



Precolonial African Society and Slavery in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavo Vassa, The African*

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Abstract: The paper focuses on precolonial African society and her sense of slavery in contrast with Western institution of slavery. In so doing, the findings revealed that precolonial Africa was socially, economically and politically well-organized before the arrival of Europeans. They detailed and proved that African strand of slavery was humanistic, temporary and non-materialistic whereas that of the West was inhuman, self-perpetuating and materialistic. The study also demonstrated that African practice of slavery changed drastically owing to the influence of western capitalistic civilization. At the end, it interrogated the validity of Eurocentric views and descriptions of precolonial Africa by revealing the barbaric and inhuman nature of western civilization through Europeans' practices of slavery and then colonization.

Key words: Civilization and Barbarism, Eurocentric Rhetoric and Views, Precolonial Africa, Slavery, the West.

Résumé : Cet article est basé sur la société précoloniale Africaine et son sens pratique de l'esclavage en contraste avec l'institution occidentale de l'esclavage. En faisant cela, les résultats ont montré que l'Afrique précoloniale était bien organisée socialement, économiquement et politiquement avant l'arrivée des Européens. Ils ont prouvé et détaillé que l'esclavage en Afrique par les Africains était pratiqué de façon humaine, temporaire et non-matérialiste, alors que ce pratiqué par l'Occident était pratiqué de façon inhumaine, perpétuel et matérialiste. L'étude a aussi démontré que la pratique de l'esclavage en Afrique a subi un changement drastique dû à l'influence de la civilisation capitaliste de l'Occident. A la fin, l'étude a mis en question la validité des perceptions et des descriptions Euro-centristes de l'Afrique précoloniale, en révélant la nature inhumaine et barbare de la civilisation occidentale à travers leurs pratiques de l'esclavage et de la colonisation.

Mots clés : Civilisation et barbarie, rhétorique et perceptions Euro-centristes, Afrique précoloniale, esclavage, Occident.

Introduction

Before embarking on developing the main concern of the paper, it is convenient to specify that Olaudah Equiano, like Amos Tutuola of Ghana, is one of the earliest key African and African American writers to have written about Africa and the outside world. Although his



work is mainly taught and sometimes rated as part of American literature, we should comprehend that in the historiography of African literature, Equiano stands as the beginning point of the African novel. He also belongs to the first generation of African novelists who had thought it necessary to use literature to talk about their culture and history in reaction to what Eurocentrists, slavers and colonialists have purposefully devised to tarnish the image of Africa. His work constitutes what we may refer to as the transition and the bridge between traditional and modern African written literatures. Equiano's narrative actually marks the historical official debut of the African novel in spite of the multiplicity of scholarly views on such a debut. In regard to that, his work thus becomes an appropriate literary text which may help us better understand precolonial Africa and her practice of slavery in contrast with that of the western world.

The objective of the paper is to first show that precolonial Africa was a civilized society, and then reveal the humanistic aspects of African slavery in opposition to western institution of slavery. We intend to attain this objective because of the multiple clichés and stereotypes disseminated against Africa and the African in this 21st century. Precolonial Africa is most of the time presented and depicted as barbaric, inhumane and deprived of any civilization. Added to that, many contemporary educated and non-educated Africans still believe in the Eurocentrists' falsified historical version of slavery in Africa. The major problem is that the terms slavery and slaves cannot actually be applied to the African sense of slavery because African practice of slavery was humanistic and did not deprive the *slave* of his rights and liberty as in the West.

In so doing, the paper addresses elements, which are tremendously significant in understanding slavery in Africa and in the West. We concretize all these elements in the context of a comparative approach by comparing European institution of slavery to Africans' practice of slavery. In terms of organization, the paper first provides European and African definitions of the terms such as slave, slavery, *Djon*, *Djonya*, *pawnship* and *clientship*. Then, it talks about the social and economic organization of precolonial Africa before the arrival of Europeans. The paper finally accounts for the hidden truth about Africans' sense of slavery and that of Europeans as well as the factor responsible for the changing faces of African practice of slavery.



1-Defining African Concepts of Slavery

As a reminder, it is convenient to specify certain points related to the conceptual definition of African sense of slavery on the one hand and its application to the African context on the other hand. This specification the meanings of the terms used by Africans to refer to slavery would eventually enable us to understand that the term slavery, as defined by the West, could not and shall not be applied to precolonial African practice of slavery. For instance, in the Empire of Mali the practice of slavery was called *Djonya* meaning in Bamanankan the works or activities of servants or the state of being a servant in society in conformity with his/her privileges, duties and rights. A *Djon* deriving from *Djonya* means servant instead of wrongly being called a slave. A *Djon* has all his rights protected and guaranteed by most precolonial African societies. He can marry the wife of his choice and in his clan; he can take the name of his choice, cook and eat the food of his choice whereas a true slave, in the western sense of the word, has no rights, no freedom and is considered a possession. In short, a *Djon* is a freeborn human being but serving a noble man called *Horon*. It is this servitude that many Westerners have failed to comprehend, but they have labelled it slavery. The foregoing is confirmed in the following words:

In many, if not most, African societies, freedom and slavery are not the binary opposites that are in the West. Rather, it might be better to think of a continuum of degrees of freedom and servitude. One might start out as a chattel slave, but later find oneself neither absolutely free nor absolutely slave. Indeed, the sheer variety of types and degrees of slavery found in African societies makes scholars wonder the applicability of the rather obtuse word “slave”.(Gilbert et al., 144).

Besides, African sense of slavery referred to as *Djonya* manifests in three forms (captivity, pawnship and clientship). The first form is when you are a captive of war, the second and third ones are whether you a pawn or a client. The state of being a pawn or a client is clearly differentiated in the precolonial African context as follows:

The matter is further complicated by two widespread institutions—clientship and pawnship – that resemble slavery but with some fundamental differences. A client is someone who voluntarily becomes a dependent of another person. Someone might do this in time of famine or other catastrophe to avoid death or a way of escaping poverty. A client is different than a slave in that a client can choose to leave the relationship. A pawn is a person given as collateral on a loan. A person who needed to borrow seed or livestock would offer as a guarantee on the loan a child or other dependent. When the loan is repaid, the pawned person would be returned. In the meantime, the labor provided by the pawn would serve as a sort of interest on the loan. It is not slavery in the classic sense, but it is similar and



something that an outside observer might easily confuse with slavery. (Gilbert et al, 144-145).

As for captivity, it is a person captured after a war, but when he learns the language of the new society and integrates it fully. He becomes a *Horon* meaning a free man. Sakoura, one of the kings of the Empire of Mali, is a very good illustration. Sakoura was a captive of war but became a respected and integrated soldier in the national fabric of the Manden society. This permitted him to ascend the social ladder to become the king of the entire empire in the 13th century¹. Let us now try to talk about the social and economic organization of precolonial Africa as portrayed by Equiano.

2- Precolonial Africa in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*

First, it is salient to specify the meaning of precolonial Africa as it is used in this work. Precolonial Africa means Africa before the arrival of the European explorers, colonizers and missionaries in Africa. Then, we could see that Equiano's work begins with a description of precolonial Africa's economic and social structures, a way to dismantle the Eurocentric views on Africa before the coming of Europeans. It proudly describes the narrator's society, who is also the main character in *The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano*. The discussion here, largely, focuses on the narrative of Olaudah Equiano because his work contains elements that best portray precolonial Africa. So, before the triangular commerce, as detailed by Equiano in his narrative, African societies in general were well organized and Africans lived in peace and harmony in respect of their traditions and customs. They had freedom to do whatever they liked according to their established laws. Equiano highlights the social organization of the society in his homeland. He also explicates how his people and the surrounding African societies used to do business. The protagonist reports that his village and the neighboring villages were well informed about one another. Besides this testimony, the narrator reveals that titles, which determine the greatness of warriors, were highly rated in traditional Igbo civilization. He sustains that his father was the holder of one of these precious titles in the like words:

History of what passes in one family or village may serve as the specimen of a nation. My father was one of those elders or chiefs I have spoken of and was styled Embrenché, a term as I remember importing the highest distinction, and signifying in our language a mark of grandeur. (Equiano, 1996, 1-2-).

¹ For further information on Sakoura, see Canós-Donnay, Sirio. (2019). "The Empire of Mali", in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*. London: University College London.



Equiano's description of his native country shows that Africans were fondly attached to these titles as symbols of social representation and consideration. Hence, the elderly and entitled people were very important and respected. To achieve one of these titles in traditional Africa the individual must deserve it. That is, the person who is granted a title must have accomplished great actions praised by people in the community. Equiano's father was a much respected man in the country because of his title. He also states that those who were granted the "Embrenché title" were appointed judges because they had the responsibility to settle social issues just like in Western world where judges have the duties to judge criminals or restore social misunderstandings or injustices. This idea is testified in the next assertion certainly to argue that indigenous people had their social and judicial organizations that fitted their ways of life: "Those Embrenché or chief men decided about disputes and punished crimes, for which purpose they assembled together."(p.2). The foregoing passage is a proof that African societies were not barbaric and with no social hierarchy wherein savagery prevailed. Instead, Africans had their own civilization, which was on the same level of degree of importance as any worldly civilization.

Moreover, in Africa, Equiano shows that people's living conditions were very simple and regulated by rules and values guaranteed by their customs and traditions. Drawing the attention of the reader to realities of the living conditions of his homeland and Africa as whole, he insists on the simplicity and humbleness of native Africans as far as their ways, culinary activities are concerned: "Our manner of living is entirely plain, for as yet the natives are unacquainted with those refinements in cookery... These constitute likewise the principal wealth of the country and the chief articles of commerce". (Equiano, 1996, 4).

Through this testimony, the reader is invited to understand that native Africans were unconcerned about European lifestyle and food supply since their lifestyle was simple and convenient. They were only interested in producing foodstuffs that were profitable for the entire community. The local trading activities were based on those articles. Moreover, the reader is expected to grasp that Africans were matured enough to establish and conduct their own trading systems without the influence of any foreign power. In other words, African civilization was already at its peak before the advent of the Westernization of Africa.

The author describes a society with an ingenious artistic creativity, a place where everybody lived in peace and harmony. He shows that his community - which is representative of all black communities on the African continent - used to be a place of



feasting and conviviality. On occasions of entertainments, local artists and dancers could perform rhythmic dances and melodious songs. As to evidence the precolonial African sense of organization, Equiano mentions that dancing performed in public places was perfectly organized and coordinated in conformity with the traditions and local laws. That was done to ensure its social importance and its expected effect on the audience. Music was used to appease souls and treat psychological anomalies. When the narrator talks about musical instruments, he implies that they were local productions and invented by precolonial Africans themselves without any European influence:

We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event such as a triumphant return from battle or other cause of public rejoicing is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion. We have many musical instruments, particularly drums of different kinds, a piece of music which resembles a guitar. (Equiano, 1996, 3).

By mentioning that his people were dancers, musicians and poets, Equiano wants to show that cheerfulness and social interaction were great features of his homeland. The foregoing quotation equally shows that Africans were much more interested in entertainments than war. They therefore focused on making musical instruments in order to bring joy and happiness in the society at the same time to reconcile souls.

The narrator also portrays the typical African woman who is viewed as the most graceful and beautiful one. In addition to her physical traits, she is described through her modesty, humbleness and self-restraint, which, for Equiano, are the virtues of ideal women. Such women could stay virgin until marriage: “Our women are too in my eyes... graceful, alert and modest the degree of bashfulness; nor do I remember to have ever heard of an instance of incontinence amongst them before marriage” (7). In this description, it becomes clear that African children were well rear too. They were endowed with the basic human instructions about how one should behave in society correctly. Precolonial African women cared more about their social reputation. So, they did not associate themselves with disgraceful practices that could tarnish their image. In doing so, African women could honor both their parents and society through respect and high moral values. In his description of African women, Equiano refers to the ideal African woman as the one who could imbibe special qualities. Moreover, those qualities make precolonial African women attracting and graceful in the eyes of the narrator.



After portraying the values and virtues of precolonial African women, Equiano also states that African soils were also significantly bountiful. That is, the soil of his homeland responded positively to all kinds of culture. The protagonist clearly mirrors in his book that the food production in his homeland was significantly stable. All local Africans could eat to their full, as their land was very rich and fruitful. In other words, there was abundance of fruit and vegetables for everyone. This equally means that Equiano's fellow citizens did not depend on any outside world for their food production or food security: "our land is commonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance."(6). through the extract, it can be understood that local Africans had almost everything they could need. The tone in which Equiano presents this aspect in the foregoing quote shows that he was both proud and happy about his homeland because his people made the agriculture their main occupation in order to profit from the richness of their soil. Hence, the practice of agriculture could guarantee food for the entire society. To ascertain the fact that agriculture was highly rated by local Africans, the protagonist relates that every member of the community young and old, men and women contributed to that activity. That situation of everyone participating in the activities of the community was very important for the prosperity of African societies in general and he sustains the latter as follows: "Agriculture is our chief employment, and everyone, even children and women are engaged in it."(7).

As indigenous Africans were hardworking people, it was very scarce to see beggars wandering through streets like in some parts of the world today. This is a way for the protagonist to demonstrate that his fellow Africans did not know laziness and idleness. They were self-dependent in terms of everything concerning their own well-being: "Everyone contributes something to common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness we have no beggars" (7). The foregoing statements signify that the precolonial Africans were hard workers and lived independently.

In terms of religion, Equiano reveals that Africans had their religious beliefs and practices that were comparable to any world religion. In the narration, it is showcased that Africans believed in the existence of one God who is the Creator of everything and governs the course of life: "As to religion, the natives believe that there is one creator of all things."(9). This statement from Equiano evidences that just like Christians and Muslims, Africans were not ignorant or devoid of religious beliefs. Indeed, they believed in one God as the Supreme Creator. In other words, the author intended to highlight that precolonial Africans were not



heathens or pagans before their contact with the West. If they had been pagans, they would not have believed in the existence of a unique God. African continent is vast with multitude of nations each of which possessed specific traditional traits.

By discussing the issue of African religion, one has to take into account the cultural diversity of African societies. To sustain the foregoing idea, the reflection turns to the views of Phillis Wheatly who also wrote about African religion in her poetry, but her view on African religion is a Eurocentric replica. It means that Equiano's views on Africans' religion contrast the views of Phillis Wheatly, a poetess who was kidnapped from Western Africa to America. She wrote a poem in 1768 entitled "On Being Brought from Africa to America." In the poem, she referred to Africa as a pagan land: " 'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land, Taught my benighted soul to understand that there is a God..."² In this passage, Wheatly upholds that slavery enabled her to see the light, because according to her, her countrymen were unaware of the existence of God. That is, her native community lived in total paganism. She therefore praised her being taken from Africa as a mercy. That statement by the poetess diverges from the views of Equiano on the religion of Africa. This divergence of opinions from the two African American writers is the evidence that African continent was very diverse culturally. Both Equiano and Phillis Wheatly were kidnapped in Western Africa, but they were not from the same community. This can explain why the two writers did not have the same opinion on religion concerning their respective countries. Equiano was stolen from Nigeria in 1756 at 11 years old (13) and Wheatly was kidnapped from Senegal or Gambia in 1761 at 7 years old.³ In view of what precedes, we can affirm that Phillis Wheatly was mentally and culturally influenced, alienated and interpellated by Western civilization during the antebellum period into subjugation.

Coming back to Equiano, he reveals in his text that religion played a major role in his homeland. Priests and magicians were well reputed in the community; their tasks were to guide people and predict future events. Priests had as main tasks to calculate time and dates of local calendar and guarantee social harmony: "we had priests and magicians or wise men... they were held in great reverence by people. They calculated our time and foretold events..."(11). The excerpt also supports and testifies that Equiano's countrymen had significant intellectual capability to establish and calculate their own calendar. By showing

² See World's Poetry Archive.(2004). *Phillis Wheatly –poems*. Classic Poetry Series, P.38.

³See Max Tensing. *The Life of Phillis Weatly*. Houghton Mifflin. n.d, p.4.



these African practices, the protagonist wants to emphasize that his people were as civilized as any outside civilized non-African nation (Europeans).

The description of African religious practices by Equiano is a contradiction to the general viewpoints maintained by Europeans to justify Africans enslavement. It also helps divulgate his people's qualities and open-mindedness to the world. As a praise for slavery, some of the European slave merchants used propagandas as to which Africans were pagans, superstitious, primitive and barbarians: "It was this lack of religion – Africans' heathenism which Europeans used to justify enslaving them."⁴ This rhetoric was just an alibi for some slave merchants to satisfy their economic ends. Therefore, Equiano made sure to showcase the true reality of Africans' religions as far as his homeland is concerned. His description of Africans as believing in the existence of "One creator of all things" is the proof that the so-called rhetoric of Africans' primitiveness and heathenism did not have any cultural ground. Hence, at that time, any European who happened to read Equiano's autobiography would be enlightened that Africans were not barbarians or primitive people. Indeed, they are full human beings in the fullest sense of the word. It is also a way to prove that Africans were on the same footing as Europeans. These descriptions of Africans attributes by Equiano prove wrong the Eurocentric stances used by some non-African scholars to deny Africans humanity and civilization.

Concerning education in precolonial Africa, the mother is very important in the life a child because she is the one who provides care and protection. The child stays with his mother until he reaches the age 7 and without the mother, the child grows weak because he will miss his mother's care and protection. As a result, Equiano details that children, in their early age in Africa, were socialized and taught the first social and human values and relations by their mothers before their fathers took up the upbringing: "I was trained up from my earliest years of war, my daily exercise was shooting and throwing javelins, and my mother adorned me with emblems after the manner of our greatest warriors. In this way I grew up till I was turned the age of 11, when an end was put to my happiness" (Equiano,1996, 13).

The foregoing passage evidences that Africans placed huge importance on boys' education as they were expected to take over the running of the community in future. They were taught the basic laws, rules, and ways of conduct of the society. Another element is that they were

⁴See James Walvin. (1998).*An African's Life: Life and time of Olaudah Equiano, 1745 – 1797*. London: Continuum, p.7.

trained to become warriors, because this was the ambition of all African boys. The narration unveils the sadness and dissatisfaction of Equiano about slavery, which prevented him from acquiring that knowledge. The excerpt also shows that the narrator would have liked to grow up by the side of his family and community. Equiano actually describes all these things about precolonial Africa in his narrative to show that Africans lived a better life organized in all the spheres, and that they had an identity which was eventually withdrawn from them by slavery.

2- Slavery in Africa and in the Western World, What is actually the Truth?

As introduced in the first section of the paper, it has now become pertinent to compare and contrast the practices and institutions of slavery in Africa and in the West as witnessed and testified by Equiano in his narrative. We strongly believe that slavery had existed in traditional Africa long before the advent of what had come to be known as triangular slave trade and that it was humanistic and the converse of European slavery.

In the *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, the practice of slavery on African soil is a reality. In spite of that, we may interrogate how different was slavery in Africa from the slavery institution that had been established by Europeans? In Equiano's presentation of precolonial Africa, he admits that slavery was practiced in his homeland before the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He also sustains that its operation was different from European system of slavery. According to him, the practice of slavery in Africa was more humane and less brutal. He stresses that either Africans' slaves were prisoners of war or maybe they had committed other offences which were not acceptable in the society: "Sometimes indeed we sold slaves to them, but they were only prisoners of war, or such among us as they had been convicted of kidnapping ...or other crimes which we esteemed heinous" (6). In fact, the excerpt shows that slavery existed in Africa before Africans' encounter with Europeans, but Africans' slaves were mainly war captives or wrong doers, especially those who were responsible for kidnapping and heinous crimes. Inferring from the foregoing excerpt it becomes obvious that a person could be enslaved owing to his actions in precolonial Africa.

The narrative further explicates that people of Essaka had established these particular laws so that there could be less crimes and violence in their society. The following statement equally supports the same idea: "Africans could be enslaved for life as punishment for

crimes... others could engage in trade retaining a portion of their profits.”⁵ Through the foregoing, people may learn that some slaves were allowed to do trade and benefit from the profits of their trade. This situation of permitting slaves to do trade and at the same time benefitting from the incomes of their trade guaranteed peace and harmony among the populations, mainly between slaves and freemen. To this end, African slaves were not tempted to escape or challenge their masters because of the profit they could benefit from their labors.

In addition to their rights to do trade, African slaves were neither brutalized nor handled like pure chattels. Their status as human beings was recognized in African communities. Slaves were granted almost all the basic human rights. They were well fed, well dressed and they could get married or be married with the person of their choice. They were even granted comfortable sleeping houses and beds just like any other freemen or inhabitants of the community. They enjoyed many privileges in the community. They had the freedom of movement approximately like all the freemen. As stressed by Equiano in the narrative, despite their status of slaves, some African slaves were even permitted to keep their own slaves who worked for them: “But how different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West Indies! With us they do no more work than other members of the community, even their master; their food, clothing and lodging were nearly the same as theirs... Some of these slaves have even slaves under them as own property and for their own use. (Equiano, 1996, 9).

The excerpt shows the open-mindedness of Africans as far as human rights and humanity are concerned. Though Africans possessed slaves, their slaves were put on an equal footing as themselves. This African social convention gave slaves more rights and liberty. While in Americas, the enslaved Africans were considered as chattels and inferior creatures. Equiano’s countrymen allowed their slaves to possess their own slaves. Could this situation be interpreted as dehumanizing exploitation or oppression directed against slaves? In fact, it is not normal for a human being to own another human being based on rights, religion or civilization. It could be inferred from Equiano’s depictions that the practices of slavery in Africa was not as dehumanizing as that of Americas operated by Europeans. Equiano wrote this narrative to inform and show that his fellow citizens were hearty people who could not commit disgusting atrocity to other human beings under the pretext that they were slaves.

⁵ See Mary B Norton, et al. (2007) *A People and a Nation, a History of the United States*. Boston: Dolphin Edition, PP.11.12.

On the other hand, the enslaved Africans on American plantations unlike Africa's slaves were mainly innocent people who had been stolen from their homeland. Then, they were subjected to dehumanizing bondage. Equiano alongside many other innocent African children were harshly separated from their parents, and Europeans put them under slavery lashes. Yet, as mentioned previously, Africans were forced into slavery by other Africans because the former had committed illegal actions, which were considered as abominations in Equiano non-fiction. Moreover, as shown in the narrative, the only punishment that could deter other wrong doers from continuing their illegal activities was to drag them into bondage, once they were captured. These are actually some of the key particularities of the practice of precolonial African slavery as narrated by Equiano in his very enlightening and interesting slave narrative.

Unlike African slaves in precolonial Africa, American enslaved Africans or plantation slaves were much more oppressed and brutalized. The only thing that interested European slaveholders was the better management and bountifulness of their farms in order to make significant profits. Indeed, in America, the practice of slavery was mainly based on profit. To this end, enslaved Africans were forced into labors wherein they had no pays or no considerations. The objective of the American slave institution was to achieve and make materialistic profits by treating enslaved Africans as chattels and commodities: "The institution of slavery was transformed radically upon its removal to Americas. Instead of kinship ties that bound masters and slaves, slave owners in Americas held slaves as chattels."⁶ So, the hunger for profit was the main reason behind Europeans opting for enslaved blacks. Through the above quote, people can see that there is a significant contrast between Africa and America concerning the practice of slavery. Instead of enslaving people according to their immoral actions, such as crimes that breach the laws of the community, in Americas, Africans were enslaved by white slaveholders because of materialistic interests and their desire to make more profits by minimizing the expenses.

3-The Changing Face of African Slavery

After the enlightenment made by Equiano about slavery in precolonial Africa, meaning Africa before her contact with the capitalist world, and in the West, his narrative reveals and explicates another interesting element that helps understand the whole history of the changing

⁶ See Toyin Falola and Warnock Amanda.(2007). *Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage*. London: Greenwood Press. P.XVII.



faces of slavery in Africa . That aspect as castigated by the author upholds that African slavery was based on kinship in accordance with African values and traditions. However, it had drastically been altered while Africans encountered European slave merchants. It means that the mode of operation of slavery practiced by Africans in Africa had been affected when they met Europeans. On their arrival, European merchants had set up projects in order to depart some indigenous Africans from their ways. Hence, at the period of triangular slave trade, European traders used to bring their commercial materials and barter them with some local Africans for the enslaved Africans. Those European goods were so rare and so precious for the local population that almost all the local elites or rulers could be tempted to get them: “they generally bring us fire-arms, gunpowder, hats, beads, and dried fish. The last we esteemed a great rarity...” (6). Throughout that method of operation, European slave merchants had been able to incentivize and inculcate capitalist ideology into some Africans mainly kings. It is mainly at that particular period that materialistic and individualistic interests and gains started gaining grounds in African daily life, which used to be the very converse (communalism, collective interests and solidarity).

By means of incentivizing the local people, European traders succeeded in tricking some African kings into accepting the so-called European merchandise in exchange for their countrymen. It therefore enticed many Africans to trade their fellow brothers for materialist goods. For instance, some African people could attack other communities just to obtain slaves or to entrap isolated Africans in order to kidnap them for compensation. Equiano substantiates such a fact in the like manner:

I can recollect of these battles, they appear to have been irruptions of one little district on the other to obtain prisoners or booty. Perhaps they were incited to this by those traders who brought the European goods I mentioned amongst us. . Such a mode of obtaining slaves in Africa is common, and I believe more are procured this way and by kidnapping than any other.
(Equiano, 1996, 8)

The above passage shows that European merchants had used materialistic baits in order to tempt and lure some native Africans into doing slave trade with them. The same excerpt reveals that European capitalist institution of slavery was mainly based on kidnapping and deceiving Africans rather than Africans willingly and consciously selling their brothers and sisters. This is to remind people that what Westerners generally say about slavery, by taking Africans responsible for capturing and selling their kinsmen willingly, is not actually founded, for Africans were brainwashed by European tricks that made them accept to act accordingly.

For illustration, some Europeans, to cover the dehumanizing treatment perpetrated on Blacks during the triangular trade, blame Africans for the atrocities against other Africans. This Eurocentric idea is illustrated in a film entitled *Adanggaman* by Roger M'bala. The West fabricated that film in order to hide the realities of Africans' exploitation: "taking as its subject the enslavement and exploitation of Africans by other Africans, *Adanggaman* also marked as the return of the subject of slavery." (18-19) This fictional film was just intended to alter the historical facts of slavery by turning the oppressed Africans into the oppressors. It was also meant to minimize the role of Europeans as far as Africans' enslavement is concerned. Yet, these kinds of films or documentaries are rather based on Eurocentric ideologies than historical facts as shown by Equiano in his slave narrative. His account was based on what he had really experienced, seen or heard during slavery. Therefore, this account enables us to restore the truth about the practice and the institution of slavery in Africa before her encounter with the western capitalist world.

Conclusion

Judging from the revealed findings of the study, the terms slavery and slaves cannot indeed be applicable to the African precolonial context (*Djonya*, pawnship and clientship). The truth is that the European institution of slavery was self-perpetuating, inhumane and capitalistic whereas the one of precolonial Africa was humanistic, not self-perpetuating and not capitalistic. In the same direction, the study permitted to deconstruct through Equiano's narrative the white man's Eurocentric web of myths and stereotypical discourses against Africans and the black race as a whole. It also explicated the nature of African sense of slavery changed in contact with the western capitalist world and that precolonial Africa was organized socially, economically and politically. All in all, Equiano's narrative, as a testimony of precolonial African history, confirms that the Eurocentric rhetoric about Africans as inferiors and uncivilized do not have any historical foundation, and that slavery was a tragedy for them, for their status as human beings was denied by European slaveholders as they were objectified as goods. Now the question that needs answering is the following: could we really call precolonial Africa barbaric and uncivilized? Whatever the answer would be, the European civilization has shown its barbarism and inhumanity through slavery and then colonization.

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