



Jesus Says Sorry:
The Anatomy of a Political
Apology for Slavery



The Ligali Organisation
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“In 1963, the [African], who had realised for many years that he was not truly free, awoke from a stupor of inaction with the cold dash of realization that 1963 meant one hundred years after Lincoln gave his autograph to the cause of freedom.

The milestone of centennial of emancipation gave the [African] a reason to act – a reason so simple and obvious that he almost had to step back to see it. Simple logic made it painfully clear that if this centennial were to be meaningful, it must be observed not as a celebration, but rather as a commemoration of the one moment in the countries history when a bold, brave start had been made and a rededication to the obvious fact that urgent business was at hand...”

Martin Luther King, Why We Can't Wait, 1964

On the topic of the Centenary commemoration of the Emancipation Act

Foreword

For far too long, many individuals working for non African institutions have abused the legacy of our African activists to advocate passive and non African religious doctrine. From Marcus Garvey, Nelson Mandela to Martin Luther King and Omowale Malcolm X, their words of resistance and calls for immediate justice for African people have been reduced by the disingenuous to a few choice sound bites about rainbow dreams promoting and passively waiting for eventual change, and worst of all used as an opportunistic means to promote their own disempowering religious and political beliefs.

To these exploiters of our cultural and revolutionary icons we must endeavour to expose their resistance to recognise the existence of African self determination and challenge their political capitalisation of our collective plight for their own needs. Indeed many Muslims and Christians choose to forget the core message uniting religious African leaders such as Omowale Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Although our leaders may have had believed in different religions with differing ideology, they both rallied around a central message which transcended faith and centred on the immediate cessation of laws and acts of oppression which denied human rights and justice to African people. As history attests, Martin Luther King was an excellent Christian, likewise Omowale Malcolm X was an exceptional Muslim. However those who invoke their names whilst failing to make this the central thrust of their arguments, degrade both the history of African resistance and the moral authenticity of the faiths they respectively claim to represent. In short, their misrepresentation of the legacy of African leaders with true moral conviction must stop.

"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every [African] with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Martin Luther King, April 1963

This document seeks to investigate and expose the political instead of moral considerations which led to the Church of England's vote to apologise for its role in the enslavement of African people.

It is meant to be read in tandem with our 2005 publication; "Declaration of protest to the 2007 Abolition Commemoration" and proposes the institutionalisation and government support for a nationwide annual African Remembrance Day followed by a week of supporting commemorative events.



Toyin Agbetu, the Ligali Organisation

Introduction

The vote to apologise for the Church of England's (CoE) pivotal role in the Maafa (Enslavement of Mama Africa) occurred during a motion which followed a debate on the topic of the 2007 commemorations with the Church's governing body, the General Synod. Unsurprisingly a story of this historic significance which should have been lead story or national front page news was given little coverage in the British media. It is suspected that this is because it has been agreed to save the 'bells and whistles' for a stage managed 'apology' event in 2007.

Either way, many Britons were surprised and questioned why this intent to apologise is being expressed some thirteen years after Pope John Paul II apologised for Catholic involvement in the enslavement of African people. One Synod member said; "I don't know what they hope to achieve. The people they should apologise to are long dead". This view is shared by many Europeans from the extreme right wing to the moderate liberal.

"I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom. I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: "And Christians know that the [African] people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth"

Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely rational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people."

Martin Luther King, April 1963

It is fortunate that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams using intellect and wisdom broke the silence and spoke up. William whose assertiveness is no longer a surprise to those familiar with his direct talking is steadily gaining a reputation for championing moral issues. In response to the Synod he stated that the apology was not political correctness but an act which was morally necessary. The Archbishop was recently shunned by many Britons after revealing that missionaries sinned by imposing both ancient and modern hymns upon African people. Typically, he is now attracting enemies from the wider community who would prefer he buried the truth of Britain's racist anti-African history deep in the closet.

Background

The African Involvement

It was early in the 14th century and Africa was unprepared militarily when Europe waged its first unprovoked war against her. Caught unaware by the savagery of the attack she initially found herself unable to prevent those such as the Portuguese from proceeding inland and spilling innocent African blood with Christian rifles.

As a strategic tactic, europeans would kill all the people in the first village they came across and then hang the bodies of the murdered Africans on trees as a warning to other villages. As Africans came close to shore seeking justice for the violation perpetrated on their lands, they were mercilessly attacked by the canons of the nearby slaver ships. Once the carnage had stopped, missionaries would disembark and begin dispensing sermons with basic medical care.

When the ruling elite eventually determined that the europeans had come not to kill but to capture Africans, some such as King Affonso adopted Christianity in the hope they would be treated as equals. Sadly to no avail.

"They seize numbers of our free or freed black subjects, and even nobles, sons of nobles, even the members of our own family."

Excerpt from letter from Affonso, King of Congo, to King of Portugal João III, 18 October 1526.

In response many African nations fought back against the barbaric nature of the 'white' beast and his guns. But as the european's insatiable appetite for enslaving African people grew, his savagery and cunningness increased. He recognised that he could not continue to sustain the losses incurred by going inland, so he determined the best strategy to achieve his objectives was to employ the tactics of divide and rule.

During the late fifteenth century some naïve Africans from the royal and ruling elite entered into nefarious treaties with european slavers. Ignoring the fact that these immoral treaties with the european slavers were a gross violation of African spiritual and cultural beliefs these leaders agreed to pass on captive prisoners of wars in exchange for guns, gunpowder and other foreign goods.

As a result of this shift in military power, the ruling elite became embroiled in much conflict across the continent as their draining of African people as human resources for europeans reaped havoc on established African intuitions. As the european scramble for African lives soared, some of the ruling elite took their African betrayal to an even higher level by forging new treaties which would allow for the construction of forts for those captured to be built on African soil. The Portuguese founded Castle "Sao Jorge and Mina" which is also infamously known as 'Elmina castle' was built in 1482 and has the reputation of being one of the most notorious.

Armed with European weaponry, African workers were unable to prevent their corrupted leaders from destroying the political systems of governance that held them accountable to the people. This led to the African family unit being sent into chaos as African politics, spirituality and culture were systematically corrupted by the interactions of exploitative Western missionaries and Arab traders. The previously Afri-socialist ruling elite had now become very poor capitalists as Nigeria, Sierra-Leone, Ghana and other West-African nations are believed to have unknowingly become major conduits for African people on their way to the horrors of Westernised chattel slavery.

The Maafa

In the words of Christopher Columbus, who is widely acknowledged as the man who introduced the enslavement of African people to the Americas;

"I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. They very quickly learn such words as are spoken to them. If it please our Lord, I intend at my return to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language"

Europeans did not wish to see the complexities and cultural importance of the indigenous societies of Africa. Seeing themselves as superior civilised 'whites' they formed an image backed by racist anti-African ideology depicting African people as inferior savage 'blacks'. They then used this propaganda to justify their view of African people as nothing more than a slave labour force. As a result, African people and cultures began to disappear as the invaders advanced into Africa bringing European diseases such as diphtheria, measles, smallpox, and malaria.

For over five hundred years Europeans inflicted enslavement, colonisation, cultural disinheritance, rape, invasion, disease, exploitation and conflict both directly and indirectly causing the deaths of over a hundred million African people. Today we refer to this ongoing tragedy as the Maafa, defined as the Enslavement of Mama Africa.

The African Revolutionaries and Activists

There was only one global movement that advocated the immediate freedom of enslaved Africans and was the first to fight slavers risking life and liberty to free captive African people. This movement was exclusively African in membership and predated European efforts by the likes of the British and French. Led by those still on the Continent and those in the Diaspora it consisted of men, women and children all prepared to die for the human rights of their fellow Africans.

"The rebellion of the enslaved Africans in Haiti during August 1791, sparked off a general insurrection which led to the abolition of slavery and to the War of Independence. It marked the beginning of a triple process of destruction of the proslavery system, the slave trade and the colonial system."

From 1798 to 1807, before Britain launched its crusade against the transatlantic slave trade, Haiti was alone in combating the trade of enslaved Africans in the

Mediterranean of the Caribbean, pursuing Portuguese, Spanish and Cuban vessels and freeing cargoes of African captives.

From 1795 to 1800, insurrections by enslaved Africans gradually undermined the Spanish possessions. In Venezuela, insurgents of Coro in May 1795 called for the law of the French, the abolition of slavery. Rebellions also broke out on the plantations of Louisiana in 1794–1795. In Cuba, from 1810 to 1812, the conspiracy led by José Antonio Aponte in Havana took Haiti as its model.

The Haitians also played an important part in the gradual process of destruction of the proslavery system in Guadeloupe and Martinique between 1804 and 1848. This was also true of the 1808 rebellion in British Guyana and that of the enslaved Africans of Demerara in 1823 and other insurrections which broke out in Jamaica (1831–1832) and in Puerto Rico during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The arrival of the Haitians in the United States encouraged the authorities to strengthen the proslavery system which led to many revolts, particularly in Louisiana and the heroic resistance of Gabriel Prosser (1800), Denmark Vesey (1822) and Nat Turner (1831, Virginia). In Venezuela, Francisco de Miranda, in February 1806, and Simon Bolivar in December 1815–January 1816 and in October–December 1816, received assistance from Haiti which had a determining effect. President Pétion asked Bolivar for freedom to be granted to all the enslaved Africans in the province of Venezuela. The Haitian Government also accepted to provide weapons and ammunition to the Mexicans led by General Mina in September 1816 and to Colombia in September 1820. Finally, after the abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848, the freed Africans took as their model the Haitian Revolution for advocating the independence of Guadeloupe.

The Haitian Revolution had set off an irresistible process of liberation in the Americas, combining the ideas of freedom and equality and embarking on the road to independence.”

Oruno D. Lara,
UNESCO – Struggles against slavery

The African Apology

During December 1999, President Mathieu Kérékou of the Republic of Benin hosted a weeklong reconciliation conference where he, the Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings and over forty African Kings attended and gave a historic apology for their respective nations involvement in the enslavement of their fellow African people.

Benin, which was known as Dahomey during the period, changed its name after gaining independence from France in 1960. It was from its infamous port in Ouidah that captive Africans were stripped, chained and taken by canoes, at night, to slaving vessels anchored in the harbours.

Prior to this conference, a delegation of Ghanaian Chiefs led by Nana Oduro Numamapau, the Paramount Chief of Asumanya in the Asante Region had travelled to the US in 1995, to give an apology to Africans in the Diaspora for the historic role of Ghanaian Chiefs' in the enslavement of their ancestors. In 2003, Cyrille Oguin, Benin's ambassador to the United States toured America again apologising to African people in the Diaspora. He said; "In the name of the government and the people of Benin, on behalf of President Mattie Ke're'kou, I say to you all, we are sorry," says Oguin. "We are deeply, deeply sorry.... this apology is from the heart ".

In 2002, the Catholic Bishop Charles G. Palmer-Buckle of Ghana apologised on behalf of Africans for the role some played in the enslavement of African people. "Please forgive us if in any way we contributed to what you had to suffer,"

Today if an African with Caribbean heritage or American nationality decides to pay a visit to Ghana, they can choose to participate in a deeply emotional and spiritually affirming act just outside the capital city of Accra where Ghanaian chiefs will lead what is known as the ceremony of apology.

In 2005 Ghana also expressed its intent to offer special lifetime visa for Africans of the Diaspora and will relax citizenship requirements so that all Africans can receive Ghanaian citizenship. Indeed Ghana's existing citizenship act 2000 states "A person of African descent in the Diaspora" can apply to be considered for the grant of right of abode."

All over the Continent, the descendants of the ruling elite who betrayed their kin are apologising for the sins of their fathers. Many African nations simply want their family to return home.

The Roots of an Apology

Celebrating Empire

"Such is the end of Empire, I sighed to myself... Every moment seemed precious, to be held as a lifelong memory of what it used to be like and of how incredibly well Britain could be represented and marketed overseas"

Prince Charles, July 1997

Private thoughts during the British handover of Hong Kong

In January 2005, prior to the British governments much publicised support for the Make Poverty History (MPH) – Live 8 music concerts, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown paid a visit to Kenya. Whilst there he was asked why he was spreading the message that "compassion must become action before that hope is squandered".

He responded stating Africa has been important to him ever since witnessing the missionaries that used to come to his father's church. A few days later as Brown moved on across the continent and visited Mozambique his subsequent actions and comments led to the Daily Mail publishing an article by Benedict Brogan titled "It's time to celebrate the Empire, says Brown" it read;

"[During] a visit to one of Britain's former East African colonies... Gordon Brown has been talking about Remembrance Day as an enduring British value... Surrounded by the impeccably tended graves of more than 300 soldiers of the Empire, Mr Brown said Britain no longer had to make excuses for its record as a colonial power. Speaking to the Daily Mail he said: "I've talked to many people on my visit to Africa and the days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over. We should move forward."

Daily Mail, 15 January 2005

However unlike other nations, the British government has never apologised for its odious colonial history, or for its pivotal role in developing the industrialised system that led to the exploitation, enslavement, cultural disinheritance, rape and murder of millions of African people. Browns comments which were meticulously timed to exploit the MPH / Live 8 publicity campaign disingenuously downplayed the fundamental role Britain had and continues to have in the socio-economic underdevelopment of Africa. But few Europeans challenged Browns comments citing his stated intent to tackle poverty in Africa through the G8 presidency which Britain held at the time.

"Gordon Brown said that we should stop apologising for the Empire... [but] when did we start apologising... the Blair government are more scared of being called politically correct than they are of the consequences of demonising [non European] incomers"

Paul Gilroy, Author and Anthony Giddens Professor of social theory at the London School of Economics

Dianne Abbott the African British Labour MP supports this viewpoint and writes;

"[Britain continues] to airbrush the truth of our recent colonial history... What the Chancellor fails to recognise is that such an apology has not yet been made. I am proud of many parts of British history but colonialism is certainly not amongst them.

Prince Harry's conduct, when he recently attended a 'natives and colonials' themed party [was a missed] opportunity to understand something fundamental about the cultural life of a post-colonial country that has never dealt with the consequences of its loss of empire. We are in danger of whitewashing the more shameful elements of our recent history.... Rather than the blinkered across-the-board pride in British history which Gordon Brown has called for, we need to learn about our history and be ashamed of the parts which are shameful."

So it is a great irony that almost exactly a year after most of the grand statements made by the G8 has been exposed as empty 'gradual' promises, that during the debate led by the Bishop of Southwark, Rev Tom Butler and various delegates, the Church's complicity in the commercial exploitation of enslaved Africans was 'gradually' acknowledged. But it is important to note this only occurred after being reminded that it was senior Church representatives who had sanctioned and provided the immoral climate that legitimised the physical abuse, branding and commercial transfer of African people held physically captive against their will in the Caribbean and the Americas.

Anglican Culpability

The Rev Simon Bessant, of Blackburn, told the Synod: "We were at the heart of it; we were directly responsible for what happened." He said that, despite the efforts of Anglican reformers such as William Wilberforce, the Church was "part of the problem as well as part of the solution". He is right. The Church was fully aware of the moral hypocrisy underpinning its active participation in the abhorrent "slave trade".

The anti-African Christian value system that was propagated by the Church at the time prioritised monetary gain above African lives. This was explained by archbishop, Rev Thomas Secker when he wrote to a fellow bishop in 1760;

"I have long wondered and lamented that the Negroes in our plantation decrease and new supplies become necessary continually... Surely this proceeds from some defect, both of humanity and even of good policy. But we must take things as they are at present."

Anglican culpability in the enslavement of African people can be traced back at least to 1710, when the slaver Christopher Codrington died, leaving his 800-acre Barbados plantations to the Church's infamous missionary arm the Society for the Propagation of the Christian Religion in Foreign Parts. In this example of a Church managed slavers institution, captive African people had the word "Society" branded on their chests with red-hot irons to mark them as the "Lords property". In 1740, 30 years after the Church took over, four out of every ten Africans brought to the plantation died within three

years. This occurred despite the fact that bishops of London and archbishops of York were also involved in its management.

The remaining Africans who were held captive on the Codrington plantations were not released until 1834, when the Church, like all other British slavers, were forced to release them by the law. However even this act of pseudo-morality was tainted as the British government paid compensation not to the Africans who were enslaved but to the society's governing body which included Archbishops of Canterbury. In one such example of this contemptuous act the bishop of Exeter and three business colleagues were paid thousands of pounds by the British government to compensate them for the loss profits caused by the release of several hundred enslaved Africans.

So Why Apologise Now?

Crucial Timing

From the moment the church announced its decision to apologise for African enslavement it was met with justified suspicion about its motivation and sincerity. Despite carefully constructed statements from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams and the African British Archbishop of York, John Sentamu there are many fears that the inhumane misery reaped upon our African ancestors is being exploited to be used as cultural propaganda to make a political statement. This is compounded by the fact that virtually none of the British media outlets chose to give the news any national prominence or sustained coverage. If the intended apology is sincere then why wait to make it? Perhaps it is because there is a plan to time the major 'press release' of the apology to occur during 2007. This way it can be used for maximum effect as media capital to propagate the abolition bicentenary agenda.

Williams said of the intended apology;

"The body of Christ is not just a body that exists at any one time, it exists across history and we therefore share the shame and the sinfulness of our predecessors and part of what we can do, with them and for them in the body of Christ, is prayer for acknowledgement of the failure that is part of us not just of some distant 'them'."

Rev Joel Edwards, general director of the Evangelical Alliance in the UK commended the Church of England's action for "its one-time complicity in the slave trade" but stressed that the issue should not be left there. He added "in the run-up to the bicentenary celebrations for the Abolition of Slavery, this is the challenge for all Christians and not just the Church of England... I would also encourage Christians everywhere to rejoice in the actions of the Christian reformers who helped to ensure the passing of the Slave Trade Act in 1807".

Many disagree.

The publisher and radio presenter Dotun Adebayo spoke for many African people when he stated in a radio debate on the topic that;

"I won't be celebrating the abolition of slavery... if you have the Archbishop of Canterbury's ear and he has the Prime Ministers ear... then shouldn't we be calling for a national day of [African] remembrance for those who were enslaved by the British government".

Dotun Adebayo, January 2006

Edwards's statement asserting the churches involvement in the Codrington plantation to be an isolated incident also infuriates many African people. The Church's involvement in the Maafa did not stop after the passing of anti-slavery legislation... it increased.

The Pat on the Back

It was recently revealed by Rev Joel Edwards that "this apology has come in a certain context, it is about England celebrating the bicentenary abolition of the slavery". Edwards had been present at meetings on the topic where independent community organisations were excluded and the deputy prime minister, government policy makers, heads of national museums and representatives from the likes of the BBC and ITV were all present.

Subsequently the Government and the Church refuse to acknowledge that their myopic focus on slavery and the celebration of the actions by the very same people who instigated it, is exactly what the African British community wishes to avoid.

There is also a pervasive argument that by focusing on the bicentenary of the infamous 1807 act Britain would be institutionally reasserting a gross distortion of world history. Africans in the British subjugated areas of the Caribbean were finally 'released' from enslavement in 1834 and not 1807. This only occurred after many years of African rebellions, military fatigue, risks of economic downturn and subsequent legislation. Reflecting the reality that this was not a moral directive, the Guardian newspaper published its article "Negro emancipation" with indifference. The very short article read;

"Throughout the British dominions the sun no longer rises on a slave. Yesterday was the day from which the emancipation of all our slave population commences; and we trust the great change by which they are elevated to the rank of freemen will be found to have passed into effect in the manner most accordant with the benevolent spirit in which it was decreed, most consistent with the interests of those for whose benefit it was primarily intended, and most calculated to put an end to the apprehensions under which it was hardly to be expected that the planters could fail to labour as the moment of its consummation approaches. We shall await anxiously the arrivals from the West Indies that will bring advices to a date subsequent to the present time."

Guardian Newspaper, Saturday August 2, 1834

On the 1st August 1934 there was no grand public announcements, no commemorative music concerts nor any mass celebration by the British public, instead the British colonial office wrote;

“A state of things where the negro escaped the necessity for labour would be as bad for him as his owner. He would be cut off from civilising influences, would have no incentive to better his condition or to impose any but the slightest degree of discipline on himself. Thus he might well become a more degraded being than his ancestor in Africa.”

After the Emancipation Act was passed in 1833, African people were not automatically permitted their freedom. This was because many including Wilberforce believed that African people were not used to thinking independently and self determining. So he and other members of Parliament created a scheme where African people were taught how to be ‘free’ under an ‘apprenticeship’ scheme which in reality meant that formally enslaved Africans were required to continue working under their old slavers but this time for low wages. Under these new conditions ‘apprentices’ were obliged to stay on plantations and work a ten hour day or face imprisonment. ‘Apprentices’ which also included women could still be flogged without redress. It was not until 1838 that this new form of enslavement, created under the guise of ‘training for freedom’, was also abolished.

This is one of the reasons why most African people refuse to applaud the efforts of William Wilberforce who championed for the gradual emancipation of African people, just as Bob Geldof is berated for championing the gradual eradication of poverty. Then as it is now, African activists have always worked towards immediate freedom, immediate independence, immediate debt relief, immediate increases in aid, immediate trade reforms and immediate equal rights. They, unlike the millions of Europeans who today still inherit power and wealth from the historic and current commercial exploitation of Africa’s natural and human resources, are not compromised by a desire to place economic greed before human need.

“If any man should buy another man and compel him to his service and slavery without any agreement of that man to serve him, the enslaver is a robber and defrauder of that man every day. Wherefore it is as much the duty of a man who is robbed in that manner to get out of the hands of his enslaver as it is for any honest community of men to get out of the hands of rogues and villains.”

Ottobah Cugoano, Author and African abolitionist, Thoughts and sentiments on the evil and wicked traffic of slavery and commerce of the human species, 1787

The website Black Britain reports that Kofi Mawuli Klu, joint co-ordinator of Rendezvous of Victory (ROV) an ‘anti-slavery, African led abolitionist heritage organisation’ and Anti-Slavery International (ASI) became part of the Executive of the Working Committee established by representatives of church groups. Kofi Mawuli Klu said; “ROV was there as an African led community organisation so that the views of black communities could be fed into the discussions and debates.”

But there is much concern as to why grass root African community organisations, non Christian and non religious Africans were excluded from the various high level consultation meetings. Instead decisions were first made on how best to celebrate european heroes and remind the nation exactly how Britain enslaved our ancestors. It is tragic that those present at the meeting cannot see how just as it would be inconceivable to expect future generations of Iraqi civilians to attend a joint British–American arranged commemoration where the theme, date and format had been established by Britain based around the ‘Bicentenary of the Liberation of Iraq’, so is it with this case for conscious African people.

All self respecting Africans who are fully aware of the Maafa in the context of world history find it offensive to be asked or expected to participate in the planned 2007 commemoration of the abolishment of slavery. The central tenant of the commemorations is focused around european actions, gradually resolving european inactions by european politicians. It is therefore unsurprising that the tacit approval for such an insult has been given by several self defining ‘black’ ministers who almost always give their obedient commitment to supporting the Christian political infrastructures that personally empowers them.

“Although I'm still a Muslim, I'm not here tonight to discuss my religion. I'm not here to try and change your religion. I'm not here to argue or discuss anything that we differ about, because it's time for us to submerge our differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have the same problem, a common problem, a problem that will make you catch hell whether you're a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Muslim, or a nationalist.

Whether you're educated or illiterate, whether you live on the boulevard or in the alley, you're going to catch hell just like I am. We're all in the same boat and we all are going to catch the same hell from the same man. He just happens to be a white man. All of us have suffered here, in this country, political oppression at the hands of the white man, economic exploitation at the hands of the white man, and social degradation at the hands of the white man.

Now in speaking like this, it doesn't mean that we're anti-white, but it does mean we're anti-exploitation, we're anti-degradation, we're anti-oppression. And if the white man doesn't want us to be anti-him, let him stop oppressing and exploiting and degrading us.”

Omowale Malcolm X, 1964

Many African people are now asking how these self defining ‘black’ religious leaders could willingly compromise the moral principles they themselves publicly state underpins the doctrine of Christ. How can they preach that God has always recognised the equal human worth of African people yet choose to prioritise government political, social and financial considerations by sanctioning a farce which is predominantly focused around the acts of the sinners and not the history, legacy and cultural restoration of the innocent oppressed victims.

Rev Joel Edwards states “My blackness is important, but the issue of my humanity .. I see it in the context of the Christian world view”. The problem is that whilst Edwards speaks highly of the pseudo ‘black’ identity passed on to him by his ancestors oppressors, he fails to recognise that which was stolen from his consciousness but has forever faced him in the mirror... his African identity.

Omowale Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr were both African religious advocates who used their faith as a guiding instrument to fight for justice with a conviction borne from their belief in the sacred doctrine of self determination. Whilst many may disapprove of either or both ideological and strategic approaches, it is clear that neither compromised their integrity when it came to calling for the recognition of human rights for African people both in America and throughout the world.

The Abolition Competition

The European competition for moral supremacy started long after the first abolition movement was established by African people. The Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery, was founded in Paris in 1822 within the Société de la Morale Chrétienne. Its first act was to gradually 'buy back' enslaved African women and in 1834 created the Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage which brought together a coalition of "peers, Parliamentarians, men of letters, financiers and magistrates of every political and religious allegiance".

"There were two outstanding decrees for abolition in the nineteenth century: the Abolition Bill passed by the British Parliament in August 1833 and the French decree signed by the Provisional Government in April 1848. The former so-called « gradual » abolition, was the result of several earlier plans and specified a compulsory period of apprenticeship for former slaves with their owners. The second, some 15 years later, put into practice the principle of so-called « immediate » abolition. It gave back to slaves in the French colonies the freedom which had been previously decreed in 1794 and lost in 1802, by declaring slavery to be « entirely abolished »."

Nelly Schmidt, UNESCO – Struggles Against Slavery

The Anatomy of the political act of Abolition

Britain was inarguably the most vociferous of European slaving nations. By 1800 its commercial industrialisation of the forced enslavement of African people generated it great wealth. But an 1803 inquiry into British colonialism recognised that the natural desire for African people to copulate could be exploited to disguise the moral façade driving a strategic political shift towards abolition.

"... the fruit of our iniquity has been a great and rich empire in America. Let us be satisfied with our gains and, being rich, let us [now] try to become righteous – not indeed by giving up a single sugar cane of what we have acquired but by continuing in our present state of overflowing opulence and preventing the further importation of slaves... The experience of the United States has distinctly proved that the rapid multiplication of the Blacks in a natural way will inevitably be occasioned by prohibiting their importation..."

Henry Brougham, 1803

Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers

However Britain's long term economic prosperity was forever threatened by the growing impact of African revolts and French rivalry. The Haitian revolution and other persistent uprisings placed an immense strain on British military resources. As well as this, slavers on British plantations were becoming more politically independent, more financially dependent and less cost effective.

By 1830, the British government concluded that the gradual transformation of abolition was in the nation's future economic interests. Britain needed to pave the way forward for its new insidious idea of using African people as a human resource on the continent itself. That idea was called colonisation.

“Abolition did have the effect of aiding Britain’s war effort, and it has to be remembered that before the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 there was an Act in 1806 which prohibited the export of slaves to Britain’s foreign rivals, and it was much presented at the time as being in the national interest. This was a law which enabled Britain to outdo and undermine its competitors. So we shouldn’t think of the abolition of the slave trade as a humanitarian gesture. We shouldn’t think that in the nineteenth century the government of Britain, the commercial interests in Britain, suddenly realised the error of their ways and said, okay, we were the greatest slave traders in the eighteenth century, but now we’re going to be the greatest abolitionists. It wasn’t as straight forward as that. One thing that has to be borne in mind is that Britain’s economic position was changing as well, that Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century, but much more by the nineteenth century, was becoming the pre-eminent manufacturing power, industrial power and so on. So its commercial and economic interests were changing. At the same time, it is argued that the plantation economies of the Caribbean were becoming less important.

The British government certainly did want to present itself in the nineteenth century as the great humanitarian power which intervened all over the world for humanitarian reasons. The same is true today... But I think that, if one looks further, it’s easy to see that the British government – or certainly those interests it represents – have various other concerns, whether they’re economic, political or strategic, which are masked by this humanitarianism, and that was certainly the case in the nineteenth century. What British government was particularly concerned about was British trade, Britain’s economy and the fact that Britain was an imperial world power. These were the chief concerns. If humanitarians furthered those interests, then fine. If it had gotten in the way of those interests, then it would have been largely ignored.”

Dr Hakim Adi, Britain’s Slave Trade

Yet to maintain its new found humanitarian identity Britain needed to be seen as the worlds number one abolitionist nation. So to further this ideal it perpetuated a great mythos. Britain claimed to be the first european slaving nation to abolish slavery. The propaganda still exists today.

“The British were the first big slave-trading nation to abandon the trade. They did this in 1807 when there were still huge profits to be made, and they did it for mainly moral reasons.”

BBC News Online, 2005

A further misrepresentation is published elsewhere on the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) website claiming;

"In the space of just [46] years, the British government outlawed the slave trade that Britain had created and went on to abolish the practice of slavery throughout the colonies."

Both these assertions are untrue and deliberately misleading. The BBC retelling obfuscates the political climate facing Britain at the time. It ignores the effects of the demoralised and weakened state of Britain's military and its inability to conclusively suppress the frequent African uprisings occurring throughout the Diaspora. There is evidence that Britain had also lost much control of the lucrative sugar market to the French which made the continuing exploitation of enslaved African people in the Caribbean less profitable.

The Ligali Organisation made a formal complaint to Michael Grade, the BBC Chairman. In it we highlighted how Britain was the nation responsible for industrialising the global commercial exploitation of enslaved African people. It took over three hundred years for the British to abolish it in 1838 not 26 years as previously stated and certainly not in 1807 as attested. Finally, the first European nation to abandon the practice was Portugal when it abolished slavery throughout Madeira in 1775.

"[The] item was talking here about the passage of time between the establishment of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (May 1787) and the passage of the Act of Parliament that outlawed slavery in 1833... so I do not think there was any further inaccuracy here.

...You say, contrary to the claim about Britain's role... that Portugal was in fact the first European nation to "abandon the practice when it abolished slavery throughout the Madeira in 1775". However, the item talks about the first total abolition by a "big slave-trading nation". I understand it wasn't until 1819 that Portugal outlawed the slave trade north of the Equator, and that it persisted until 1858 in its colonies. Leaving aside the question of whether Portugal can be characterised as a "big slave-trading nation", its action in 1775 seems to have fallen a long way short of the total abolition of slavery throughout its sphere of influence."

**Fraser Steel on behalf of the BBC Chairman,
Head of Editorial Complaints**

However despite the concerted efforts of the British media and educational institutions, history remains unequivocally resolute on this matter. If the decision to abolish the enslavement of African people was done mainly for moral reasons then the British slavers in the Caribbean would not have been compensated by the state for 'loss of earnings'. This and other evidence including the fact that Britain was not the first to abolish the practice conclusively puts to rest the odious argument that the 1807 abolition act was done for 'mainly moral' reasons.

The Apology Rivals

Britain v France

Several African community organisations recognise that the planned Church of England apology is politically motivated. As a result, the strong feeling of deceitfulness emanating from Church leaders on this matter is spreading dissent across the African British community. This is a situation made worse by the absence of an honest answer about the CoE's motivations and intentions. Many members of the African community suggest the apology has been proposed in an effort to attract the rapidly dwindling church goes from Africentric churches which reject the western sanctioning of clergy in same sex relationships. Others believe it an attempt to stop African Britons from embracing Islam.

However a popular view held at grass roots level is that the decision to apologise has only occurred to ensure that Britain is not outdone by France which has announced its own plans to establish an annual 'slavery memorial day' on the 10th May. This follows the actions of the British MP Louise Ellman who in April 2004, initiated an Early Day Motion, which called upon the UK Government to initiate a National Memorial Slavery Day.

"That this House notes the leading role which Britain played in the transatlantic slave trade and that millions of enslaved persons passed through the ports of Bristol, Liverpool and London; further notes that a large proportion of Britain's black community are descendants of enslaved Africans; recognises that slavery is a crime against humanity; notes that many people of all communities in Britain want to learn about the history of slavery; calls on the Government to make the teaching of the slave trade and plantation slavery, mandatory as part of the national curriculum; commends the national museums and galleries on Merseyside for promoting National Memorial Slavery Day; and further calls upon the Government to initiate a National Memorial Slavery Day so that people throughout the country will learn about and remember the horrors of slavery."

EDM 1010 – National Memorial Slavery Day, 20 April 2004

It is widely accepted that the French decision is both insincere and politically motivated. Indeed the specific decision by the French to acknowledge the historic enslavement of African peoples as a 'crime against humanity' is only possible due to the determined efforts of the African Guyanese member of French parliament Christiane Taubira.

Taubira tirelessly campaigned to ensure that the western world recognised the essential need to share, recollect and preserve the world's collective memory of the commercial exploitation and enslavement of African people. Her activism resulted in the drafting of a bill which was voted into law declaring the African "slave trade" a crime against humanity in May 2001.

Yet up until 2006 the French government had expressed little intent in respecting the needs, concerns of its African citizens. So when on 4 January 2006, almost five years later, French President Jacques Chirac says;

"The issue of slavery is a wound for a large number of our fellow citizens, notably overseas... France was exemplary in being the first country in the world – and today still the only one – to recognize slavery as a crime against humanity... [as a result] I have decided to introduce a [slavery] remembrance day."

His announcement made in a New Year's address laying out France's plans for 2006 has to be placed in context. In this typical assertion of moral supremacy by the 'white male', there was no mention of Christiane Taubira. Perhaps it is because she is an African woman and therefore not 'authentically' French. Either way it is an irrefutable fact that it was the work achieved due to her indefatigable spirit which enabled Chirac's to make his grandiose proclamation in which he takes credit for her deeds.

It is telling that Chirac chose to focus solely on the actions of the institution which voted on the bill, insultingly setting the day to ensure that it was the institutionalising of that action which is to be commemorated. As with in Britain the historic actions and views of African people are also deemed irrelevant. In another ironic speech, Chirac claims children should be taught about slavery at primary and secondary school as part of the national curriculum. "Slavery fed racism," he said. "When people tried to justify the unjustifiable, that was when the first racist theories were elaborated".

"Two main actions are necessary to counter the bigotry, ignorance and misinformation that characterise race debates.... The first is for political, corporate and community-based leaders to challenge all forms of misinformation and sensational media reports that demonise particular groups of people... The second concerns what should be happening in our places of learning. Parents are educating and influencing their children with their perceptions, attitudes and limited knowledge, so there is a huge gap to be filled by our nurseries, schools, colleges and universities. Given that "antiracist education" is regarded in official quarters as unacceptable indoctrination ("political correctness"), how would you suggest that we might persuade our leaders and educationists..."

Herman Ouseley, former chair of the Commission for Racial Equality

However what Chirac does not point out is that it is the institutionalised slavery in Europe's past which leads directly to the institutionalised racism in Europe's present. The inexcusable five year delay in addressing Taubira's legacy, has exposed the fact that Chirac's "slavery remembrance day" gesture is a response directly influenced by the African French uprisings which characterised October 2005.

It is not coincidental that the conflict which lasted over three weeks and resulted in almost 9,000 vehicles being torched, hundreds of schools and public buildings attacked and more than 3,000 people arrested was triggered by the deaths of two innocent African boys. Zyed Benna and Bouna Traore were reported to be accidentally electrocuted after being chased by the notoriously anti-African "zero tolerance" French police. The cause of this and other such problems facing African people in France is rooted in the deep racist anti-African culture which permeates throughout European culture and denies equality and opportunity to African people.

In France, unemployment for 18 to 25 year olds stands at 40% for African communities, whilst the national average for non Africans is 9.6%. In a promise to start addressing this issue Chirac has said he would overturn the oppressive law on the teaching of France's colonial past which required teachers to stress positive aspects of French colonialism, especially in Africa. However the similarity of institutionalised anti-African education and the persistent socio-economic inequality issues facing both the African French and African British communities are uncanny in their resemblance.

The chronically symbiotic relationship does not stop there.

"The Tories would ensure schools focus on basic skills rather than political correctness, says Chris Woodhead [Former Ofsted chief inspector of British schools... Conservative leader Michael Howard told the Welsh Tory conference on Sunday that the "all must have prizes culture" weakened teachers' authority. Mr Woodhead said it was wrong that under the existing national curriculum children were to be taught in citizenship classes to "feel positive about themselves" and to respect other races. "I am not saying that any of these things are not important, I just think the explicit focus, the idea that these things are taught to children as young as five or six is wrong."

BBC News Online, March 2005

Schools 'should return to basics'

African Remembrance or Slavery Remembrance?

Ignoring the African Struggle against Enslavement

The Bussa Rebellion in Barbados during 1816; the Berbice Uprising in Guyana, 1763; the Maroon Wars of 1725–1740 and 1795–6; Tacky's revolt in Jamaica in 1760, Kofi's revolt in Guyana in 1763, Santa Domingo in 1522; Cuba in 1550 and 1843; Panama in 1531; Mexico in 1537; Honduras in 1548; Haiti in 1804; Antigua in 1735–5, Granada in 1795–7, Jamaica in 1655–1673, 1685–1686, 1760–1784, 1784–1832, etc

A few examples of African revolts removed from eurocentric history books

The British government recently showed its contempt for the African community when it and other European nations refused to give national prominence to the 'UN International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition' in 2004.

Not wanting to commemorate the African led struggle but anxious to deflect growing criticism, the Home Office awarded the inter-ethnic community organisation "Rendezvous of Victory" the sum of £5,000 towards commemorative events between 23 and 29 August. This grant was the sum of its national community driven programme to recognise the 23 August as International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition as set by UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural education organ.

The 23rd August date commemorates the landmark 1791 Haitian revolts in which the enslaved peoples of the island reclaimed their freedom by defeating their European oppressors despite a subsequent opportunistic invasion by the British army. News of this successful uprising gave inspiration to oppressed African people worldwide and subsequently led to the escalation of the already numerous African rebellions in European and American managed plantations. The direct result of these uprisings was it caused the British government and slavers to realise that economic viability of African enslavement on plantations was unsustainable and destined to come to an inevitable bloody end. An inquiry on the matter reported;

"When a fire is raging windward, is it the proper time for stirring up everything that is combustible in your warehouse and throwing them new load of material still prone to explosion? Surely, surely these most obvious considerations only have to be hinted at to demonstrate that, independent of any other considerations against negro traffic, the present state of the French West Indies renders the idea of continuing its existence for another hour worse than infamy"

Henry Brougham, 1803

Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers

Today Haiti remains impoverished after being forced to compensate France for 'losses' due to Haitians liberating themselves from French enslavement and colonisation. Many feel it is unsurprising that the British and other European governments have done everything to ensure that the significance of this date is little known amongst the wider public despite UNESCO advocating a global day of remembrance to commemorate the struggle against slavery and the history and achievements of African people.

“British colonialism has often been compared favourably to French or German imperialism in Africa. Decades have been spent constructing a largely fictional image of a British imperialism which lacked the brutality of other European empires in Africa. Only due to impressive attempts by people like Caroline Elkins, who recently wrote Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya, can we begin to understand the true nature of the colonial crimes which this country has perpetrated. This British gulag consisted of a network of over 100 camps and prisons in Kenya in which 1.5 million people, including almost the entire Kikuyu tribe, were detained. These were supposedly people suspected of involvement in the Mau Mau rising. Estimates of how many people died range from 100,000 to 300,000. Acts of torture and abuse have been documented, including the kinds of ritual humiliations which we witness today in Coalition prisons in Iraq.”

Dianne Abbott, MP

Britain like France instead prefers to focus on their less malignant contributions to African enslavement. Their myopic interpretation of African history refuses to acknowledge that any culture of value could have existed on the continent prior to their nefarious engagement and interactions. In the eyes of eurocentric historians, the history of ‘black’ people begins with slavery. Yet in the widely accepted academic discourse of world history, the beginning of all humanity starts at Africa.

Despite the fact that many African communities across the world including groups within the UK have been holding African remembrance day events for several years, non African do-gooders march ahead and disrespectfully tell us by their actions that they want or will be holding a slavery day in ‘our’ honour and will proceed if necessary without our support. Of course it doesn’t help that there are several African personalities who often speak on the behalf of our community without cultural-academic authority, moral, legitimacy, impartiality or Africentric authenticity.

Often meaning well, these uninformed media favourites give ‘our’ tacit approval without being mandated by our community to do so. For example when the likes of writer Benjamin Zephaniah who is also one of the UK’s ambassadors for British culture states on a BBC radio show that he and the African British theologian Robert Beckford are leading the calls in establishing a ‘slavery memorial day’ they stand alone from those grassroots organisations and people who have already established annual events focused on African remembrance.

Yet this is not the first time this has interference has occurred. In 2001 a government ‘slavery memorial’ working group was established which included barrister Lincoln Crawford, Kofi Mawuli Klu from campaign group Rendezvous of Victory, and London Mayor Ken Livingstone’s race advisor Lee Jasper. However in November 2004, the website Blink reported;

“Three years ago the Home Office set up a slavery memorial committee following a surprise promise for a national memorial day by Tony Blair in an interview with Britain’s top black newspaper the New Nation. But the committee collapsed after members, including Jasper, resigned accusing civil servants of obstructing progress.”

Blink, November 2004

In many cases these well intentioned individuals cannot see the difference between institutionalising an event based on 'black' history after slavery as opposed to that focused on African history prior, during and after enslavement. Whilst plans for slavery memorial events have typically sought to focus on the crime committed against African people, a day of African remembrance looks at who we were before slavery, it acknowledges and commemorates the losses endured during our enslavement, it addresses the legacy and impact of the Maafa, and ultimately help us work to develop the empowering social, cultural, spiritual and political identity that was forcibly taken from us.

But Slavery Never Ended

Many believe that the phrase "never again to slavery" is a hollow sound bite lacking moral fibre and acknowledgment of historical truths. In a radio debate on the topic Bro Mbandaka, head of the community based Alkebulan Revivalist Movement stated that the colonialism forcibly imposed upon Africa was a modernised version of enslavement. Instead of African people being held captive on plantations in the Caribbean, they were insidiously enslaved on the Continent itself. Mbandaka explains how as a direct consequence of colonialism there was no abolition of slavery, instead there was merely an escalation.

The military imposition of alien western cultural values contaminated almost every sphere of African society, as with Islam, the religious doctrine of Christianity was forced upon African people. Some even chose to worship the 'white mans god' in order to gain access to the 'white mans power'.

"If it is accepted that the Japanese state reflects Japanese values, the American state American values, or the French state French values, why should the African state be any different? Are [indigenous] African values authoritarianism, conflict, corruption, dependency, disorder, hunger, and war? ... The pattern set during slavery was accelerated through colonialism as foreign powers used Africans in their own land for the maximum profit of the West. Independence was nothing but the Africanization of colonial institutions.

As it did during slavery, the West rewarded leaders who served it well. In the same way as the abolition of slavery was used by diverse Western agencies as an excuse to meddle into African affairs, the present African predicament offers an opportunity to the international financial institutions to shape and control African economies. This pattern will continue until Africans recapture their economies. They have to create states that are based on their own culture and values.."

Mueni Wa Muiu, Author of Fundi Wa Afrika

This is why many community organisations declare that Britain must accept and act on its moral obligations to bring its continuing role in the commercial exploitation of African resources to an immediate halt. The government must also support cultural and educational resources that seek to bring an immediate cessation to Britain's systematic oppression of African culture, identity and spirituality. Unless this is done the underlying racist message perpetuated by British media and educational institutions will

be the assertion that ‘it was blacks and negroes that was taken from Africa, not Africans’. The result of this will be the continuation of the institutionalisation of anti-African ideology just so another generation of europeans can feel justified to project their anti-African prejudices onto the world.

Unity with viewpoints like this has been found in the most unlikely of sources. The tabloid columnist Tony Sewell who is widely ostracised by the African community on the grounds of being a Maafa apologist states; “If its just [about] white people feeling guilty and saying sorry then its just a waste of [our] time”.

The British Empire Is Never Sorry

But we didn't do anything wrong, slavery was legal...

"We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers."

Martin Luther King, Birmingham Jail, April 1963

Likewise many government officials and British politicians have also claimed that the enslavement of African people was 'legal' at the time. Therefore in their eyes no crime had been committed by the government during that period. In short, Britain along with its European partners has decided to act solely on legal and not moral grounds, basing their refusal to apologise on the fact that international law is not currently applied retro-actively.

Yet the Queen herself had established an earlier British precedent on this matter. Whilst she would not apologise personally, in November 1995, Queen Elizabeth who is also New Zealand's queen and head of state approved a parliamentary bill which "apologizes unreservedly" to the New Zealand Maori in an attempt to atone for treaty violations and the invasion of its lands in 1863. The legislation which included reparations amounted to a payment of \$112 million and the return of 39,000 acres to the Tainui people. The legislation states that "the Crown expresses its profound regret and apologizes unreservedly for the loss of lives because of the hostilities arising from its invasion, and at the devastation of property and social life which resulted". In New Zealand political parlance, the term "the Crown" denotes the Government, not the monarchy.

During a 2001 conference, London Mayor Ken Livingstone criticised the government's refusal to apologise for its leading role in the commercial exploitation and enslavement of African people. He said: "It seems strange that those countries now involved in slavery are being roundly condemned but that those countries that grew rich through the trade in human beings just a few generations ago will not apologise."

The Rev Nezlin Sterling who was representing African British churches at the CoE slavery debate told the synod that the forthcoming 2007 commemorations of the 200th anniversary of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 would revive "painful issues and memories" for African people. His comments reflected a fact that many African people in Britain feel. Without a true expression of institutional sincerity with this apology, backed by action not just from the church but also from the British government and head of state, then the inevitable backlash from right wing agitators will result in an ugly outpouring of anti-African ideology similar to that which permeated the British media following the Live 8 campaign in 2005. This will only serve to deepen resentment, animosity and hostility between the African and wider community.

No apology from the Queen

Bro Mbandaka of the Alkebulan Revivalist Movement has also rightly challenged the earnestness of the Church of England's announcement and asserted that any such apology would not demonstrate sincerity with international recognised moral authority unless given by Queen Elizabeth II as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. But Church representatives such as Rev Joel Edwards strongly disagree. They recognise that the monarch retains the title "Defender of the Faith" but simultaneously believe it would set a bad precedent to have the queen speak out on such matters. In contrast African community leaders argue that the Maafa is a unique tragedy unparalleled in the history of humanity. They state that it is this irrefutable fact alone which makes an apology direct from the queen such a necessity.

The Queen is the United Kingdom's Head of State. As well as carrying out significant constitutional functions, the queen must also act as a focus for national unity, presiding at ceremonial occasions and representing Britain around the world. Without her explicit apology then fears that a Synod apology could result in the Church becoming the "national scapegoat" for slavery when it is the whole country who should collectively share the guilt will come true. But this is not the first time the queen has been called to apologise on this matter. It is published that during January 2003;

"Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom refused to make a public apology for the long history of slavery under the British Empire on the basis that it was legal at the time. Writing via assistant private secretary Kay Brock, she said 'Under the statute of the International Criminal Court, acts of enslavement committed today . . . constitute a crime against humanity. But the historic slave trade was not a crime against humanity or contrary to international law at the time when the UK government condoned it'".

Yet we cannot ignore the fact that it was one of the queens ancestors, Queen Elizabeth I who provided John Hawkins with the 700-ton vessel, "Jesus of Lubeck" latter to be known as "the good ship Jesus". In 1564 Hawkins left Plymouth specifically for the purpose of capturing Africans. On the first voyages of Jesus, Hawkins captured several African people from the coast of Africa, near Sierra Leone using violence and subterfuge. It is said that on latter trips he frequently used the bible and prayer to convince some naive Africans to cease their resistance to enslavement by promising them that they would be the recipients of free land and riches in "the new world" (America).

Jesus was the first of the many notorious slaver ships to carry captive African people from the continent for enslavement in the Americas and Caribbean. Vessels such as Jesus were directly responsible for the deaths of millions of African people who perished through illness, suicide or murder during the torturous route known as the middle passage.

No Apology from the Government

The inactions of the British government are no better on this matter.

During Prime Minister's Question Time, 24 Nov 1999, Bernie Grant, the most vocal and active politician in Britain for the African British community rightly made the point that;

"There has been no acknowledgement of the contribution made to the wealth of Britain and Europe, and America by millions of African people."

In his response Tony Blair replied by stating 'I believe one of the great things that happened in politics in the last few years is that every political party in this country is now committed to a multiracial and a multicultural society'. But he lied.

In 2005 the British elections were typically dominated by a single issue. From the BNP to the Tories virtually every political party were united on the xenophobic theme of immigration. Apparently there were too many of 'them' here and 'our' borders must be placed under stricter control.

"It's not racist to impose limits on immigration, are you thinking what we're thinking"
Michael Howard, Conservative Party, 2005 Electoral Campaign slogan

A few years later at the end of 2001, the conference declaration from the United Nations conference on racism read;

"We acknowledge and profoundly regret the massive human sufferings and the tragic plight of millions of men, women and children as a result of slavery, slave trade, transatlantic slave trade, apartheid, colonialism and genocide.

We acknowledge that these were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity... and further acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so."

So when in 2004 the Home Office Minister, Fiona MacTaggart, stated that;

"Slavery is a crime against humanity. Slavery and the slave trade were, and are, appalling tragedies in the history of humanity"

The governments back tracking was apparent. Her two statements were deliberately constructed with legal precision to reject the UN declaration and encapsulate modern day human enslavement as a crime which she presented as distinct from that of the historic 'trade' in enslaved Africans. Her statement was at best disingenuous, at worst politically insincere and morally bankrupt.

Consider that in August 29, 1993, President F.W. de Klerk the leader of the odious european regime in Azania (South Africa) apologised to African people for the atrocities committed under the anti-African ideology of apartheid. In response, two days later former President Nelson Mandela apologised in the spirit of reconciliation for crimes

allegedly committed by the African National Congress against suspected enemies of South Africans. In a failure to take moral cues from examples such as this, Prime Minister Tony Blair's government has been steadfast in its refusal to apologise for the Maafa. In 2001 a press release issued from Downing street stated;

"The government is following an agreed European Union position which was agreed at a meeting of the general affairs council in July... We do not believe it is appropriate or sensible for governments today to accept responsibility for the actions of governments centuries ago".

This view from the British Labour government was supported by EU partners from Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. But Blair's statement does not transcend global truths;

- In September 13, 1999: Head of the Libyan government Col. Moammar Kadhafi says Americans and European powers should apologise and pay reparations to Africans for their enslavement.
- June, 1983: The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians recommends that Congress pass legislation providing an official apology and compensation to interned Japanese Americans.
- August 10, 1988: The Civil Liberties Act apologises on behalf of the people of the U.S. for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The Act also authorizes \$1.2 billion for payments of \$20,000 to each of the roughly 60,000 internees still alive and for the establishment of a \$50 million foundation to promote the cultural and historical concerns of Japanese Americans.
- November 15, 1993: The U.S. House passes U.S. Public Law 103-150: "To acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the January 17, 1893 [sic] of the Kingdom of Hawaii, and to offer an apology to native Hawaiians on behalf of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii."
- September 23, 1996: President Clinton apologises to seven undecorated, heroic African-American World War II soldiers.
- September 22, 2001: South African Xhosa prince Xhanti Sigcawu calls for direct talks with Queen Elizabeth to clarify her statements about expressing guilt for colonising Africa.
- February 6, 2002: Belgium apologizes for participating in the 1961 assassination of Patrice Lumumba, Congo's first Prime Minister, and establishes a memorial fund to assist Congolese youth and democracy.
- In May 29, 2002: Nigerian President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo apologised to Nigerians for years of human rights abuses by previous governments.

The list¹ continues...

The concept of justice and rule of law is accepted if not always practiced throughout the international community. From Israel to America, it remains the case that it is Europeans and in particular Britain which has always chosen not to accept culpability for criminal acts perpetrated on behalf of the state (formally Empire). One such example is 'Bloody Sunday' where on 30th January 1972, 13 Irish Catholics were killed when soldiers of a British paratroops regiment opened fire on unarmed civilians during a civil rights march in Londonderry. There has never been a formal British government apology for the killings, and no soldiers have ever been charged in connection with the deaths and injuries.

With relevance to the matter at hand, Patrick Mayhew, former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said in 1997 that "an apology is for criminal wrongdoing and there is nothing in [our investigations] to support that, and therefore it would be wrong".

"There is nothing wrong with reconciliation as a principle but it MUST go hand in hand with the restoration of communal equilibrium and harmony achieved through the action of justice. It is not enough to forgive and forget or even to accept an apology for heinous crimes. There is an African principle that I really do adhere to which is that 'a wrong does not become a right with the passage of time' i.e. if you killed someone 5 years ago and didn't pay for it, time past does not lessen the injustice and make it irrelevant."

Emma Pierre-Joseph

The Ligali Organisation, February 2006

¹ Source: Political apologies compiled by Graham G. Dodds (<http://reserve.mg2.org/apologies.htm>)

The Sincerity Test

“Many white Americans of good will had never connected bigotry with economic exploitation. They have deplored prejudice, but tolerated or ignored economic injustice. But the negro knows these two spirits have a malignant kinship.. the economic structure of a society appeared to be so ordered that a precise sifting of jobs took place. The lowest paid employment and the most tentative jobs were reserved for him. If he sought to change his position, he was walled in by their tall barrier of discrimination.”

Martin Luther King, Why We Can't Wait, 1964

African people place a high value on sincerity. One simple marker we use to gauge that sincerity is the language and terminology used by others to address us or convey ideological ideas. For example it is customary practice in African culture for children of all ages to refer to adults using traditional titles such as uncle or aunty. In contrast the western practice of a child referring to their parents by their first name is deemed taboo by most Africans and a sign of disrespect. These linguistic differences transcend adult – child relationships and specifically includes all areas of academic and political discourse.

This experience means that African people almost immediately recognise and respect the substantive level of personal humility and discipline required to do so. It is not just the usage of particular words that matters, but also the display of discipline in doing so. This is of significant relevance when speaking or writing as a moral advocate on African issues to a non–African and often anti–African audience.

That same historic experience also recognises the typically arrogant and anti–African attitudes of those who ignorantly or purposefully choose to do the opposite. Language is often used as a tool of oppression to perpetuate discrimination. Commercial profiteering of the ‘n word’ keeps alive the most venomous of anti–African language, in this case it is repeated by ignorant self serving Africans but distributed, propagated and purchased by european children in a industry that exploits African culture with little regard to social responsibility or moral integrity.

There are a few simple questions which community members can use to test the sincerity of those who express repentance for the enslavement of African people. Depending on the answers given it is possible to determine those who spout anti–African ideology purely from ignorance and those from arrogant maliciousness.

Honesty and Respect

'Slave' or enslaved African?

Do they seek to subjugate African identity by eradicating the heritage of those enslaved to that of a possession with cultural insensitivity and indifference? Do they refer to African people with Caribbean heritage as descendants of slaves or enslaved Africans?

'Black' or African?

Are they capable of not referring to African people as a single colour coded homogeneous entity and instead use terminology which reflects and respects the ethno-geographic reality of today's African identity? Do they denigrate African people by referring to them as 'black' people, 'black' Africans, 'black' Caribbeans or simply 'blacks'.

'African Holocaust or Maafa'

Can they refer to the enslavement of Africa using an African word without asserting that a eurocentric definition is needed to recognise Maafa as an authoritative reference? Do they attempt to ignore the magnitude of the natural and human resources plundered from Africa and limit the culpability of European slavery by ignoring its odious evolution into colonisation and capitalism.

Equal Rights and Justice

Money or resources?

Do they instinctively object to the word reparations and myopically view demands for justice and socio-economic equality solely as a claim for monetary compensation? Are they willing to accept demands on their resources which are open ended and based not on a quantitative quota but a target based objective?

Leading or supporting?

Are they capable of following and supporting African initiatives on this matter without feeling the need to always take ownership, leadership and credit for public acts of restorative justice?

Why African Remembrance Day?

Nationally, Britain currently celebrates an annual Moth Day, Sleep Day, VE Day, Valentines Day, Poetry day and even a Wrong Trousers day based on an animation about a dog and his owner. Yet perversely, there is still no British recognition of an African Remembrance day despite support for the event across the Continent, Caribbean and Americas.

As a result of this very conscious reluctance, the full details of Britain's participation in the Maafa remain largely unknown. Other than a superficial knowledge about 'slavery', the British public are not educated about the legacy of Britain and Europe's global enslavement and colonising regimes and their affect on Africans on the Continent and in the Diaspora today. This ignorance is what fuels the rampant racism and anti African sentiment that is rife in British culture.

An annual day of African Remembrance supported by a week of events dedicated to remembering those African ancestors who have fought and died for self-determination, justice and social revolution and the African people and culture lost through enslavement, colonialism and racism would help reverse this dangerous trend of ignorance.

Declaration

We will not support and will actively campaign against any commemorative events themed around the actions of a eurocentric abolitionist movement until;

- The British government and church make a formal apology for their leading role in the institutionalisation of the forced enslavement and commercial exploitation of African people.
- The British government and church recognises and sanctions local government support for a national African Remembrance day (currently marked in August) incorporating a national call for three minutes silence at 3pm.

Recommendations

1. We propose and call for community, institutional, organisational, church and government support for an annual African Remembrance Day with a week of supporting events.
2. To form a more rounded and factual picture of the history of enslavement, related rebellions and abolitionist movements, we propose the following recommendations to be part of an immediate change to the current academic and institutional² portrayal of this era of history. It should also be a foundation for any related events during the week of events supporting and promoting African Remembrance Day.
 - To redress the mass distortion to history that has written out the pro-active actions of African resistance movements it is imperative that all discussions on abolitionists and enslavement are prefaced with a substantive discourse on the roles of famous African anti-enslavement activists and abolitionists such as Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Quobna Ottobah Cugoana, Harriet Tubman, Henry Highland Garnet, Sojourner Truth, Nat Turner, William and Ellen Craft, Solomon Northrup, Zombi of the Quilombo dos Palmares and the Maroons of Jamaica to name but a few.
 - There is a need to include an analysis explaining Britain's grave socio-political difficulties maintaining morale and military strength after learning of the frequent African uprisings in Haiti led by Toussaint L'Ouverture leading to the Haitian revolution in 1791 which by 1803 had driven european slavers out of Haiti.
 - A programme documenting the nature of the enslavement process and the emotional, cultural and physical repercussions for African people. This should crucially include the story of the Middle Passage and the demoralising, dehumanising practices on plantations.

² *Institutions include, but are not limited to, public galleries, museums, schools, colleges and local councils*

- Awareness must be raised about the legacy of enslavement affecting African people in the Diaspora (African British, African Caribbean, African American, African Brazilian etc) and on the great Continent of Africa.
 - A programme centered on the fight for reparations for the injustices of European enslavement of African people.
 - An awareness and analysis of the collapse of The African Adventurers Company and the untold history of the Royal Africa Company must be promoted. Additionally, there must be a focus on the numerous British companies who were involved in enslavement including, for example, Barclays Bank and Tate and Lyle.
 - There must be a focus on how British society, architecture, economic wealth and attitudes are influenced by the centuries of exploiting Africa, African people and their labour to build Britain and boost its economy.
3. British institutions must ensure that all usage of the seal of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery where African people are portrayed begging on their knees for emancipation are no longer used to signify anti-enslavement or the abolitionist movements.
 4. Local governments must take responsibility for ensuring its public and educational institutions use non-offensive anti-African language in all written or recorded media (see terminology guidelines).
 5. British government implements a national genealogy program where hospitals and historical institutions with archival records provide a free heritage tracing service to African people. The aim is to enable Diasporic Africans to discover their African ancestry and thereafter reclaim their African identity.

Educational Reparations

As a means to culturally disinherit the Africans forced into enslavement, the British government deployed ruthless strategies to sever all references and connections of the enslaved Africans to their language, culture and identity. In order to repair the damning legacy still affecting African Britons, including those with Caribbean heritage we call for;

1. A modern worldview version of African and African British history to be made mandatory topics in the national curriculum under the title of 'world history'.
2. African languages to be added to the modern foreign languages module in national curriculum, in particular, Kiswahili following the African Union's adoption of it as the Continent's first official African language in 2004.
3. National recognition of African History Month in February as practised across Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas and the Diaspora.

Terminology

Introduction

There are many words and phrases in the English language that are geared towards maintaining inequality. However, despite the immature claims of a minority of people who think that revising the way we verbally communicate is ‘political correctness gone mad’, it has become a necessary part of addressing the way in which we think. Language is a key medium for conveying ideas about a society and culture. If populist and relatively frivolous words such as ‘retrosexual’, ‘squeaky-bum time’ and ‘adulescent’ can be integrated into modern day English dictionaries and language, there is no reason why we can not address racially offensive terminology with a view to revising and implementing positive and accurate changes.

The word African specifically relates to the indigenous people of the African continent and their descents in the Diaspora (Caribbean, Americas, Arabia, etc). The race-nationality model such as that currently employed by African-American, African-Brazilian and African-Caribbean communities more accurately describes the identity whilst fully articulating the history and geo-political reality of African people globally.

The miscellaneous usage of the label ‘Black’ within this document reflects its contemporary use as a means to denote a specific socio-cultural and political context. It is recognised as a colloquial term that was fashioned as a reactionary concept to derogatory racial epithets in the 1960’s. It is offensive when used as a racial classification code word to denote African people. Other such denigratory terminology that remains offensive when made in reference to African culture, heritage or identity are ‘Tribe’, ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’, or ‘black Africa’.

Guidelines

Historically in European languages it is the oppressor and not the oppressed victims that get the label of shame;

There is a *rapist* and not a **rapee**. The victim had been *raped*.
The woman was *raped*.

There is a *murderer* and not a **murderee**.
The victim had been *murdered*. The person was *murdered*.

Likewise in the context of African enslavement;

There is a *slaver* and there should not be a **slave**.
The victim had been *enslaved*. The African was *enslaved*.

At no point do European language rules state;

The woman was *born raped*.
The man was *born murdered*.

Likewise it is nonsensical to claim that;

The African was *born a slave*.

Due to the need to thoroughly propagate racist anti-African ideology, when european languages expressed our ancestors enslavement they gave them the 'label of shame' and themselves the respectable titles of 'enterprise and ownership'.

i.e. a european slaver is referred to as a slave/plantation owner (sic) as if to suggest it is a morally legitimate occupation.

Accurate and Respectful Solutions

1. We must not refer to those of our ancestors captured by european slavers as slaves, they were enslaved African people.

2. We must not legitimise or give dignity to those who enslaved our ancestors by referring to them as 'owners', they were slavers, rapists and murderers. Plantation owner just doesn't cover it.

3. Likewise the phrase 'slave ship' is another propaganda Trojan horse. The ships were not owned by the enslaved Africans. They were slavers ships holding captured Africans typically on route to forced enslavement in the Americas and the Caribbean.

The purpose of these words in european languages is to distort the significance, involvement and culpability of europeans in these matters. When we as Africans start to perpetuate these ideas in their language to our own children and community we inadvertently reinforce anti-African ideology.

Therefore:

Plantation owners (sic) = slavers

Slave owners (sic) = slavers

Slave master (sic) = slaver

Slave ship = slavers ship (slaving ship or enslavement ship)

Slaves = enslaved people

Slave = enslaved person

Negro slave = enslaved African

Black slave = enslaved African

Appendix

| Word/ Phrase | Recommended (optional) replacement | Example / Context |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Black | African | 'Mary Prince was one of the first African women to escape British enslavement' |
| Black British | African British | 'Olaudah Equiano was revered by most as the leading African British abolitionist' |
| Blacks (Negroes) | African people | 'Many African people despise the English language label classifying them as black' |
| Female Slave | (enslaved) African woman | 'The enslaved African woman was raped and impregnated by the slaver' |
| Freed slave | (freed) African | 'The freed African returned at night to release other enslaved Africans' |
| Negroid | Africoid | 'She was described by scientist as having typical Africoid features' |
| Plantation owners | Slavers | 'The slavers often used barbaric force to control the enslaved Africans' |
| Slave | (captive/ enslaved) African (man/woman/child/people) | 'The enslaved African people fought hard to retain their cultural identity' |
| Slave ships | Slavers ships | 'The slavers ships held over 200 Africans captive' |
| Slave Trade | (commercial) exploitation of (enslaved) African people | 'The Transatlantic exploitation of African people was a crime against humanity' |
| South Africa | Azania (South Africa) | 'The Government in Azania (South Africa) frequently acts in partnership with nations in Southern Africa such as Zimbabwe' |
| White African | European <African region> | 'The Dutch in Zimbabwe were left empowered by the legacy of Cecil Rhodes' |