

George Floyd: Yank Their Feet Off Your Necks

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Many human beings are rightly condemning the asphyxiation of George Floyd to death over what must have been a painful and agonizing death as he shouted: “I can’t breathe” and called on his dead mum to help out. But Derek Chauvin, the police official (better expression than “officer”, which makes them feel they are on top of people they are to serve), held on with his knees chocking his catch of the day like a leopard would do to a prized gazelle just caught. Derek’s colleagues: J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Kiernan Lane helped restrain Floyd, while Tou Thao stood guard and ensured no interference by bystanders as they all enjoyed the gruesome snuffing of life out of George Floyd that dragged on for 8 minutes, 46 seconds. George Floyd was neither the first nor the last to face the “George Floyd Moment”. In Atlanta, Rayshard Brooks faced it on June 12, 2020 and so did Eric Garner on July 17, 2014. He also had cried: “I can’t breathe” as he got asphyxiated by Daniel Pantaleo in New York.

The Millennials, in multi-racial reactions all over the world, have rightly been on the streets of many countries further popularizing “Black Lives Matter”. This battle cry should really be African Lives Matter Too (ALMT). Some of these protests are calling attention to the manifestation of racism in terms of police murders that are either never prosecuted or always received acquittal and swept under the rugs nonchalantly. These demonstrations have shown that the world-wide brutalization of others, especially people of African descent is not only an American aberration but a world – wide phenomenon that should be outrightly discontinued and denounced as “Man’s Inhumanity To Man”!.

People with African DNA (whatever may be their individual achievements) are placed at the bottom of the world even in Africa, not to talk of in the US; United Kingdom; Europe; Middle East; the Americas; Asia and Oceania. Africa would be a surprise to many. But I have travelled in Africa widely and see how Africans cringe when they have to deal with the “Oyinbo” or “Mzungu”. A Nigerian like other Africans is conditioned to give more weight to the reasoning and acts of an Oyinbo/Mzungu in comparison to his/her fellow Nigerian. I had seen Africans lead a UN delegation in Africa and the receiving Africans giving prominence to an Oyinbo who may even be the lowest in bureaucratic hierarchy in the delegation. In effect, the problem we face is more than police brutalities around the world. Ranking, resulting from power differences and supported by ideological or religious (soft power) controls of the mind has been a means of sustaining order in societies. Technological advancements, however crude at the beginning, made it possible to expand contacts among communities resulting in trade in goods. Power differences among communities/societies fueled the desire to subjugate other human

beings from other communities and societies and make them provide for the needs of their conquerors. Trade grew to include human beings like chattels/goods. This situation has been with humankind for quite a while. Such a situation is known to and sanctioned by the so-called holy books.

It's interesting that at the initial point of contacts, the Europeans, more of Portuguese did not see Africans as unequal and less human. Written accounts on the Portuguese admiration for the comparative achievements of Benin Kingdom exists. For long, the Europeans denied the Giza pyramids as African contributions to civilization. But then, we all know the arrival of Arabs in Egypt was more recent and the Nubian pyramids and artifacts put paid to the Afro doubters.

But as the relationship went further and European realities dictated extracting maximum wealth from owning Africans, they had to construct institutionalized/structured systemic dehumanisation of Africans and co-opted a few African misleaders who became co-beneficiaries although of pittance in the case of the African sell-outs.

The Europeans subjugated the rest of the Africans through the barrels of the gun going hand in hand with the more insidious means of control: religion. Thus, the British conquered the Ijebu resistance to colonization in 1892 with inflow of Christian Missionaries following on the heels of the conquest to further estrange the Ijebu from their religion. The Benin Kingdom faced the same music in 1897. The rest of the country now known as Nigeria and much of Africa surrendered to the British as the French, Portuguese and the Belgians rampaged in much of Africa.

Having rendered the Trans-Saharan slave trade unprofitable through the opening of coastal trade, Transatlantic slave trade thrived until it was replaced by colonization. The struggles of African nationalists of the post-World War I (1914-1918) and the weakening of the jugular asphyxiation hold of Africans necks by Europeans after the Second World War (1939-1945) resulted in the easing of the colonial chokehold as a new brand of African nationalists benefitted from interactions with the likes of Marcus Garvey; George Padmore and Paul Robeson, returned to Africa and woke up consciousness for change. Padmore actually accompanied Kwame Nkrumah into Independent Ghana.

But the change blowing in the world of the 1960s did not end in Europe. Great strides on civil rights in the United States became rapid as African countries started to emerge on the world scene. America wanted its exploitation arrangements using the World Bank and IMF to become institutionalized as the United Nations provided talk shops for new African countries. It was no longer easy to stifle, brutalize and hold off the radar, the struggles led by Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, Elijah Mohammed and inspiring individual acts of the Rosa Parks of America.

Neo-colonialism replaced colonialism as the Bretton Woods institutions became a basis for world-wide Western extraction and subtle psychological sustenance of the control over all people of African descent went on with ideological mind controlling expressions like democracy and free enterprise. Democracy was thrown overboard by the West as they conveniently did not preach it in countries like Rhodesia and South Africa. The West embraced the local repressive regimes until the rest of Africa supported the gallant bloody struggles led by the ZANU-PF and ANC in the two respective countries.

The problem we face is not colour but structured power relationships of domination. Racism is one manifestation. Today, many African leaders have not acted much differently from the misleaders who sold their kind into slavery. They are now forcing their now supposedly independent African people to accept everything dehumanizing in exchange for a better life outside Africa as they turn their local governance into lootocracies – the plundering of national patrimonies as governance rationale. The training of Africans in Africa who then emigrate for a "better life" to create wealth for other countries as well as the post-second world war structures of domination of international economic relations all go in the same direction - knees on the necks of Africans whether as Continental Africans, African-Americans (North America/South America), African-Europeans, African-Asians etc. George Floyd's gruesome murder is an opportunity to clearly understand the broader meaning of "knees on the necks of Africans"

The Reverend Al Sharpton, at the funeral ceremony for George Floyd in Minneapolis had called out to the American authorities with the expression: Get your knees off our necks. This expression reflects a plea, if you like, a persuasion of sorts to those who have systematically been sustaining systemic racism that has kept people of African descent down.

A plea does not work in dominant and dominated power relationships. Racism thrives on the basis of a power relationship and people do not give up power willingly. The multi-racial reaction of the millennials on the streets of many capitals of the world is welcomed but it is not enough. Africans themselves must wake up and resist being put at the bottom of the world that allows the ease of the exploitation of Africans. Beyond the poetical, philosophical, emotional, political, celebrity-social media chagrin that followed the murder of George Floyd, the African people, irrespective of where they are and who they sound like, must understand that they are not to be at the bottom of the world.

Nigeria as a country, hosting the largest population of people of African descent, has been punching below its weight. There were feeble reactions to the fate of George Floyd by Nigerians. As usual, the weakened Nigerian leadership that is steep in its own bad governance, perpetually failing to serve justice for unexplained deaths within its confine, was largely missing in action only reportedly supporting resolutions at the world's talk shop that fails to walk the talk.

But we must make no mistakes about it, the fate of George Floyd is the fate of every African in the world, including Nigerians. No level of achievement gives the status of "honorary white" to any African on the streets of New York or London whenever racial profiling sets in. Self-assessment and insidiously built others' assessment vary a lot and more so when there is hardly any African country of pride to all peoples of the world.

China's reaction to past humiliation from the West was not premised on moral pleas. It built up its power over the years. Today, China does not need to tell anyone to get their knees of Chinese necks.

More demeaning feet are really what are on the necks of Africans. Africans must not continuously build "Wall Streets" outside Africa only to be kicked against the same walls. It is high time people of African descent everywhere woke up and: "Yank Their Feet of Your Necks".