

Contents

Preface 006
Philippa Ebene &
Eric van Grasdorff

Preface 007
Nadja Ofuatey-Rahal

A Continent emptied – The truth about what slavery did to Africa	009
Louise Marie Diop-Maes	
The Transatlantic Slave Trade, Slavery and Resistance	013
Rosa Amelia Plumelle-Uribe	
African Resistance to the Transatlantic Slave Trade	027
Sylviane A. Diouf	
The Middle Passage	035
David Richardson	
The Slave Trade: Resistance Strategies, Revolts, and Conspiracies in the United States	041
Loren Schweningen	
“Freedom Mus’ Come One Day”: Women & the Fight Against Slavery in the Caribbean	051
Prof. Verene A. Shepherd	
Survivals and Dynamism of African Cultures in the Americas	063
Joseph Y. Olabiyi Babalola	
African American Culture and American Culture	073
Howard Dodson	
African Survivals in the Secular Popular Culture of the Americas	079
Yolande Behanzin-Joseph-Noël	
Resilience of African Musical Elements and the Effect of Linguistic Styntax on Rhythmic Organization in Diaspora	089
Kazadi wa Mukuna	
African Religions in the Americas: A Structural Analysis	097
Guérin C. Montilus	
Reparations and Reconstruction – Lessons from How Europe Underdeveloped Africa	107
Horace Campbell	
Epilogue from the editor	119
Nadja Ofuatey-Rahal	
Serving the King and the Kingdom: Africans and Prussian Law in the 18th Century	121
Paulette Reed-Anderson	

Timeline: Resistance against the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery 129

Bibiography 135

Pictures 137

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Philippa Ebéné & Eric van Grasdorff > Preface

Dear Readers,

The year 2008 marks the bicentennial of the official abolition of the Maafa* in the United States – in Germany this jubilee almost went unnoticed. As CEO and artistic director of the Werkstatt der Kulturen, a cultural institution focusing on artistic, cultural and political expressions of migrant cultures in Germany, and in view of Berlin's vast population of Africans, African-Germans, Afro-Brazilians, African-Americans, African-Europeans, and Afro-Latinos, I was determined to celebrate this anniversary. After all – Brandenburg-Prussia had also been involved in the Maafa.

One of the greatest atrocities in the history of mankind, the barbarous so-called “Transatlantic Slave Trade”, was a highly profitable business. Without forced labour, the economic value of the Americas could never have been realized. Captured and enslaved Africans “made possible the taming of the wilderness, construction of cities, excavation of mines, and the establishment of powerful plantation economies” (The Mariners’ Museum, Newport News). The European trade with human beings led to the devastation and depopulation of Africa, and enabled the wealth and development of Europe.

Since both the violent and nonviolent resistance of Africans against European enslavement is well researched, I wanted this anniversary to be dedicated to the men and women who fought against this most abominable “trade” and counter the cynical myth of “slave docility and quiescence”. I imagined an exhibition portraying African abolitionists to be at the centre of a one-week festival entitled “200 years later...” in which films on resistance in Africa and the Americas should be shown, lectures on anti-slavery movements should be held and papers written by eminent academics from Africa and the African Diaspora should be presented, while Capoeira, Blues, Candomblé, Samba and other forms of African cultural techniques of resistance and resilience would be celebrated.

On the lookout for the ideal partner I turned to Eric van Grasdorff, CEO of *AfricAvenir International*, an organization with headquarters in Douala (Cameroon) dedicated to the African Renaissance. Over the years *AfricAvenir* has rightfully gained the reputation of being a most reliable partner, with a highly evolved expertise in presenting African films, readings, concerts, lectures and workshops as well as being the publisher of numerous readers on various African topics. Having experienced successful cooperations on several occasions in the past, we decided to once more join forces.

Over and above 200 years later ... would not have been possible without the generous support of a number of people participating in this event as lecturers or performers. We would therefore like to thank: His Excellency the Ambassador of Benin to UNESCO Prof. Olabiyi Babalola Yai, the Ambassador of Haiti to Germany Jean Robert Saget, the dancer Murah Soares (Brazil), the historian Prof. Ibrahima Thioub (Senegal), the writer and psychoanalyst Dr. Grada Kilomba (Sao Tomé/Príncipe and Portugal), the literary scholar Dr. Marie Biloa Onana (Cameroon), the sociologist Prof. Babacar Sall (Senegal), the Afro-Peruvian musician and music historian Rafael Santa Cruz (Peru), percussionist and singer Gilbert Abdourahmane Diop (Senegal), the singer-song writer duo Pape & Cheick (Senegal), the capoeira performers Sidney Martins, Mestre Saulo Souza and Carlos Silva (Brazil), the avantgarde trio Three Kings, featuring Haitian-African-American guitar player Jean-Paul Bourelly, Jonas Hamond on bass (Ghana) and Marlon Browden on drums (USA), the story teller Babacar Mbaye Ndaak as well as all the prolific authors of this reader on acts of resistance and resilience against the Maafa.

May the ancestors rest in Peace,

Philippa Ebéné
CEO and Artistic director
Werkstatt der Kulturen

Eric van Grasdorff
CEO *AfricAvenir International* Germany

* The Swahili word Maafa, meaning disaster, terrible occurrence or great tragedy, has replaced the highly problematic term “Transatlantic Slave Trade” within the academic discourse, as the latter serves as euphemism for the intense violence, the sustained attempt of dehumanization and the mass murder inflicted on African peoples, the complete appropriation of their lands and the destruction of African societies.



Nadja Ofuatey-Rahal > Preface

Dear Readers,

welcome to „200 Years later...“, our acknowledgement of the struggle for freedom of men and women of African descent against the Transatlantic Slave Trade and a celebration of the resilience and vibrancy of what they and their descendants have contributed to the societies and cultures they were forcefully migrated to. Today we honor some of the icons of resistance against one of the greatest crimes against humanity.

History ... His Story. The history at large is a history written by White males. It is time to have dissenting voices come forward and shine a spotlights onto the dark spots of the map of this century-long historical chapter. And to have its Black protagonists get their long overdue appearance in the limelight.

In this publication we are going to look at the manifold resistance strategies against the trade with human beings – the resistance struggles waged in Africa, North- and South America and the Caribbean by people of African descent. We will see how the kidnapping of some 20–30 million people has affected the African continent and we will address the many contributions people of African descent have made in their various acts of self-assertion.

Slavery means that one human being owns another human being and therefore determines his/her life and death, dwelling, fate, children, bodily integrity or lack thereof, future, sexuality, communication and spiritual practice etc, ... in order to legitimize such a psychopathological system, the first step had to be to dehumanize that other human being, constructing him/her as „another“ ... and ultimately declare him/her a commodity. This self-serving and insane notion, these images and concepts, needless to say, today still determine the White Western view of Africa and it's descents in the Diaspora and, more importantly, co-determine the self-perception of people of African descent worldwide. These concepts have propelled colonialism and have created the murderous economic and political structures in our “globalized” world today. These concepts are what we still encounter in school books and the media – when and if the subject of the Transatlantic Slave Trade comes up. The Maafa (African Holocaust) has not yet been redeemed. Reparations are being discussed as if they were out of the question. Enough now.

Resistance against the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the individual and collective act of reclaiming and reasserting humanity, is something that has not been in the mainstream academic focus so far. It is therefore high time to feature it.

I am proud and pleased that we have managed to assemble scholarly voices from Africa, Europe, the U.S., South America and the Caribbean to set the prevailing record straight. At this point I also wish to thank the following dedicated group of people from the *AfricAvenir International* team without whom this reader would not have been possible: Judith Strohm (Coordination) Lola Zuckerman, Fabian Lehmann, Ivalu Hildmann, Alexandra Künzel, Richard Gutmann, Stéphanie Hansoulle, Claudia Samlenski (research), Hannah Jordan (lectorate) and Nayeli Zimmermann and Verena Memczak (layout and typesetting). Thank you! Great job!

Today we stand up and salute those men and women resistance fighters who each in their own way have stood up for their convictions, their humanity, demonstrated faith, incredible courage and integrity and have therefore, against the odds helped forward humanity as a whole.

Nadja Ofuatey-Rahal
Munich, October 2008