drew immense economic benefit from it. As indicated in the previous section, at least twelve million people from the Western Coast of Africa were kidnapped and shipped across the Atlantic to plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean. Founded on the dispossession and systemic murder of the indigenous people of the Americas, these plantations would be powered by the forced labour of African slaves for the next few centuries. This architecture of exploitation and extraction from the colonies in the Americas, and later in Africa, provided a solid base for the economic growth of Europe.

In a [previous article](#) on *Progressive International*, I pointed out that the trade, shipping and banking empires of Europe and America owe a huge part of their development to the historical epochs of slavery and colonialism, periods of fast and sustained economic growth in European history. Sustained extraction from the periphery resulted in the concentration of wealth in the cold, insatiable centre - and still manifests in today's economic relations between Africa and the so-called civilised world, the West.

In that era, proceeds from the slave trade were pumped into banking, land and property acquisition, education, among other key sectors. The businesses and empires that were instituted and strengthened during this era of enslavement today play a huge role in economic relations and disparities between the so-called Global North and the Global South - not forgetting their concurrent contributions to economic and political destabilisation, cultural disruption and environmental degradation.

Bacrlays Bank, for instance, was founded by the Barclay brothers using wealth earned from the slave trade. Many other British banks including the Royal Bank of Scotland, HSBC and Lloyds also had direct links to slavery. CitiBank, an American bank, is in the same whatsapp group. Numerous founders and benefactors to some of the well-known sites of higher education in the western world - from Georgetown, to Harvard, to Oxford - were actively engaged in the slave trade. Yale University for instance is named after Elihu Yale - the slave trader and slave owner who made 'generous' donations to the university. Georgetown University, on the other hand, is known to have sold 272 enslaved people in 1838 alone. The position these institutions today occupy in the global intellectual hegemony is predicated on these bloody and brutal histories. Churches also participated in, justified and benefitted from the slave trade. Some of the countless properties owned by the Anglican Church across London and other parts of the world were purchased using proceeds from its engagement in the slave trade. More importantly, world-renowned seats of power and hegemony, including the White House and the US Capitol, were also built using slave labour.

When the British empire banned the owning of slaves in 1833, it instituted a Slave Compensation Act through which over 46,000 plantation owners were paid 20 million pounds

(billions by today's standards). Britain only finished paying former slave owners a few decades ago, while the enslaved and their descendants have received nothing to date.

The structures and economic relations created to serve the slave trade and later strengthened to serve the colonial enterprise are hugely responsible for the underdeveloped state of Africa and most of the third world in this era.

In his seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Guyanese revolutionary-intellectual Walter Rodney points at the relationship between development and underdevelopment. Rodney says that:

“Because of the superficiality of many of the approaches to ‘underdevelopment’, and because of resulting misconceptions, it is necessary to re-emphasise that development and underdevelopment are not only comparative terms, but that they also have a dialectical relationship one to the other: that is to say, the two help produce each other by interaction... The developed and underdeveloped parts of the present capitalist section of the world have been in continuous contact for four and a half centuries. The contention here is that over that period, Africa helped to develop Western Europe in the same proportion as Western Europe helped to underdevelop Africa”.

The dialectical nature of the relationship between development and underdevelopment has never been more clear than today.

Today, Europe and America continue to pillage Africa through extractive and colonial patterns of economics that have become a mainstay of the neo-colonial state - everyday reducing our people to *the wretched of the earth*.

Chapter III

Berlin, Circa 1884

In 1884, Otto Von Bismarck convened the Berlin Conference where Africa was carved up by Europe. The conference was called to enable the 'amicable' partitioning of Africa among European states, for in their thirst to accumulate, European powers were already fighting among themselves over who would eventually control what - the so-called spheres of influence. In simple terms, this conference [established the rules of conquest](#). It was again a war without terms.

14 countries – Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway, Turkey and the United States – sent ambassadors and envoys to this conference. In essence, all European countries apart from Switzerland were actively involved in the discussion to colonise Africa, and all of Western Europe and the then-satellites such as the United States of America effectively ended up as beneficiaries of the colonial project. Those Western European countries that did not directly colonise the African land and her people received major concessions in mining, trade, shipping, insurance and other domains of capital - perpetuating frameworks and operational mechanisms that enabled the Western world to extract and grow fatter at the expense of the periphery.

The advent of colonialism was marked with resistance by many African peoples, communities, nations and kingdoms. Some of these resistances were fierce and protracted, while many others were easily quashed due to superior European firepower and machiavellian tactics of conquest.

I will briefly mention three examples below:

a. Namibia

Present day Namibia was colonised by Germany in 1884. Following the Herrero uprising of 1904, German soldiers drove the Herrero and Nama people into the scorching Namib desert at gun-point over a period of four years (1904-1908), resulting in the death of over 100,000 people, mostly from dehydration. Many others were held in concentration camps. This was done to 'destroy the tribe', as per the orders of General Lothar van Trotha.

About 75% of the Herrero population was exterminated in the course of these four years, which, looking back in retrospect, was a learning ground for the mass murder that would befall Europe a few decades later courtesy of Hitler's Third Reich. It is today estimated that Germany has paid the Jewish people reparations amounting to at least \$90 billion since the end of World War 2, most recently having committed an [additional \\$767 million](#) in 2021.

That same Germany refused to even simply recognise the massacre of the Herrero as genocide until 2015.

b. Congo:

The Congo is an even more poignant case in point. This country, the largest and richest in Africa, was the personal property of King Leopold between 1885 and 1908 when control over the territory reverted to the Belgian government. King Leopold lorded over an extensive and ruthless process of extraction of ivory, rubber and other resources marked by forced labour, torture, amputation of limbs, executions among other countless atrocities.

The demand for rubber by Europe rose sharply especially after the invention of the inflatable rubber tyre in 1887, soon followed by the invention of the automobile that also required rubber for its tyres, and a concurrent rise in the use of rubber in various industries. Rubber, which grew wild in the forests of the so-called Congo Free State, was extracted through a brutal system of forced labour where men were sent into the vast forests to collect rubber, while their wives and children were held hostage to ensure that they returned from the forests. Those of them who did not meet their quotas of rubber to be collected had their limbs amputated.

Forced labour was the foundation of the colonial economy. In Congo, the system of forced labour led to decrease in farming, hunting and fishing - resulting in food shortages and famines that claimed countless lives. Those communities that resisted Leopold's domination were also massacred, and in just one decade, over 10 million people in the present day Congo lost their lives as a result of Leopold's barbarism. The Congolese people were treated as animals in this historical epoch, and exhibited in zoos in Belgium and other parts of the world - including at the [Monkey House](#) in New York's Bronx Zoo.

Belgium's dominance over the Congo in this and later eras was greatly aided by American complicity, for the United States was aggressively exploiting [uranium deposits in the Congo](#) from the 1930's, and continues exploiting minerals such as zinc, copper, cobalt among others to date.

The Congolese people are still treated as animals to date, their territory reduced to a theatre of war by global powers competing for resources.

c. Kenya:

Kenya experienced a brand of settler-colonialism whose effects reverberate to date. Early in the 20th Century, her indigenous systems of production and exchange were smothered and subjected to a series of substantive changes by the colonial system - embedding Kenya within the global capitalist system. This shift from pre-capitalist modes of production to capitalism in the first decades of the 20th Century was marked by the forceful alienation of indigenous productive forces from their rightful owners, a process largely enforced by violence.

Indigenous people were moved out of their most fertile and productive lands at gunpoint to create what became known as the 'white highlands', and were later allowed to stay on the farms as squatters. This move aided the exploitation of African people and their labour by capital and its attendant forces of violence and coercion, enforcing extraction and destruction.

In 1952, the war for national liberation broke out - with the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (commonly referred to as the MauMau) engaging the British in a protracted armed struggle. [Between 1952 and 1960](#), roughly 1.5 million people were forced into around 800 concentration camps, mostly spread across Central Kenya, where they were subjected to torture, rape and other grave violations. A notorious system of prisons dubbed 'the pipeline' was created to confine and 'rehabilitate' over 300,000 detainees. Many detainees succumbed to forced labor, disease, starvation, torture, and other catastrophes in this pipeline.

In the early 1960's, with national independence inevitable, the British made a systematic effort to [destroy and conceal](#) official records of their brutal crackdowns - burning many official colonial documents, dumping others in the deep sea, and carting many more to the UK. After decades of denying any such records existed, the British Government finally acknowledged their existence in 2011.

In 2009, a few members of the MauMau sued the British government which reached an out of court settlement in the following years, paying 19.9 million pounds to some 5,228 elderly Kenyans tortured in the 1950's when the height of resistance to the colonial machine was at its peak.

The cases of Namibia, Congo and Kenya are not isolated ones - these practices took place across the continent. This barbarism and its attendant violence enabled, furthered and enforced an unprecedented accumulation by Europe marked by enforced displacement in the colonies, forced and subjugated labour, constant extraction and shipping of raw materials and other natural or mineral resources from Africa to Europe, and the massively huge market for European goods and manufactures that Africa offered.

We must note that none of the colonial powers ended colonialism voluntarily, for the benefits, especially the economic ones, were innumerable to them. More importantly, the balance of forces had gradually but steadily been tilting in favour of the anti-colonial movements, organisations and formations, especially after the 5th Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945.

Rodney again details how years earlier, Bishop Maury (of France) had presented an argument against France ending the slave trade and giving freedom to its colonies. In his presentation before the French National Assembly, Maury stated that, "*If you were to lose each year more than 200 million livres that you now get from your colonies; if you had not the exclusive trade with your colonies to feed your manufactures, to maintain your navy, to keep your agriculture going, to repay for your imports, to provide for your luxury needs, to advantageously balance your trade with Europe and Asia, then I say it clearly, the kingdom would be irretrievably lost.*"

What better explanation of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism is there? The objectives of capitalism are economic, for its visible and invisible political leanings and expressions exist in the service of its economic power - or rather, in the service of those who control the productive forces - the economic base.

Chapter IV

The Neo-Colonial Era

If the colonial epoch was the era of the 3 C's - christianity, civilisation and commerce - then the neo-colonial epoch is the era of the 3 D's, dominion, destruction and death.

Though colonialism and its objectives were camouflaged around myths including those on religion or the superior nature of the white man, the African people are today looking beyond the logic and rhetoric of colonialism and arriving at an understanding that the overriding ideology of this era was capitalism-imperialism. Based on ruthless exploitation, extraction and accumulation by the western world at the expense of the peripheries, the capitalist system created and enforced a chokehold over most of Africa, Asia and Latin America through colonialism. In the colonial era, African people were treated as bystanders of history, as people undeserving of rights and dignity.

Today's generation of Africans again understand that the end of the 'colonial era' did not result in decolonization of the formerly colonised territories and people. As colonialism left through one door, neo-colonialism, a system of indirect control, was introduced through another. In the neo-colonial states, it is very clear who wields ultimate power.

Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah reminds us that, *"The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."*

Many African countries remain neo-colonial states to this day, their national economies structured to exist in the service of the economies of Europe and America, and their leaders forced to kowtow to the political and economic dictates of the West. Some African economies however, have made attempts at de-linking or providing alternatives both historically and in the present, always reminding us that another world is possible.

In the late 1950's, at the twilight of the colonial era, France institutionalised its colonial relationship with 'now former colonies' by imposing 'certain conditions' including the CFA - a colonial currency that is printed and controlled by Paris - and which is still used by 14 African countries to date (2023).

In the face of threats and intimidation, many African countries agreed to the conditions imposed on them by France, or rather, the African petty bourgeoisie in these countries agreed to conditions dictated from Paris. These fabricated elites, products and beneficiaries of the French colonial system, were (and still are) prepared to sacrifice Africans and Africa for the sake of their own national interests and French(foreign) interests. In several African countries, they are today's national bourgeoisie and remain answerable to external forces - specifically their masters from across the vast seas and oceans.

One key exception with regard to the retreating French colonial empire is Guinea, which was the first French colony in Africa* to declare its independence in 1958. In the run-up to her independence, the people of Guinea under the political leadership of the *Parti démocratique de Guinée* (Democratic Party of Guinea) and Sekou Toure refused to concede to the demands of the French, including the continued use of the CFA as a currency. In the midst of a bitter and protracted exchange between the colonised who had smelled and sensed freedom, and the soon-to-be 'former colonisers' represented by the then French President De Gaulle, Sekou Toure famously said that "We prefer freedom in poverty to opulence in servitude".

A few years later, Kenyan socialist and freedom fighter Pio Gama Pinto would echo Toure's words in his rallying cry that "*Uhuru* (freedom) must not be transformed into freedom to exploit, or freedom to be hungry and live in ignorance. *Uhuru* must be *uhuru* for the masses - *uhuru* from exploitation, from ignorance, disease or poverty".

Sekou Toure led his Democratic Party of Guinea to victory in the 1958 referendum, ushering in Guinea's independence. France responded by recalling all French professionals, carting away anything that could be shipped back to France including light bulbs, and destroying critical infrastructure in a bid to destabilise the country's economy and make an example of Guinea to other French colonies which they feared would be tempted to follow paths of radical economic emancipation when they gained their independence.

This was nothing new, for France had more than a century earlier demanded for and extracted reparations from Haiti using gangster methods in the wake of the Haitian revolution in 1804. Before 1804, Haiti was the richest colony in the world. With over 8,000 plantations whose existence was predicated on slave labour, Haiti was the [world's leading producer of sugar and coffee](#) in addition to producing a multitude of other products including cotton and cacao. From the late 1790's, those enslaved, under the military leadership of Toussaint Louverture rebelled, burning down the plantations and chasing away the settlers, many of whom fled to America and France. Haiti consequently gained its independence in 1804 under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, but faced sustained political and economic sabotage from both the United States and France. The United States saw this black-led country, this nation of formerly enslaved people who had rebelled against capital and its system of slavery as being symbolic and representative of strands of resistance that could potentially inspire slave revolts in the United States.

In 1825, France blockaded Haiti with a gang of warships, demanding a sum of 150 million francs to recognise Haiti's independence. Haiti conceded to secure its territorial integrity, and only finished paying the sum 122 years later. At certain points over the course of these 122 years, Haiti was forced to take [loans with hefty interest rates](#) from a French bank to pay the French government.

The harm that France and the United States inflicted on Haiti, not to mention the resultant increased need for capital that led to Haiti's dependence on international institutions like the World Bank and IMF, are responsible for the devastating material conditions and lived realities

that the people of Haiti endure to this date. In 2010, when Haiti was devastated by an earthquake, these two countries again came together to 'help Haiti', but did nothing to change the structure that keeps Haiti poor. They, in fact, subsequently both refused to accept Haitian refugees, or in the case of France, to pay back Haiti what is owed to her.

In Port au Prince, systems have as of today basically collapsed with the people left at the mercy of capital, nature, famine, disease and marauding gangs which today make the Haitian capital one of the kidnapping capitals of the world.

Again, Rodney reminds us that *“From the beginning, Europe assumed the power to make decisions within the international trading system. An excellent illustration of that is the fact that the so-called international law which governed the conduct of nations on the high seas was nothing else but European law. Africans did not participate in its making, and in many instances African people were simply the victims, for the law recognised them only as transportable merchandise. If the African slave was thrown overboard at sea, the only legal problem that arose was whether or not the slave-ship could claim compensation from the insurers! Above all, European decision-making power was exercised in selecting what Africa should export — in accordance with European needs.”*

In the neo-colonial set-up, the experience of African countries is not much different from Haiti's experience with the French, at least principally. Africa everyday experiences outflows to her former colonial masters through mineral concessions, lopsided trade agreements like AGOA and other sophisticated mechanisms anchored on colonial patterns of economics that extract from the already impoverished nation states of Africa to the centre.

Today, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) estimates that Africa loses \$50-80 Billion annually to illicit financial flows (Actual figures are much higher). Multinational companies, many born in Britain, Europe or America, register to tax havens, often using British or American-made legal instruments that enable them to shift profits and obfuscate where tax is due. Left in weakened financial positions, African countries have, over decades, borrowed huge sums of money under bilateral and multilateral arrangements that disproportionately serve the interest of the western world. More recently, African countries have been borrowing from private financial institutions. The long-term effects of this behaviour are now, again, becoming clear, with Zambia defaulting on debt repayment in 2021 and Ghana defaulting in 2022.

The assumptions of yesterday are the assumptions of today, for no systematic difference exists between that historical epoch and now. Form might have changed, but not content.

Chapter V

What are reparations?

The Oxford dictionary defines reparations as “*compensating for damage, (or) making amends for loss*”. Deemed as controversial for many decades, the question of reparations has in the past few years been more-hyped and much talked-about, with many people and organisations wholeheartedly supporting the struggle for reparations. But what do we as African people interpret reparations to mean?

There has been a tendency to consign reparations to the realm of monetary compensation alone. Consequently, our calls for reparations have in many ways been misrepresented and framed to look like African people are abdicating their responsibility to develop their continent and only waiting for hand-outs.

But those who have been engaging in the struggle for reparations know that monetary compensation is only one component of reparations, not the whole. In so knowing, they realise that any attempt to limit the question of reparations to the monetary alone is to limit it within hegemonies of western thought, existence and practice.

Two years ago, I was tasked by [Africans Rising](#) to coordinate the #ReRightHistory campaign, which sought to confront the continued exploitation and subjugation of African people by examining its historical roots and initiating conversations and actions aimed at getting former colonial powers to right the wrongs of the brutal histories and legacies of colonialism, enslavement and systemic racism.

The [#ReRightHistory](#) campaign did not come up with a fixed definition of reparations, but instead chose to allow individuals, communities and countries to define what reparations meant to them based on their historical context and lived realities. This was out of a recognition that for some countries, reparations could have meant financial compensation for atrocities and exploitation in the hands of former slave-traders or colonial powers. For others it could have meant repairing structural injustices resulting from, or continuing from, historical injustices. For some communities, reparations could also mean the return of stolen properties, objects, cultural or spiritual items. For Africa’s small-holder farmers, it could also have meant environmental repair, self-determination and sustainability.

I will below attempt to widen the view of reparations as relates to stolen African objects, human remains, the land and climate.

i) African artefacts:

It is of much significance, especially at a cultural level, that the push for reparations includes demands for the return of stolen properties and artefacts - carvings, totems, drums, traditional weapons such as spears, and other items of cultural or spiritual significance.

Most Africans know of the statues of Benin, carved and moulded in the 13th Century and looted by the British in the 19th Century, or the [drum of the Pokomo](#) people in Kenya's Tana River region, which are among many other important cultural artefacts held ransom in European museums and other sites. To date, Europe refuses to truly and fully repatriate them to their countries of origin despite repeated demands for return of the items, choosing every then and now to instead engage in shows of tokenism.

Recently, a few of these items have been 'returned' to Africa, such as in 2022 when the Berlin Ethnological Museum agreed to return "[23 ancient items of jewellery and other artefacts that were taken between 1884 and 1915, when Namibia was part of German South West Africa, a colony of the German Empire.](#)" The agreement described it as an "indefinite" loan. How do you loan me what is mine? How do you loan proceeds of your theft to the victims of that theft?

King Felipe of Belgium went to the DRC on a state visit in 2022, again engaging in a similar show of doing-nothing-ism (*the art of doing nothing while appearing to be very busy*). In The Vanguard, a Nigerian publication, Owei Lakemfa's [article](#) brilliantly captured Felipe's visit:

"When last week, King Philippe visited DRC, he did not bring Lumumba's recovered tooth. Rather, he brought a Congolese mask, one of more than 84,000 DRC works taken or stolen by the Belgians during colonialism. The Belgians do not intend to return these stolen works, rather their Parliament wants to legislate for their restitution on a case-by-case basis. Imagine the centuries this may take! Even the mask the King brought is not really a return to its rightful owners, but an "indefinite loan." Imagine people in possession of stolen property, loaning them to the owners."

This is crazy. Why should hundreds of thousands of looted African artefacts continue to be displayed in European Museums where they earn income for European countries while they could be in their countries of origin enabling African museums generate incomes, or serving the cultural and spiritual roles they historically played, be repurposed to meet other contemporary or arising needs which might be of equal or greater significance, or in national museums where they would help increase visits and therefore incomes.

ii) Human remains:

Our demands for reparations include the repatriation of human remains of all Africans carted off to Europe by colonial powers, especially those of resistance leaders. Again, in shows of tokenism, some of these remains have recently been returned while many others continue to dot Museums in Berlin, Brussels, London and many other places. Many more remains, like the remains of Dedan Kimathi, the leader of Kenya's struggle for national liberation and Field Marshal of the MauMau, are buried in unknown locations - the millions of unmarked graves that are a hallmark of the colonial enterprise and its attempted erasure of these ancestors from our collective memories.

Why would you continue to keep the remains of people, some of who your ancestors killed more than one hundred years ago? What sort of psychological ransom is this?

A week after King Felipe's visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Patrice Lumumba's tooth was finally handed over to his family members in Brussels, Belgium. This tooth is all that remained of this independence hero and Congo's first Prime Minister who was assassinated in 1961 by Belgium and his body dissolved in acid.

Scientists in the field of epigenetics have in recent years made us aware that trauma can be embedded in the DNA of a human being and is intergenerational, meaning it can be passed from parent to child. Some of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those whose remains we demand for are still alive and have had no concrete avenues of closure thus far. In Kenya, the now-aged Mukami Kimathi who is freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi's widow every other time keeps asking to at least be allowed to give her husband a dignified burial before she leaves this world.

Our demand for reparations means that all remains held outside should be brought back to Africa and accorded proper burial to enable closure, both for families and communities. In this endeavour, the nation-states of Africa must march in tandem with traditional institutions to ensure that our brave and loving ancestors are accorded dignified send-offs to the land of the living-dead. We owe them that at the minimum.

iii) Land:

As African people, our existence is tied to the land. Our land was forcibly taken away from us as some of us were forcibly taken away from our land - ushering us into the era of the landless African who everyday confronts your senses in the urban slums, the favelas, the medinas, and increasingly in camps for internally displaced people. It is land alienation that initially produced the squatters, the homeless and inhabitants of the urban slums - the dehumanised masses of our people whose only sin was to be born African.

In countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, a minority white population still controls significant amounts of land while Africans in those countries experience increased land pressure in packed villages or find themselves squeezed in urban slums where many of them live an undignified and sub-human existence.

Land is the basis of production. The true development of Africa will only happen after Africans assume control of the forces of production, with the land in the hands of its original owners following programmes of land reform.

Land reform and restitution are key components of reparations for they inform the correcting of a historical dispossession.

iv) Climate reparations:

More recently, we all are confronted by the climate crisis which is directly connected to our planet and the land. Whole African villages are everyday threatened by or wiped out by the climate catastrophe. The Global North, which is responsible for 92% of historical emissions and

material footprints continues to pollute our collective ecology, while Africa bears a disproportionate brunt as droughts become longer, famines more severe, and floods more aggressive.

Calls for climate reparations will definitely continue to grow in size and strength as the effects of climate change become deadlier, more devastating and anti-life. These calls and demands must however not be reduced to mere tokenisms, like in 2022 when American President Joseph Biden apologised to African leaders for “*his nation’s original sin*”, the “*unimaginable cruelty*” of slavery - adding a token \$55 billion of aid to be spent on health, climate change and trade over three years, about half of the over \$100 billion the United States government spent on the war in Ukraine over the course of 2022 alone.

In a 2020 article on Progressive International, I wrote about humanity, territory, resources and movement.

I wrote that “It therefore isn’t surprising that more than a century after the abolition of slavery, thousands of African lives are still being lost at sea. Every day African youth risk their lives attempting to cross the Mediterranean and search for better prospects in Europe, victims of forces both internal and external to Africa...Countless more now flee hardship and deprivation caused by the changing climate that has rendered rich farmland into dry and unproductive soil. In certain parts of Africa, environmental changes have forced whole villages to relocate into cities where conditions are even direr...The young Africans risking or losing their lives crossing the Mediterranean are literally running away from the legacies of colonialism and realities of imperialism that inform their wretched conditions. They run away hoping to access Europe’s concentration of wealth and opportunities. How many more lives does Africa have to lose? Is the ocean floor not tired of African skeletons?”

Indeed, how many more sons and daughters does Africa have to lose? How many more bodies and skeletons can the seas and oceans take?

The four categories outlined above are meant to help expand the common definition of reparations. These reparations are specifically related to the epochs of slavery and colonialism, and take a significant economic dimension arising from land alienation and the totalization of the alienation of labour from the enslaved. Our calls for reparations must thus also include land reform and monetary compensation. But in as much as there exists a strong economic angle within the push for reparations, the overall struggle for reparations must be firmly anchored on clear cultural, economic, ecological and political basis. This expansion is aimed at outlining a broader approach to reparations.

Chapter VI

Our struggle for reparations: Recognitions, apologies and other short stories.

We are asking for reparations related to the epochs of slavery and colonialism. At a future date, African people will again demand for reparations relating to the neo-colonial era. In fact, the movement for climate reparations partly represents and already is asking for reparations for climate atrocities occasioned before and during the neo-colonial era.

In the neo-colonial era, however, our immediate task is to work towards ending this system of indirect control and domination which holds back meaningful development of our countries - the neo-colonial system. In this era, we must struggle against both internal oppression and external suppression. In that scheme of action and organising, the Western world must be aware that one day after the collapse of the unipolar world order, African people and nations shall again raise their fists and voices to demand for substantive reparations relating to exploitation in the neo-colonial era and the conditions occasioned by that exploitation.

Reparations, however, do not emerge from a vacuum, or appear at the tail-end of a magical process. Reparations are the final part of a three-step process:
(Outlined in more detail in the 10 point plan for reparations in Chapter 8 below).

- 1) A recognition and acknowledgement of the crime committed.
- 2) An apology for the crime committed, to enable closure and healing processes.
- 3) Reparations.

To this day, many of the countries that participated in slavery and colonialism neither acknowledge their harmful nature nor recognise them as crimes. But after years of demands and continued struggle by the movement for reparations, we have over the past few years seen a few 'recognitions'.

But what exactly are these recognitions? Are they concrete recognitions, or bags of hot air?

In 2016, Robert Lambert, the speaker of Germany's lower house, sparked a debate over the recognition of colonial era crimes committed by German troops in Namibia. Germany had for many years [avoided this dark chapter of its history](#) and defeated attempts to term the Herrero and Nama massacres a genocide - stressing that killings could only be termed as genocide if they occurred after the UN genocide convention of 1951. Germany's reluctance to acknowledge these historical crimes arose from knowing that recognition comes with reparative and compensative responsibility.

Germany finally [recognised the massacre](#) of the Herrero and Nama peoples as genocide in 2021 and issued a public apology. What followed next was bizarre - Germany pretended to pay reparations, proposing to pay a sum of 1.1 billion euros through aid programmes over a period

of 30 years. The deal was eventually rejected by the Namibian government after some back and forth, including the refusal of some traditional institutions to endorse the agreement.

The proposed mode of payment was not only racist, but also anchored on economic relations that have historically and continually engineered and perpetuated Africa's dependency on Europe.

The framing of reparations is important. The word aid denotes help, not attempts at accessing and achieving justice. You do not give aid to people you massacred, you pay them reparations - which they then decide on how to put to their service and utilise based on solutions they have been part of prescribing.

The same Germany that played *picky-pickey-ponkey* with the people of Namibia had decades earlier paid reparations amounting to over \$90 billion to the Jews of Europe for atrocities committed against them during the genocide of WW2. It is indeed unfortunate that the question of reparations, which in the African context arises from a historical dimension based on economic and racial exploitation, can have its solutions prescribed using racial frames and logics based on colonial patterns of economics.

Dear Germany, Africa is not immune to reparations. Real reparations.

In Neocolonialism, the Last Stage of imperialism, Nkrumah again reminds us that, "In fact neo-colonialism is the victim of its own contradictions. In order to make it attractive to those upon whom it is practised it must be shown as capable of raising their living standards, but the economic object of neo-colonialism is to keep those standards depressed in the interest of the developed countries. It is only when this contradiction is understood that the failure of innumerable 'aid' programmes, many of them well intentioned, can be explained."

Germany has [rejected](#) calls for new negotiations, including calls from descendants of the victims of its genocide and from Namibian politicians. It insists on moving ahead with the earlier plan of a 1.1 billion Euros aid package, which Vekuli Rukoro, paramount chief of the Herrero, termed as ["an insult"](#) in 2021.

Perhaps of greater concern to Africans is the fact that throughout the process, Germany insisted on negotiating with the nation state of Namibia despite dissenting voices from traditional leaders who should naturally be at the heart of this process given that the genocides of the Herrero and Nama people were committed before the nation state of Namibia existed. These genocides were against specific peoples and nations.

How can one engage in a restitutive or reparative process using terms and frameworks set by those who committed the crime? Why would Germany insist on paying reparations through a framework that is certain to fail? Why would African people, the oppressed, be forced to accept reparations on terms determined by their oppressors, the colonisers? To engage in a struggle using terms set by the oppressor is to engage in a process that is neither beneficial nor

restitutive to the historically oppressed, the forgotten humans in the slums, ghettos, favelas and villages that define the landscape of the Global South.

Other European countries have also recently 'recognised' the brutal nature of their historical exploitation of Africa.

In June 2020, on the 60th anniversary of the independence of the Congo, King Philippe of Belgium, who had denied Belgian atrocities for years, wrote a letter expressing his '[deepest regrets for the wounds of the past](#)'. He, however, did not apologise for Belgium's colonial crimes. In June 2022, he again [reiterated](#) his deepest regrets while on a state visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Congolese people, in their multitudes, have been pushing and demanding for an apology from Belgium for decades. All they got was a 'deepest regret' from the king of a nation that to this date continues to benefit from the exploitation of the Congo.

Enough with the regrets. Where is the apology? And the reparations?

African people must remain vigilant, for it is this vigilance that enables us to arrive at the realisation that these recent events and pronouncements force the inevitable escalation of this struggle for reparations.

In October 2022, during the 51st regular session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Côte d'Ivoire introduced a motion against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on behalf of African states. The British government, one of the largest beneficiaries of enslavement and colonialism, [voted against the motion](#) on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance because it was nervous that the motion would make Britain liable to pay reparations. Rita French, the UK Human Rights Ambassador soon after stated that her country voted against the call because "*states are required to make reparations for the slave trade and colonialism, which caused great suffering to many but were not, at that time, violations of international law*", adding that "*claims(for reparations) divert focus from the pressing challenges of tackling contemporary racism and global inequality, which are global challenges affecting all regions*".

Imagine the level of audacity it takes to talk such nonsense.

The United States, Ukraine, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Czechia and Montenegro are the eight other countries that voted against the above motion alongside Britain.

Racism, a continued and living legacy of the epochs of slavery and colonialism, and everyday experienced by Africans all across the world - whether through hostile economic architectures or through the brutal murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 - was dismissed on the basis of national liability. But the masses of Africa, in their vigilance, know that legal and linguistic gymnastics do not absolve the guilty from culpability.

There are those who say we should forget the past. Or forgive. But how do you forgive a person, institution or system that doesn't acknowledge having committed a crime, despite continuing to benefit from the initial crimes of slavery and colonialism, and despite the known presence of concrete evidence that affirms the commitment of these crimes? On what moral basis does one ask African people to forgive the white world for these crimes, yet the white world still benefits from structural racism and economic accumulation to the detriment of Africa and the rest of the third world?

How dare you?

With regard to apologies and concrete steps, the Dutch government is a mile ahead of its European counterparts. The Dutch took a decisive step in December 2022 when Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologised “*for the past actions of the Dutch State: to enslaved people in the past, everywhere in the world, who suffered as a consequence of those actions, as well as to their daughters and sons, and to all their descendants, up to the present day.*”

The Dutch government has further committed €200 million to a fund aimed at *raising awareness, fostering engagement and addressing the present-day effects of slavery*. These funds are to be allocated to different areas after consultation with descendants and other relevant parties. Quite significantly, Rutte also announced that the Dutch government would “*give the Netherlands’ role in the history of slavery a substantial place in education, as this is where young people come into contact with history*”. Education on factual history is indeed important in an era where most education systems in the global North and South subject learners to a history devoid of the historical character and structure of their societies regarding relations with and exploitation of other parts of the world.

Apart from the amount which is a pittance, the recent steps by the Dutch are worthy of close observation and study over the coming years as they could potentially provide invaluable learnings to those involved in struggles for reparations. Their ‘success’ however, depends on our eternal vigilance and constant push.

Chapter VII

Towards an All-African People's Reparations Commission.

From 2020 to 2021, at Africans Rising, the Pan-African movement of people and organisations - I was tasked with coordinating the #ReRightHistory campaign, a Pan-African and global campaign that looked at the legacies of slavery and colonialism, and how these manifest as systemic racism in today's world.

The #ReRightHistory campaign was not the first campaign or movement of such a nature, for our people, both on the continent and in the diaspora have historically demanded reparations. The significance of the #ReRightHistory campaign was that it was led by another generation of Africans, symbolising the intergenerational nature of our struggle for reparations. It was also inter-racial and intersectional, prodding at the nexus between reparative justice, climate justice and economic justice. It was common sense.

African people and their movements have historically been the vanguard of today's global push for reparations. This push, as shown above, has enabled Africa to attain some advances, but has on the other hand gotten us nowhere near concrete reparations. Our simple and honest question that facts of history be recognised has been met with partial recognition, feigned recognition, and in many instances, the outright denial and attempted erasure of enslavement, colonialism, neo-colonialism and structural racism.

Africans living in Africa must thus deliberately link their call for reparations to similar discussions and struggles in other parts of the world - especially the Caribbean region, the Americas and Europe - and locate this agenda at the centre of discourse and organising. A recurring theme of these conversations and linkages must be the need to establish a robust framework through which the push for reparations can be made.

In this regard, the Caribbean region provides good learnings in terms of actions taken and structures established to push forward the struggle for reparations. CARICOM (Caribbean Community), a political and economic union of Caribbean states founded in 1973, made the bold step to establish the [CARICOM Reparations Commission](#) in July 2013. The mandate of this commission is to *establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of Reparations by the Governments of all the former colonial powers and the relevant institutions of those countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community for the Crimes against Humanity of Native Genocide, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and a racialized system of chattel Slavery*. Its [10 point reparations plan](#) lays clear definitions and steps towards reparations.

The work of the CARICOM reparations Commission has in the years that followed "*inspired the formation of the National African American Reparations Commission, the European Reparations Commission and similar formations in Canada and Great Britain*".

In the case of Africa, most governments have shied away from the question of reparations because it either runs counter to the interests of the national bourgeoisie, or national leaders are afraid of upsetting their masters - the people, structures and institutions that keep them in power. It is therefore not surprising that in its over twenty years of existence, the African Union has failed to set up a comprehensive framework for reparations. Indeed, it would be a miracle if any significant move relating to the struggle for reparations originated from that front in the near future.

Practical engagements with the movement for reparations have shown us that campaigns on reparations serve well to create awareness and educate the masses of our people on this history and the linkages of this history to prevailing material conditions, lived realities and our collective future. However, increased awareness, actions and organising around the question of reparations mean that Africa again finds herself at a historical juncture. The strides made by campaigns such as #ReRightHistory among others present a historical responsibility which dictates [that] it is time to escalate the nature of our call for reparations, with or without African governments or the African Union.

At certain points in history, the people are ahead of their leaders, movements and organisations, reflecting the disease of dilatoriness. In the form of persistent currents of Pan-Africanism from below, the people of Africa must come together to form an All-African People's Reparations Commission that is capable of making the call for reparations truly representative, long-term and within sight.

This All-African People's Reparations Commission will be tasked with establishing and actualizing Africa's pathway toward reparations for her people, nations and nationalities through a framework with clear economic, political, socio-cultural and ecological dimensions and fronts. This involves:

1. Background work and research on historical events and processes that inform the African push for reparations.
2. Economic, socio-cultural, political and ecological quantification of the losses incurred by African people and the African continent so as to establish a minimum baseline from which claims for reparations from governments and institutions can be made
3. Autonomous and collective engagements with African people and nations, regional and continental bodies, relevant institutions, organisations and other spaces or avenues to enable a unified and synergized push for reparations.
4. Creating a workable and accessible framework through which people and communities whose struggles for reparations reach a logical conclusion can meaningfully benefit from amounts, items and knowledge returning to the continent.

The AAPRC's work must be guided by a clear programme of action, and CARICOM's 10 point programme provides a starting point from which a programme for the African front of the struggle for reparations can be developed from.

It must single-mindedly work toward payment of reparations to African people and their continent after the protracted period of research, advocacy and engagements - which is long-term. There definitely will be attempts to blur and obscure what reparations mean to us over the duration of this formative period, but guided by our commitment and dedication to this historical responsibility, we will still know and insist that reparations means monetary compensation, return of stolen land, repatriation of human remains and stolen artefacts, among other elements outlined in the 10 point programme below.

The All-African People's Reparations Commission must however be very careful in how it establishes frameworks for payment of reparations. Caution must be taken to ensure that a significant part of reparations do not go to the coffers of African governments, but to communities and descendants of people directly affected by slavery and colonialism. To give these amounts of money, art, etc to the neo-colonial government would be disaster if not suicide, for the neo-colonial state is created in the irredeemably and morally corrupt image of the colonial state.

Chapter VIII

Reparations Now: A 10 point programme

This 10 point programme for African reparations is an outline that potentially informs areas of work for the African reparations movement, and is not cast on stone. It is based on experience from involvement in the struggle for reparations, and draws inspiration from the work of movements and organisations working on reparations. Parts of it are adapted from the notes above.

This 10 point programme touches on:

- Education of African people.**
- Honest recognition and apologies for the crimes of enslavement and colonialism.**
- Truth and healing commissions.**
- Debt cancellation.**
- Return of artefacts.**
- Repatriation.**
- Land reform.**
- Universal Basic Income.**
- Technology transfer.**
- Financial compensation.**

i) Education of African people/Re-Africanising the African.

To engage in the struggle for reparations, there is great need for a concrete understanding of the concrete conditions, and the historical linkages that today define the lived realities of African people. Slavery and colonisation systematically destroyed the African intellectual tradition, kidnapped and killed bearers of knowledge and practices, throwing the African Intellectual tradition into disarray.

African people must revisit their history, learn from it and engage in processes which reverse their alienation from our ways of being and knowing to enable the *re-africanisation of the African*. More importantly, these learnings touching on slavery and colonialism form the basis of the knowledge and memory that underpins our engagement in the struggle for reparations.

ii) Honest recognition and apologies for the crimes of enslavement and colonialism.

Most countries that participated in the enslavement of Africans and which were later part of the colonial enterprise do not recognise these dark epochs of human history as crimes. They refuse to simply recognize or acknowledge that slavery and colonialism were wrong, or that their participation in them was criminal in nature.

A few of them have expressed 'deepest regrets' for their historical actions, while others are quick to tell Africans to 'forget and move on'. How do you forgive a person, institution or system

that doesn't acknowledge having committed a crime, despite continuing to benefit from the initial crimes of slavery and colonialism, and despite the magnitude of evidence that affirms commitment of the crime? Only honest recognition and acknowledgement of the crimes of enslavement and colonisation can lead to genuine apologies which then herald the dawn of other reparative processes.

The masses of Africa must today make these countries that participated in slavery and colonialism aware that Africa does not need 'deepest regrets', but apologies. True apologies. Our demand for genuine apologies arises out of a recognition of the fact that only genuine apologies can kickstart processes that enable closure and healing.

iii) **Truth and healing commissions:**

Slavery and colonialism were brutal processes which left African people traumatised and scarred in more ways than one. The trauma of these dark phases of enslavement and colonialism is still with us, whether collectively or individually, and manifests in many different ways in different African communities around the world.

Truth and healing processes that allow for full acknowledgement of the crimes of slavery, colonialism and ongoing systemic racism should be instituted to create a space for all Africans to learn, to collectively confront the trauma of the past, and express sorrow and grief - eventually enabling a just peace which can form the foundation for healing and reconciliation to emerge.

iv) **Debt cancellation.**

In the neo-colonial states, borrowing is necessitated by both incessant exploitation by external forces and pilferage by internal forces. In this economic infrastructure, debt is an instrument of bondage. The so-called debt that Africa is claimed to owe, is owed to countries aggressively engaged in the unfair exploitation of Africa, her resources and people - both historically and in the present.

Britain, West Germany and the World Bank for example loaned Kenya £2 million in 1963 to buy back one million acres of land from departing British settlers under the *million acre scheme*. The irony is that the settlers who were selling the land back had not bought the land from anyone - having taken it from the indigenous people through the barrel of a gun. The Kenyan state finished paying back the sum decades later, cementing its place as an agent of colonial patterns of economics

Based on historical exploitation, many European countries and the United States actually owe Africa reparations that amount to at least ten times what they claim Africa owes them in the form of debt. Debt cancellation therefore is a logical starting point in addressing imbalances created by colonial patterns of economics which are still prevalent to date, and which inform and manifest through the lived realities and material conditions of Africans across the world.

v) Return of artefacts:

It is of much significance, especially at a cultural level, that the push for reparations includes demands for the return of stolen properties and artefacts - carvings, totems, drums, traditional weapons such as spears, and other items of cultural or spiritual significance.

Based on prevailing realities, these items can be treated in two ways:

a) In instances where the traditional leadership structures and institutions that made use of these items are still intact, the items should be handed back to them so that they can be exercised and repurposed to their correct historical uses and roles.

b) In instances where the traditional structures and institutions have been erased from existence by brute force or the cultural evolution of society, these items should be handed over to the African museum authorities for preservation and to enable avenues of learning across generations. The items should, where possible, be displayed within or near the communities they originated from - as opposed to placing them at the national museums in the capital cities which are mostly structured to cater for the tourist economy and which remain largely inaccessible to rural dwellers.

vi) Repatriation:

Repatriation is double faceted.

The first part involves the repatriation of Africans who are willing to come back to the motherland. For this to happen, the movement for reparations must work closely with African governments and communities to facilitate open movement and settlement of African people while combating xenophobic tendencies that arise out of narrow nationalisms.

The second part involves the repatriation of remains, including those of resistance heroes, that were carted off to Europe by colonial powers, some of which are still displayed in European museums or held in private collections. These ancestors deserve dignified send-offs.

vii) Land reform:

The colonial era resulted in the loss of some of the continent's best agricultural and grazing grounds which had hitherto been utilised by indigenous peoples. This land was not alienated from its owners through prayer, but through violence and genocide. In countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, a minority white population still controls significant amounts of land while Africans in those countries experience land pressure in packed villages or are squeezed in urban slums where many of them live an undignified and sub-human existence.

Land is the basis of production. The true development of Africa will only happen after Africans assume control of the forces of production, and the land is in the hands of its original owners following land reform. The attendant process of land redistribution must be done in an organised manner so that it does not end up benefiting a few individuals, or replicating colonial land practices of theft and dispossession. Most importantly, all of Africa must come together in

support of land reform so that the countries which implement it are not isolated in the international arena as happened to Zimbabwe two decades ago.

viii) **Universal Basic Income**

The era of slavery thrived on unpaid labour for the system behind it was more-than-eager to strip everything from the enslaved, including labour. Forced labour, later on, was the foundation of the colonial economy in most African countries.

In the neo-colonial state, the economy is in the hands of global capital - and the national economy is engineered to exist in service of the global economy. Consequently, the national economy is reduced to supplier of raw material and purchaser of finished products. In many of our economies, the banks, mines, farmlands, beaches, nature and other commons are 'owned' and controlled by companies that trace their origins to Europe or America. Many of them offer a pittance for wages, the poorly-paid workers condemned to precarious existences.

To close off that historical trajectory of exploitation and labour alienation, and in fulfilment of ongoing labour struggles for dignified wages, the struggle for reparations must work toward ending today's wage-slavery by instituting a Universal Basic Income as one of its key components.

ix) **Technology transfer:**

Historically, the epochs of slavery and colonialism acted as roadblocks and reversals to the progress of the African intellectual tradition and African technological advances that would have today enabled Africa to have a competitive technological advantage.

In the height of the Global Covid-19 Pandemic, Africa and much of the global South experienced vaccine apartheid, with rich nations hoarding vaccines to the detriment of the Global South. This was part of a longstanding systemic exclusion, for many technology patents, global and multilateral institutions, key frameworks and policies are designed to place Africa at the position of raw materials exporter and have played a significant role in underdeveloping African industry, whilst concurrently developing Western industry.

Just reparations must include appropriate technology transfer that is life-saving. One that helps advance ethical medical research, helps combat the climate catastrophe, and enables sustainable production to a scale that is beneficial to the national economies and the people of Africa.

x) **Financial compensation:**

Most of the nine points above boil back to financial compensation. The main reason for this is that unlike items like artefacts and human remains that can materially be repatriated back to the African continent, Europe is incapable of undoing, for instance, the kidnapping and forcible relocation that marked the era of enslavement, or the torture that marked the colonial era. These, alongside many other crimes, can only be compensated financially.

This financial compensation could come from the public coffers of governments and nations that participated in slavery and colonialism - or could alternatively be raised by these countries through special taxes that are ring-fenced for the payment of reparations, for most people in western societies are beneficiaries of a higher standard of living that was built by and predicated on the economics around slavery and colonialism. This also applies to many companies in that part of the world.

As African people, we stress that the crimes of enslavement and colonialism cannot be commodified, or valued in monetary terms alone. We however, equally note that there is no other feasible form of compensation apart from monetary means. It is, at this point, important to emphasise that this monetary path is only a tool to enable our people, communities and nations recover from massive setbacks occasioned on our collective progress by enslavement and colonialism.

Financial compensation is not the ultimate solution, it is a pathway to arriving at a solution.

Chapter IX

Criticisms of reparations: A racist disorder.

Like any concrete struggle, the struggle for reparations has not been without criticism. Most of the criticism levelled against it, however, comes from a position of deep-seated racism, ignorance, or the desire to erase and rewrite history. Below are some of the most common questions and criticisms levelled against our righteous struggle for reparations.

Shouldn't Africa just focus on developing herself, as opposed to asking for reparations?

We everyday encounter those who pose the question above, arguing that Africa shouldn't ask for reparations but instead focus on developing herself and her people.

It is curious that they and their grandfathers never posed such questions when it came to colonising Africa under the guise of the 'civilising mission', nor did they ask such questions when it came to paying reparations to the Jewish people, or the Armenians. Their only tangible problem seems to arise from the fact that the reparations are due to Africa and African people. This stems, in many instances, from a deep-seated racism and a psychological condition called cognitive dissonance.

Frantz Fanon articulates that, *"Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalise, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief."*

Their denial of the claim of reparations arises from the fact that this particular round of reparations is being claimed by black people, the African people. They, on the other hand, rationalise themselves as descendants of the 'civilised world' that came to Africa to liberate the African people from 'darkness'.

The few Africans who parrot this stale phrase are mostly from a social strata created by the colonial enterprise as salaried workers, traders and liberal professionals who Amilcar Cabral called 'the fabricated bourgeoisie'. They either display a characteristically historical hesitation to upset the order of things, or act and speak on behalf of forces external to Africa - with the objective of protecting their social class. A small faction within this class that has political clarity and which can be deemed as revolutionary supports our call for reparations.

A river does not stop because it has met another river, they converge. In that same flow, one struggle does not stop because another has erupted - they complement each other based on an intersectionality predicated on concrete analysis of the concrete conditions. And so, we will continue the struggle to keep African countries free from both internal suppression and external domination, whilst concurrently demanding reparations.

It is very clear to us that our push for reparations does not mean that we are relieved of the responsibility of bettering our conditions and reality. We must continually organise and work toward a better Africa, where we can live in peace and dignity. We must therefore continually engage in relentless political struggle through the mass-based dimensions of our movements. We must continually organise to overthrow the economic system of capitalism that everyday exploits our people and motherland.

Indeed, Amzat Boukari's words at the *All African Movements Assembly* in August 2022 reverberate even louder today, "Reparations is at the centre of the African struggle in the 21st Century, for it is linked to decolonization".

Does Europe really owe Africa anything?

There are those who try to paint the issue of reparations in an economic angle, going as far as saying Europe doesn't owe Africa anything. They argue that colonialism helped develop Africa courtesy of education, healthcare, railways and other infrastructure. We know that the Europeans never educated Africans out of their love for Africans, but because they needed an educated workforce to support the colonial bureaucracy as clerks, teachers, etc. We know that the colonial enterprise availed (minimal) healthcare to Africans not because they really desired good health for Africans, but because they needed a somewhat healthy and functional workforce.

In any case, who owes who? While Africa is often portrayed as owing Europe billions of dollars in debt, the correct position is that it is Europe which owes Africa for centuries of plunder, which continues to manifest today via exploitative economic relations, unbalanced trade deals and illicit financial flows.

But some Africans participated in the slave trade, not just Europeans?

Then there are those who argue that Africans participated in the slave trade. These ones are simply unaware of the fact that slavery existed in almost every continent albeit in a much smaller scale, and some civilizations, including in Africa, already exhibited class stratification and enforced hierarchical systems of socialisation, meaning there were people and communities that owned slaves. The arabs, for instance, were active in the East African slave trade, with the Omanis and Portuguese engaging in a protracted struggle for centuries over control of the Eastern Coast of Africa.

However, it is Europe that institutionalised and expanded her participation in the slave trade into other continents and territories - with the enslaved forming an integral part of the plantation economy in the Americas and the Carribean, and powering the economic base of Europe. It is Europe that again eyed other continents with an objective of colonising them, albeit with the help of a few African people in some instances. Should we also say that we are not demanding

reparations relating to colonialism just because a handful of Africans collaborated with the British, or the French?

Honestly speaking, this line of argument is tired and should be put to rest.

Aren't African governments corrupt? Won't they just 'eat' the reparations paid?

Well, the reparations are due to us. The first step is to demand for them, create mechanisms that facilitate payment of reparations, then receive them.

We know many African governments are corrupt, but also recognise that the crimes that lead to our demand for reparations arise from the thirst for accumulation and moral bankruptcy by former colonial powers. The neo-colonial state is a reflection of this thirst for accumulation and moral bankruptcy, for the neo-colonial state was created in the image of the colonial state.

Actually, this line of argument doesn't counter our legitimate claim for reparations or attempt to answer the question of reparations.

Furthermore, it is not set in stone that reparations are due to African governments. The reparations we claim are due to African people and communities. In this scheme of things, existing governments should only serve as facilitators and pathways.

African people are capable of identifying and actualising clear alternatives to help facilitate the payment of reparations, with the African People's Reparations Commission providing a clear starting point from where we can move forward.