

PEKI COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT: Level 300, Music and RME.

Memory and Reparatory Justice for Enslavement by Missionaries

The history of Christian missionaries in Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean is often framed as one of evangelism, education, and healthcare. Yet this memory is incomplete. Many missionary societies and religious orders directly owned, traded, and profited from enslaved people from the 16th through the 19th centuries. Confronting that record is the first step toward reparatory justice.

The Historical Record

Catholic orders such as the Jesuits, Carmelites, and Capuchins held plantations worked by enslaved Africans in Brazil, Angola, and the Caribbean. In the United States, Georgetown University's sale of 272 enslaved men, women, and children in 1838 by the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus is well documented. Anglican and Protestant mission societies also received bequests of enslaved people and used their labor to fund churches, schools, and mission stations. In West Africa, missions sometimes operated "liberated African" settlements while simultaneously benefiting from colonial labor systems that resembled enslavement. These facts disrupt the narrative of missions as purely benevolent and show how religious institutions were embedded in the political economy of slavery.

Memory and the Politics of Acknowledgment

Public memory has long emphasized missionary abolitionism while minimizing missionary slaveholding. Archives in Rome, Lisbon, London, and Accra contain ledgers, baptismal records, and bills of sale that name the enslaved and record the profits. Acknowledgment means naming these people, publishing the records, and teaching this history in seminaries and church schools. Several institutions have begun this work. The Jesuits in the U.S. and Canada established the Descendants Truth & Reconciliation Foundation in 2021 with a \$100 million commitment. The Church of England allocated £100 million in 2023 for a fund addressing its historic links to transatlantic slavery through the Queen Anne's Bounty and Church Commissioners. These acts treat memory not as apology alone but as evidence for repair.

What Reparatory Justice Requires

Reparatory justice goes beyond symbolic apology. It is material, structural, and community-led. Based on frameworks developed by CARICOM and African and diaspora scholars, four components are central:

1. Truth and Transparency: Full access to missionary archives, digitization of records, and genealogical support for descendants to trace their ancestors.
2. Financial Repair: Direct funding for education, healthcare, and land for descendant communities, financed by assets that originated in enslavement. The Georgetown and Jesuits' initiatives include scholarships and community investment. The Church of England's fund prioritizes community projects in diaspora communities impacted by slavery.
3. Institutional Transformation: Curriculum reform in theological education, reparations studies in mission-founded universities, and governance roles for descendants on boards that control legacy endowments.
4. Restoration of Dignity: Memorialization at former mission plantations, repatriation of remains, and liturgical practices of lament and restitution led by affected communities.

The Role of Missionary Organizations Today

Because many missionary orders still exist and hold significant property and financial reserves, they are among the few institutions with a direct institutional lineage to slaveholding entities. That continuity creates a distinct responsibility. Reparatory justice here is not collective guilt but institutional accountability: using resources derived from enslavement to repair the harms that still shape inequality in education, health, and intergenerational wealth.

WHAT GHANAIAN STUDENTS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO TEACHING IN GHANAIAN-GERMAN EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES.

Ghanaian students bring lived, local knowledge that's essential when teaching enslavement and reparatory justice in Ghana-Germany exchanges. Here's how they typically contribute:

1. Local memory & sites as “textbooks”

Ghanaian students can guide German peers through places like Cape Coast/Elmina dungeons, explaining what the Middle Passage felt like from the point of capture. In exchanges like the University of Hamburg–UEW project, students jointly trace colonial figures like Schimmelmann and develop ideas for memorials. Standing in those spaces makes the history visceral, not abstract.

2. Counter-narratives & the Sankofa principle

They introduce African perspectives often missing in European curricula: community resistance, agency, and how slavery stifled economic, cultural, and psychological progress. Using _Sankofa_—“go back and fetch it”—they show remembering the past is meant to build a better future.

3. Language, culture, and contemporary links

Teaching basic Twi, songs, and naming practices helps German students see how enslavement disrupted language and identity. Ghanaian students also connect past harms to present calls for reparations, like Ghana’s UN resolution to recognize transatlantic slavery as “the gravest crime in human history” and seek reparatory justice.

4. Restitution & reparations dialogue

Germany is now examining its colonial past and provenance of objects. Ghanaian students can share current restitution cases—e.g. Akpini Traditional Area’s claim for royal regalia from Germany—and frame the 4Rs: restitution, return, repatriation, reparation. This moves debate from theory to real negotiations.

5. Youth-to-youth accountability

Exchanges let youth co-create teaching materials, workshops, and “fugitive pedagogy” that center African voices. Ghana’s national stance—“not reopen old wounds but heal with truth”—gives students a model for honest, restorative dialogue.

Bottom line: Ghanaian students supply the place-based evidence, cultural context, and current political urgency that German students often lack. Together they can shift teaching from dates and ships to human cost, resistance, and what repair looks like today.