

On-line Slave Market in the Gulf

When you hear on a BBC documentary that African domestic workers, some of whom are imported to the Gulf states under the age of 18, can be advertised on an “app”, then bought and sold, you have to wonder if the Guptas will ever be deported back to South Africa.

Oil wealth has corrupted even the most basic religious values, which have found their latest manifestation in the charters of human rights.

You can use your (American) iPhone to download an app like “4Sale” where you can see a rogues gallery of photos of domestic workers marked “for sale”. This 21st century Slave Trade is also conducted on Facebook and Google. It is booming in Kuwait and other Gulf states.

Unemployment is so rampant in Africa that young ladies are exported to earn money to send home to their families. But when their employment agency lands them in a home, legally through immigration, the trading begins. You want a slimmer one? You want a younger one? You want a Muslim one? Just phone up the family that is advertising a “transfer” and haggle. It’s just like buying a bicycle or a TV set. But these are people, some of them under-age.

Their employers defy all the regulations – requiring them to offer one day off per week and freedom of movement. They are not given any time off, they cannot go out alone, and if they rebel they can be thrown into jail.

Ostensibly, the authorities do not condone such behaviour. But no one ever condoned State Capture either. They just did not report it.

Part of the reason for the trading is to make it harder for the authorities to track down complaints and to crack down on the host families. Every 3 months a domestic worker may be shunted to another home – not even realizing that they have been “sold”. All they know is that they go months on end without being paid. And if they complain – they go to jail.

Thank God for the HRDs. Human Rights Defenders are out there, doing their best to interrupt this illicit On-line Slave Trade. Most of the domestic workers are women, who as a rule are at the bottom of the pecking order in Muslim countries. Many of the brave HRDs who track down victims are women, and thus treated with contempt – even by the authorities.

The HRDs are already building an “underground railroad”. There are shelters where victims can hole up while their court cases are being processed. There are investigative journalists on the scent of this social evil. The BBC’s documentary about it is quintessential investigative journalism. On the heels of the story of the Uighurs in China comes this breaking news about an On-line Slave Trade in the Gulf. They did us proud.

One can readily understand why a region that behaves like this has become a safe haven for the Guptas. Money talks. The authorities are a law unto themselves, their responses are just a smoke-screen for what is really going on in private homes all over the Gulf.

The British led the Anti-Slavery movement 200 years ago. Back then, around 1800, the population of Capetown was 15,000. It was mainly a port-of-call between Western Europe and the Far East, because the old overland route had been seized by the rise of Islam. The sea route was an end-run around that stranglehold.

At that time, slavery had not yet been outlawed. Even the clergy in Capetown owned slaves, though these were mainly imported from Indonesia. Only after the battle of Trafalgar, when Napoleon was defeated, did the ascendancy of Britain come. From Italy it had passed to Iberia and then to France and Holland. Britannia ruled the waves, and thus put an end to the Atlantic Slave Trade.

The Dutch disliked British policy so much that 20 years after Trafalgar with a Union jack flying over Capetown, the Boers decided en masse to leave the colony. They trekked north, across the Vaal river, where they could set up their own republics.

Today the British have to use other approaches. Investigative journalism is one. Could the time be coming that sanctions against the Gulf states should be considered? There is a flourishing On-line Slave Trade there, and they are harbouring criminals like the Guptas.

Will Africa leave it to Britain again to lead the fight against Slavery? Or can Africa boycott these Arab enclaves? Let's start by boycotting the 2020 Trade Fair in Dubai. Fly on Air Ethiopia instead of the Gulf airlines. Get off of Arab oil and on to the African sun. Solar is the order of the day.