

**KIDNAPPING:
An Underreported Aspect of African Agency
During the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Era
(1440-1886)**

But I must own, to the shame...of my own countrymen, that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by some of my own complexion, who were the first cause of my exile and slavery...

Ottobah Quobona Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*

Introduction

This article addresses the issue of African agency—that is, the active involvement by some of continental Africa’s indigenous inhabitants, i.e., members of various ethnic, religious, and cultural communities—in aiding and abetting the European slave traders during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era (1440-1886). They committed innumerable acts of kidnapping on their neighbors with whom they cohabited the sub-Saharan regions of the African continent: western, central, and to a lesser extent, eastern.

Many of the abducted unfortunates, besides being incorporated into the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, were sold into other slavery systems as well, i.e., the Trans-Saharan, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the ubiquitous internal networks for which there is a dearth of verifiable documentation translated into English. Fortunately the European slave-ship captains maintained fairly good ship-logs of their slave purchases for the duration of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era. Their records have been examined, catalogued, and categorized by several notable African and Africanist historians and scholars who also uncovered contemporary first-person kidnap-victim narratives. Despite these efforts to document kidnapping as a means by which millions of Africans were caught and delivered to prospective slave-buyers, it does not seem to have ever been considered anything more than a subcategory among the known methods of slave acquisition in Africa, and therefore not an important enough subject for independent investigation. This article will refer to these findings in order to present evidence that kidnapping, far from being an unimportant enslaving activity, contributed substantially to the human commodity commerce.

Africanist scholars John Thornton(1998) and Anne C. Bailey(2005) present contrasting views of African agency and differ in their conclusions in so far as the degree to which the African populations participated in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade; however, they concur that there was African complicity with the European slave traders.

African Agency

That Europeans kidnapped Africans and enslaved them during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era is an issue that I will not challenge in this essay (Thompson 1987). However, I will show that the management and conduct of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the African side was not solely the province of great polities, monarchies, and nobilities, as suggested by Thornton; nor was the kidnapping of Africans confined to the Europeans in concert with African “rogue ne’er-do-wells,” as implied by Bailey, but was a lucrative enterprise in which Africans, irrespective of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, economic, or social considerations, participated in their fellow humans’ exploitation. The wealth-generating opportunities provided avenues to self-aggrandizement, perhaps the overarching reason for committing such abductions.

A word in widespread usage throughout the affected regions was “Panyaring,” coined from the Portuguese lexicon (*apanhar*), meaning “to catch, seize” (Shaw 2002), the connotation of which is kidnapping persons into slavery, a pervasive practice which “merchants and even priests officially denied” (Mannix and Cowley 1962). Of the various ways used to ensnare humans for sale during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era, kidnapping was extensive. This phenomenon consisted of “tens of millions of specific and individual experiences of capture distributed in time and space” (Larson, 2000),

which included the process of physical intimidation and brainwashing that resulted in profound transformations in how most of the captives' bodies and spirits related to the alien and often hostile environments in which they existed, for their cultures along with their languages were forbidden to them, being replaced by their enslavers' traditions and languages; utilitarian in design to render them malleable, compliant and subservient . The effects of this programming, comprised of linguistic and cultural deprivation, enforced by unimaginable forms of brutality that included rape, murder, and torture, continue to manifest in the various societies and cultures where populations composed of violators and violated (which includes the offspring of miscegenation) precariously coexist, e.g., Brazil and the United States. The Africans captured in the several aforementioned regions were bought and sold in marketplaces that catered to local and international needs.

Slavery was virtually always initiated through violence that reduced the status of a person from a condition of freedom and citizenship to a condition of slavery. The most common type of violence has been warfare in which prisoners were enslaved. Variations in the organization of such violence—including raids whose purpose was to acquire slaves, banditry, and kidnapping—indicate that violent enslavement can be thought of as falling on a continuum from large-scale political action...to small-scale criminal activity, in which enslavement is the sole purpose of the action. Taken together, warfare, slave-raiding, and kidnapping have accounted for the vast majority of new slaves in history. (Lovejoy 1983)

The distinction between raiding and kidnapping appears to be, in a sense, arbitrary, for any unilateral, violent action that generates prisoners, separating them by force, and selling them into bondage qualifies as kidnapping in a broader sense (Patterson 1982).

Although those who were bought and sold in African marketplaces never left the continent, they were incorporated into internal alien cultures, some of which had

practiced forms of bondage, different from but just as oppressive as the European varieties, for hundreds of years.

Slavery was pervasive in Africa long before Arab and European traders arrived. Africans enslaved their fellow Africans throughout the continent... In Ghana, one third of the population was enslaved between 1076 and 1600...Mali was the greatest of the West African kingdoms...Large numbers of slaves were critical to support such a vast empire and were, along with gold, Mali's most important export. (Watkins, 2001, 7-8)

In West Africa the process of human deracination was helped substantially by indigenous groups and individuals who recognized the wealth-generating opportunities engendered by economy's need for a cheap, controllable labor-force. They strove to meet the demand and vigorously participated in the large, well-organized, wealth-making system, abducting countless millions to satiate the hunger of the "persons-commodification" market, better known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. They developed an adjunct network through which to move, sell, and ultimately deliver their "catch" to their patrons/clients.

A kidnap victim was more readily bought far from his home... Such long-distance trading required some degree of organization and specialization, and the transfers were no longer simple bilateral transactions but involved middle-men and entrepreneurs. (Miers and Kopytoff, 1977)

In East Africa the existence of slavery appears to have been quite longstanding by the time the Portuguese arrived in the sixteenth century, but was far from being an organized trade of anywhere near the magnitude that the West African phase reached, although during the early part of the nineteenth century it is supposed that the Eastern

phase approximated that level: “It was not until after 1810 that the East African slave trade became anywhere near as voracious as the West African trade at its height” (Alpers, 1975). Kidnapping likewise seems to have become prevalent in East Africa, and apparently for the same avaricious reasons as those on the western coast. Edward Alpers, (1975) whose observation that kidnapping “was a widely practiced form of acquiring a slave for sale”(240) offers a cogent illustration of this pervasive practice when he writes about “the fate of several of the Kiungani children” (240). Larson (2000) offers another detailed exposition of how the kidnapping phenomenon in East Africa was impacted specifically by the European slave trade: “European merchants actively encouraged the practice. Secluded, sparsely populated rural areas were the most likely regions in which kidnappers lurked.” Though this passage speaks to the Malagasy experience, a resonance can be discerned in some of the West African narratives that follow. Consider the following observation made by Samuel Crowther in “Igboland” ca. 1864:

While detained here [Idda] I gleaned some information about the countries on the back of Idda. One might travel from Idda to Onitsha by land through the Igara country, if it had not been rendered unsafe by a tribe of the lbo, called Igbo, who are hostile to travelers by plundering their loads, kidnapping their persons; and selling them away into slavery; and if there happens to be a horse among the passengers it is killed, and eaten up. Through this tribe Igbo, European goods find their way by land to Idda, such as gunpowder, brass rods, and other trade goods. (Isichei 1978, 20)

Indeed, during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era, day-to-day human activities such as crop cultivation, animal herding, hunting, and gathering, to name a few, were rather precarious undertakings in some areas of sub-Saharan Africa, for most people had to be constantly aware that human predators roamed the countryside at will in search of

victims. Crowther was himself captured, enslaved in the internal slavery system, and later sold to European Trans-Atlantic slave merchants. He was freed when the ship on which he had been loaded was interdicted by the British. He became a student at Fourah Bay Institution (now College) built by the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) in Sierra Leone, and upon graduating he was ordained an Anglican priest.

Stories of the Kidnappers

Elizabeth Isichei, working with a team of oral historians, interviewed a number of Nigerian Igbo elders who spoke of the pervasiveness of abductions in their regions. One was Obi Anthony Modebe, who was recorded in January 1975. Although only in his seventies, he had heard about what living was like in the earlier Igbo world from his father:

My father had one. If you happen to capture someone, he becomes your slave. They didn't really go out marketing for slaves. In those days, you couldn't walk three or four miles from Illah without fearing for your life, because there would be people lurking in the bushes—guerilla business. You could be in the farm working, and people would pounce on you and carry you away, to their town, and you would automatically become their slave. (Isichei 1978, 152)

He suggests that living in those times was a perilous, double-edged affair, where one day a person might be the hunter and the next day that same person might be the game.

Amanam Okpala, another elder in his nineties from Obeledu, was alive a few years before English colonization reached his village. He spoke of those times in September 1972:

Just before the coming of the white man to Agulu, I was no longer a very small child. In fact I was almost an adolescent when the white man first came to these parts. As a small child, I could remember that whenever my mother wanted to go to the farm to pick vegetables, she always hid us in the *uno aja* (clay house) and fastened the door. Could a child dare visit other children in the neighbourhood in those days? If a child tried it, he might succeed twice but not for the third time. He might be kidnapped even before the third attempt. (Isichei 1978, 45)

Joseph Nwose was in his mid-seventies in July 1972, when he spoke of how the slave trade and kidnapping had produced great riches for those who participated:

The two names best remembered in connection with the slave trade in Alor are Isuofia and Okwunanne Udeogu. Okwunanne was a native of Alor. Isuofia came from Arochukwu. From very early times slavery had been practised in Alor... In time, the volume of slaves obtained from Alor increased. A person like Okwunanne Udeogu took the collection and sale of slaves as his profession. People who collected and sold slaves became richer and richer. In time Okwunanne formed a gang not only to buy slaves but also to raid for slaves... He also had contacts with other slave dealers in the neighbouring villages. By this means the volume of trade in slaves increased and one Isuofia from Arcochukwu came to settle at Alor for the sole purpose of dealing in slaves. Okwunanne became the best known slave dealer in the whole area. People from the nearby villages could come to sell their slaves secretly in either Okwunanne's or Isuofia's place...It was Isuofja's duty to arrange for the transportation of slaves from Alor to Arochukwu. Isuofja did not himself engage in slave raiding. He only bought slaves from those who willingly brought them to him. (Isichei 1978, 50-51)

Besides these narratives, in 1956 a text titled, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* edited by Daryll Forde was published by the Oxford University Press. This book features a primary first-person source: a journal of questionable origin allegedly written by an Efik slave-trader, Antera Duke, who supposedly kept a journal from 1785 to 1788, in which are recorded slave trading exploits that helped to sustain the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. While the document purports to provide a window into the mind of an African who was involved in the commodification of others, one may justifiably ask questions such as,

Who taught Duke to write English? Were there other writers who helped him along? Was he the only African slaver to write down his exploits for posterity? Why were the accounts of his business practices made known when they were? In other words, is there a purpose to the timing of the diary's exposure? Why would the United Nations' celebration of 200 years of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Abolition include his name in their official commemoration, and the BBC-UK feature him on its history of British Abolition of Slavery website?

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/slavery_business_gallery

More questions could be, and perhaps should be asked regarding the diary's source; however, because it appears to have acquired an air of authenticity, it is included here, not as a verification of its validity, but as an example of the information available to those who have a desire to comprehend the complexities of the Trans-Atlantic-Slave Trade. It is with that in mind that the following excerpt from the document is cited:

January 30, 1785

But at the same time we and Tom Aqua and John Aqua joined together to *catch* men. (Forde, 28; italics added)

This entry indicates that kidnapping was a practice with which the alleged diarist was familiar. Forde writes that besides buying slaves from trading-partner towns, the Efik slave traders of Old Calabar also “went on war expeditions to capture slaves” (Forde, 69n23). The alleged diarist provides contemporary verification of African complicity while incriminating himself and many of his associates, with whom he shared membership in Ekpe, “a secret mask cult ... a male cult...an important agency of social control” (Isichei, 1997, 356-7), the purpose of which was to dominate all trade in the

Cross River area. This trade was the result of conspiracy and collusion in 1767 between the English slave captains and one faction of Efik slave suppliers who were enmeshed in an intense internecine rivalry due to the fierce competition for “slaves, oil and the European trade” (Forde, xi-xii).

Evidence of Antera having participated in the aforementioned conspiracy and collusion has yet to be found however, he seems to have secured an economically rewarding trade relationship with the British slave ship captains shortly after the harmonized massacre.. The relationship was long-term and beneficial, for by the time the journal attributed to Duke began, it is reported that he was wealthy enough to have his house built “of materials imported from Liverpool” (Reader, 402). Within the three-year recorded period of the journal, Duke reported seeing more than twenty sailings from his town, carrying more than seven thousand captives to the Western Hemisphere, many of whom he possibly supplied to the transporting vessels. The earliest known instance of this is a 1769 ship’s record (*The Dobson*) that lists his name as one of several Africans from whom slaves were obtained. Duke sold “thirty seven slaves” and received “4,000 coppers” which he redeemed for guns and gunpowder, among other goods (Reader, 402, 416).

The Bailor-Caulker Afro-European clan of Sierra Leone represents another example of African agency and illuminates the length to which some Africans and Europeans went in the pursuit of money and power. The clan’s progenitors were Thomas Corker, an English agent for the Royal African Company, and Seniora Doll, an African princess of the Sherbro ruling house, whose marriage solidified and increased the profits of the international traders. In the eighteenth century the Caulkers (a change in the last

name spelling had occurred) involved themselves in the slave trade and began to hire local tribes to capture other humans for them in order to meet the growing European labor demands. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherbro_Caulkers)

Madame Honoria Bailor-Caulker, former Paramount Chief of the Shenge district of Sierra Leone, spoke in 1977 to an audience at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association about the impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on her administrative district. Before launching into her address, she persuaded the attendees to sing “Amazing Grace” (Reader). Her address, according to Reader, “was very well received. Her introductory remarks linking the horrors of the slave trade to the history of the Shenge community evoked a lot of sympathy for her current efforts to improve amenities in the district” (Reader, 378). However, a closer investigation of the Bailor-Caulker family’s history uncovered data that showed it had been deeply involved in the very same commerce that she bemoaned. Confronted with the evidence, she responded,

Yes, the Caulkers were slavers. They ruled the shores of Yawri Bay between the Sierra Leone Peninsula [on which Freetown is located] and the Sherbro estuary, and their territory included Plantain and Banana Islands. Those islands were busy slave-trading centres, regularly visited by ships from Europe; the Caulkers grew rich and powerful on the slave trade. We bought the slaves that others brought from up-country and sold them to the ships. Yes, we were slavers. (Reader,379)

The clan was one of the most notorious Afro-European purveyors of humans to the slave trader John Newton and others in the eighteenth century). Her clan was deeply involved in most aspects of local and international slavery, and embraced kidnapping as an accepted business necessity in order to generate wealth. The following response indicates her attitude as she spoke of her family’s past.

But history cannot be eradicated...furthermore, powerful chiefs frankly prefer their ancestry to be rooted among the strong that ruled rather than among the weak that were enslaved. Ordinary people too, when an argument becomes a shouting match, are not always able to restrain the taunt: "Just remember, my fathers sold your people!" (Reader, 379)

Her statement suggests that many indigenous Sierra Leonean peoples harbor deep resentment towards the Africans designated as "recaptive" by the British Navy's abolition-enforcing sea fleet upon successfully intercepting a slave ship which would be declared property of the British government according to the 1807 British Abolition Act, i.e., a seized ship's property is forfeited to the English Crown.. (Sanneh, 1999, 110)

These liberated Africans were then re-settled among the indigenous who seem to be antipathetic to the strangers in their midst. Whether the supposed insult speaks truth or not regarding the taunter's claim of ancestral participation in crimes against humanity, its utterance reminds the formerly enslaved people's descendants that they remain at best tolerated "outsiders" whose heritage is impotency. Miers and Kopytoff (1977) report that as late as the publication of their book, similar reminders of a person's ancestry were still used for belittlement and disenfranchisement purposes. In Liberia, the nonresettled indigenous inhabitants call the descendants of resettled North American African slaves "Congo."

It is a somewhat derogatory term invented by the native Liberians back in the early nineteenth century, after Britain abolished slave trade on the high seas. British patrols seized slave ships leaving the West African coast for America and returned those captured to Liberia and Sierra Leone, whether they came from there or not. Since many of the slave ships entered the Atlantic from the mouth of the massive Congo River, the native Liberians, many of whom happily engaged in the slave trade and didn't like this new business of freeing the slaves and dumping them in Liberia, called the newcomers Congo People. Because the newly freed

captives were released in Liberia at the same time that the freed blacks arrived in Liberia from America, all newcomers became known as Congo People. (Cooper, 6)

Tangential to the fact of abduction is the subtle shift of guilt for the ensnarements away from the abductors onto the abductees, as exemplified by Mme. Bailor-Caulker's assertion concerning the insult hurled in anger by the common folk during a verbal spat. Her remark seems to corroborate Akosua Perbi's (2004) study of slave status in pre-colonial Ghana, which also may be currently true: "Even though in the course of time, slave descendants might appear to be completely integrated...the head of the family and his Elders would never lose sight of the slave's servile origin. Slaves and their descendants never forgot their original status" (2004, 113). Nwachukwu-Ogendengbe reported that a similar stigma on the slave-descendants hampered their full participation within the Aboh society of Nigeria (Miers and Kopytoff, 1977).

In some regions, kidnapping also seems to have become a "profession," the province of hired brigands (Thompson 1987). On October 16, 1974, sixty-year-old Nkwonto Nwuduaku spoke of this development during an interview in Urunnebo, Enugwu-Ukwu, and after implying that the body-snatchers were aware that they were committing indefensibly repugnant actions that would have caused them to be severely punished, he goes on to say, "In such cases, you know that the slave dealers must have tipped the kidnappers and would be waiting in a nearby place" (Isichei, 1978, 31). His observation illuminates the reality that in many instances, business arrangements had been negotiated beforehand between those who actually caught the unsuspecting people, and their "employers."

“We sold slaves because we wanted to be rich,” Nwuduaku frankly admits (Isichei, 1978, 31), and then he goes on to talk about how his father and grandfather participated in an arrangement that may well be described as “consensual kidnapping.”

Parents even sold their children, for want of food...these children were not told that they had been sold. Their parents would ask them to help their family friends (in this case Nkwonto’s father and grandfather) convey their goods to market. These children were pampered until they got to Afo Nkwuleto market, in Ubulu, where slaves were sold openly. My father continued that when they arrived with these children in this market, they were asked to look after a few worthless commodities. Then the slave dealers, mostly Aro people, would pretend that they were pricing those goods, when they were really surveying the children. They then came back to my father and grandfather, and a price was fixed—some items of European goods. My father said that after they had received these goods they disappeared, and that was the last he saw of these children. (Isichei, 1978, 31)

The betrayal of innocent filial trust by parents who colluded with other adults to deceive their children—because of what was perceived to be material gain for all except the children—was a particularly harsh reality for the Kabre of northern Togo, who sold their own kin as slaves during the nineteenth century (Piot, 1996). However, this was done by the children’s mother’s brother and not by non-kin, as appears to have been the case in Nkwonto’s narrative.

The children were first objectified and commodified within their parental household before ever being taken to market. Nkwonto related two other instances in which parents bartered their children, anecdotes confirming that there were occasions of African agency even within the family. For some the Diaspora began at home.

Remembrance and Ritual

Journalist Edward Ball, a descendant of a North American slave-holding dynasty, went to the Gambia region of West Africa, where he held historic interviews with the descendants of those Africans who sold other Africans to his ancestors. His book, based on the story of an English forebear who migrated from England to South Carolina to take possession of an inheritance (part of a plantation and twenty slaves), which in the ensuing years became an “American dynasty” that endured until the North American Civil War, is in itself nothing out of the ordinary as far as the millennia-old global sagas of bondage, bondholders, bondsmen, masters, and slaves go. The epilogue, however, is of relevance to this article in that it reports on the meetings between Ball and a few of the descendants of the Africans from whom his Ball ancestors had purchased slaves. At one such meeting with Peter Karefa-Smart, whose ancestor Gumbu overcame enslavement to become a very successful slave trader, Ball suggested that his interviewee’s ancestor was not only a slave trader but also “a tyrant.” Peter responded, “That’s the language we throw around today...That’s just intellectualizing it... Slavery was practiced in all societies...Nobody is innocent. Nobody can point the finger and say, ‘You are the guilty party.’ We can only sit back and say, ‘It happened’” (Ball, 423-424). Peter’s statements rang true for Ball, a fellow beneficiary of the same business transactions conducted between their ancestors from which both sides profited.

Before returning to the United States, Ball made a trip through the war-torn countryside to meet with the Temne chief and his family in a town that began as a Portuguese bartering post centuries before, Port Loko. There he met with descendants of those Africans who had sold many slaves to his slave-trading relatives. Through the

royal griot he learned that the Temne ancestors had been involved in procuring slaves for the Whites through slave-raiding and other methods. He wrote that the griot said,

Slavery was encouraged by the chiefs, with their warriors. If you are powerful, you can conquer people, then you have slaves. If you went to any town, it was to conquer the town, and take some captives. These people became slaves. You could sell them, or you could use them to farm for you. (Ball, 441)

After much soul-searching encouraged by Ball's gentle but persistent prodding concerning their ancestors' involvement in providing human commodities for exportation, the chief and all those present admitted through the griot that they knew their precursors had made an evil mistake.

When we sit together, we sometimes pray for those things that our ancestors have done, two, three hundred years ago....We pray that these people will be forgiven by the Almighty for they have done evil things in the past. (Ball, 442)

Ball acknowledged his forebears' responsibility and then they all agreed to perform a ritual of atonement on the dock at the town's creek, where the captive people had been loaded into small boats for the long trip downstream to the seacoast.

In other parts of West Africa, ritual practices intended to avert the expected vengeance from the spirits of those captured and sold into slavery were regularly performed and may persist until the present time. For example, in the Casamance region of Senegal, the Diola greatly transformed their spirit shrines to accommodate their enslavement activities during the Atlantic Slave Trade era. According to Baum (1999)

The methods by which the Diola-Esulalu became active participants in the slave trade, through reliance on religious authorities to regulate their commercial activities, is central to this entire study. The close involvement of religious leaders and their spirit shrines ultimately led to the proliferation of new cults and

the redefinition of the nature of spirit shrines and their priests. Such changes extended far beyond those cults that were directly involved in the slave trade, generated a whole new group of spirit shrines that emphasized wealth over charisma as a source of ritual authority, and led to lessening concern with the Diola supreme being, Emtal. (Baum, 1999, 6)

It seems that enslaving others as a means of self-enrichment tempted some in the Diola society to transgress their law forbidding abduction within the community. However, by reconfiguring their religion and its icons, they created temporary havens of protection that required secret ceremonies of propitiation to appease the spirits of the dead victims and to avoid discovery by the victims' families.

In addition, a new kind of shrine was developed by and for those who had committed the serious moral transgression of selling a child from their own community: this was "the shrine of the rice granary" (*hupila hugop*), concealed within the household's granary to evade detection and established in order to protect the family from harmful retaliation by the spirit-shrine of the family from which the child in question was taken. (Shaw, 2002 13)

Statuettes of enslaved captives (*bocio*) carved out of wood are also used by many clans that live in southern Benin and Togo whose Dahomeian ancestors depended on the slave trade as the foundation of their kingdom's economy in the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century. These *bocio* are believed to embody great power and can also be viewed as undeniable material memories of the slave trade (Shaw,2002, 13).

Among the Ewe, descendants of the slave-owning segments not only maintain shrines in respectful remembrance of their ancestors' slaves as part of their Vodun rituals, but they also give over their bodies to the spirits of these slaves "to possess and enjoy." This is their way of acknowledging the Ewe peoples' gratitude for the slaves' gifts of

labor, as well as their own bodies, to the slave owners in order to increase the clan lineages, and thus the Ewe survival (Shaw,2002, 14); they recognize that the enslaved women became concubines and, sometimes, wives of their owners, thereby giving birth to children who were probably included in the fathers' lineages; perhaps this action was intended to erase any linkage to the slave-concubines' former cultures that no longer were considered to be of importance. Their attempt at expiation involves not only inanimate objects—i.e., shrines, like the aforementioned Diola and the Dahomeian descendants—but their own sentient physicality as reparation for the collective ancestral guilt.

Narratives of the Kidnapped

I now turn to some of the kidnappees' personal accounts collected and transcribed by Sigismund Koelle (1854), as well as some that were written by the kidnappees themselves. These captives' words speak not only of how they became enslaved, but also of their experiences as slaves. The circumstances of their post-ensnarement existences differed, but what they all had in common was the capture: those first moments when they were deprived of their liberty, and over time were sold into intracontinental bondage or packed along with thousands of other unfortunates into fetid slave-ship holds bound for the extracontinental slavery systems, most notably, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The following excerpts from these narratives were selected in order to guard as much as possible against accusations of indiscriminately blaming the entire African humanity for the traumatic effects of kidnapping and slave raiding. Occasionally the abductees referred to those who captured them and those who owned them by nation, religion,

language, or even proper names. Inclusion of this information in this essay is not to be construed as verification of the identities, but to convey the memories of the violated, the majority of whom were perhaps first caught, as Ottobah Cugoano put it, “by some of my own complexion” (Gates and Andrews, 95-96).

Cugoano (b. 1757, Ghana; d. ?) was kidnapped when he was about thirteen years of age, in 1770 (Appiah and Gates, 1999). After having undergone all phases of the slave experience, he wrote about his kidnapping experience in his abolitionist works, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, published in 1787 in London:

I was early snatched away from my native country, with about eighteen or twenty more boys and girls, as we were playing in a field...we went into the woods as usual...several great ruffians came upon us suddenly, and said we had committed a fault against their lord, and we must go and answer for it ourselves before him. (Gates and Andrews, 92)

He then wrote that in a few short days, he became aware of how they had been lied to by their original kidnappers, Fanti-speakers like themselves, who disappeared after having delivered them to new custodians. He also wrote of what it was to like to feel despair brought on by the shattering of his youthful innocence and trust:

This abandoned situation may be easier conceived than described. From the time that I was kidnapped and conducted to a factory, and from then in the brutish, base, but fashionable way of traffic... the grievous thoughts which I then felt, still pant in my heart; though my fears and tears have long since subsided. And yet it

is still grievous to think that thousands more have suffered in similar and greater distress, under the hands of barbarous robbers...that no language can describe. Thus ... in this pitiful, distressed and horrible situation, with all the brutish baseness and barbarity attending it, could not but fill my little mind with horror and indignation. But I must own, to the shame...of my own countrymen, that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by some of my own complexion, who were the first cause of my exile and slavery, but if there were no buyers there would be no sellers. (Gates and Andrews, 95-96)

By 1791, four years after the publication of his tract, Cugoano had disappeared, and nothing more is known about his life.

Olaudah Equiano (b. 1745, Nigeria; d. April, 1797, England) was abducted along with his sister in 1756 when he was eleven years old (Appiah and Gates, 1999). He wrote about their abduction in his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, published in 1789 in London, two years after Cugoano's work (Curtin, 1967).

One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both; and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. (Curtin, 69)

After having passed through the hands of many different owners and many different lands, he arrived at the Atlantic Ocean:

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slaveship, then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, which I am yet at a loss to describe, nor the then feelings of my mind. (Curtin, 92)

The sense of helplessness that Equiano speaks of is an echo of Cugoano's memory of abandonment, for years later when he wrote about his experiences, he was still unable to summon up the words to convey what he had suffered.

Samuel Ajayi Crowther (b. 1806, Nigeria; d. December 31, 1891, Nigeria), a slave raid/kidnapping victim, was designated a "recaptive" by the British Navy's abolition-enforcing sea fleet after it successfully intercepted the ship in which he was shackled along with hundreds of other unfortunate, commodified Africans, en route to any one of the many slaveholding nations in the Western Hemisphere: Cuba, Brazil, North America, to cite just a few.

In an interview he gave some time after his recapture he talked about how he was first violated:

I suppose some time about the commencement of the year 1821, I was in my native country... The enemies who carried on these wars were principally the Oyo Mahomedans—with the Foulahs [Fulbe], and such foreign slaves as had escaped from their owners... They had no other employment but selling slaves to the Spaniards and Portuguese on the coast... Your humble servant was thus caught... I was made the eighth in number of the slaves of the Portuguese... On the very same evening, we were surprised by two English men-of-war; and on the next morning found ourselves in the hand of new conquerors (Curtin, 299, 300, 301, 310, 312).

He states that the "enemies" and his captors were "procurers" for the Spanish and the Portuguese. If this was the case, then we are confronted with another example of "slave-raiders for hire" that implicates the representatives of these European nations as promoting slaving raids on vulnerable populations by Africans who displayed a willingness to seize other hapless Africans for sale: "European merchants actively encouraged the practice. Secluded, sparsely populated rural areas were the most likely

regions in which kidnappers lurked” (Larson, 103). Andrew Apter presents Crowther’s own words regarding his initial encounter with the Portuguese: “It was not without a great fear and trembling that I received, for the first time, the touch of a White Man, who examined me” (Apter, 1992, 196). Years later, after being ordained into the Anglican priesthood, he was assigned to the CMS Yoruba Mission in Abeokuta, his native area where he was first captured; and there he was reunited with his mother and sister (Appiah and Gates, Jr., 532).

Many kidnapped children were spared the indignities of the existing extracontinental slave networks and were sold by their violators into internal bondage. Mgbeke of Umoji talked about her abduction:

My name is Mgbeke, me papa’s name is Okori, and my mother’s M’leafo, all of us belong to Omoji [Umuoji]. One day 4 of us went to cut wood in the farm, 2 men met us in the bush and said that ‘me papa’ owed him, and caught me, the rest of the girls ran away. I was taken to M’kpoho [Mkpo], and sold to Umutshuka, then to Bende, then to Oloko, then to Akwete and Igoni [Ogoni], and was lastly bought by Chief George of Okrika. (Isichei, 1978, 292-293, 332n12-13)

Charging the child with responsibility for alleged debts of her parents in order to capture her is a variation on the theme of deceit that we read about in the capture of Cugoano, who was accused of having trespassed against a “lord” who never manifested.

In some narratives, not even the home was a sanctuary; Rashid bin Hassani of the Bisa Tribe was kidnapped as a child, in the middle of the night. He recalled:

When evening came I went as usual to my grandmother’s hut to get food and to sleep...I was awakened by her. ‘What is that?’ ...there was the noise of shields rattling on doors all round us and ours burst open: half the doorway was blocked by a shield of buffalo hide. The old woman ducked to run out of the door and an Angoni stabbed her in the ribs and she fell almost without a sound.... I thought I

would run away: when I was clear of the door, I was swept by the warrior with his shield against his thigh and held there as his property and so that nobody else should stab me. My little sister started to scream and cry and another warrior grabbed her by the arm, held her up, and killed her with a blow of his throwing spear...I was too frightened to move or cry out...The other prisoners and I were immediately taken off about two hours' walk to the Angoni camp in the bush; there were more than twenty of us. (Perham, 92-93)

Next morning we moved off to the Luangwa river, near the Basenga's country; the next day we slept at a Senga village, and here I was sold as well as many children too young to go far...The man who bought me was called Kilole, and it was then millet harvest. At the next planting he sold me to a Yao safari, and with me went fifteen others...He took me eventually to Kilwa and sold me to a Manga Arab, Bwana Saidi, who lived in Zanzibar. I stayed three days with Saidi and then I saw a man wearing a turban come to market and say, 'Bibi Zem-Zem [the sister of Said Bargash, the Sultan Zanzibar] wants some slaves, go and pick some out... I was bought for 40 reales... A woman named Mtondo...came and carried me away... When her husband came he was told, 'I have got a child.' He was called Hassani and that is why my name is Rashid bin Hassani; my tribal name Kibuli bin Mchubiri. (Perham, 97-99).

Joseph Nwose's narrative indicates that this predatory phenomenon existed in West Africa as well—at least in the Alor community.

Okwunanne and his gang had various methods of getting slaves... In Alor itself they could go about in the hours of about nine to twelve o'clock in the morning. They could enter any house and kidnap the children whose parents had gone to the farm. They could also repeat the process between the hours of one o'clock and three o'clock in the afternoon when the parents had gone to the market. At night they could enter into the houses of widows and kidnap them and their children. (Isichei, 1978, 51)

Like Mgbeke and countless others, Rashid was integrated into the continental slave systems that held the slave-owners in high esteem.

Individuals accumulated slaves to show how well off they were, for a man's worth was often estimated by the number of his slaves. The same purpose, however, was served by the acquisition of wives and the birth of many children. The larger one's household and the more numerous one's relatives, wives,

children, clients, and slaves, the higher was one's prestige. (Miers and Kopytoff, 1977, 141)

Rashid, the stolen child, gave meaning to a childless couple who cared not for his birth parents, but without whose successful procreative efforts, there would have been no purloined posterity for them to purchase. Their self-deluded happiness was founded on actions that required them to disregard the origins of their seeming good fortune: death, destruction, and the trauma inflicted upon their "son's" psyche.

Phillis Wheatley (b. 1753, Gambia; d. December 5, 1784) was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery at age seven. John Wheatley purchased her in Boston, Massachusetts on July 11, 1761. While held in bondage by this family, she was given an English Christian education (Latin, history, English, geography, religion, and the Bible). The first published African American poet (Appiah and Gates, 1999), Phillis's story is important to this thesis for it provides evidence that an abducted African child was imported to the English North American colonies on the slave ship Phillis, and sold by the captain to an English settler Christian family (Thomas, 201-8).

Imperfect Numbers

In Freetown, Sierra Leone, a city founded in 1787 by British philanthropists for the purpose of returning Africans to Africa from England, the distinguished missionary

linguist Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle collected data (1850-1852) for his singular contribution to the “tradition of research into African languages.” He interviewed 179 Africans recaptured at sea regarding the circumstances of their original capture, of those who gave details about their enslavement, 34 percent had been taken in war, 30 percent kidnapped, sometimes by fellow townsmen. Larson (2000) cites Koelle’s numbers and augments them by including results from interviews done with the Amistad Africans (Larson, 2000, 14-15). James Covey, a recaptive born in Mendi country who later became a British sailor served as interpreter for the interviews that revealed 46 percent “had been kidnapped” (Barber, 1840, 9-15) Applying this percentage to the 12 million (half the difference between Inikori’s 15 million figure (1992, 5-6) and Curtin’s 9.5 million figure (Curtin, 1969) the number of abducted persons is over 5.5 million; at 30 percent the number of abductees is over 3.5 million.

The war captive to kidnappee slave ratio no doubt fluctuated during the slave trade era, and more than likely spiked during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, besides the Koelle and the Amistad interviews there do not seem to be any other studies that suggest a possible ratio of kidnapped to those enslaved through other methods.

Historian David Eltis collaborated with other well-known historians on an in-depth census of the human beings imported between 1519 and 1867. They researched the records of 27,233 trans-Atlantic slave ship voyages, and from the data gathered they tabulated the total number of slaves embarked in Africa at 7,943,600 (Eltis et al., 1999). A subsequent revised database that includes an earlier date (1500, and over 7,000

additional voyages) augmented the total number of slaves substantially (www.data-archive.ac.uk/findingData/snDescription.asp?sn=5584, 2007).

Harvard Economist Nathan Nunn, (http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/4134/1/MPRA_paper_4134.pdf 2007, 13) did an extensive study and made an estimate of the number of humans exported from all African countries known to have been involved in the major extra-continental slave trading systems (Trans-Atlantic, Trans-Saharan, Indian Ocean, Red Sea). After adding up the number totals for each country, I arrived at a grand total of over 15,677,544, 30 percent (Koelle's percentage) of which is 4,703,632 possible kidnap victims; at the maximum (Amistad percentage), 46 percent is 7,211,670 possible kidnap victims. Applying the same percentages to Eltis's newest census, the number of possible kidnap victims ranges from a low of 3,636,676.50 to a high of 5,576,237, all of whom were integrated into the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade system.

An unimaginable number of people, many of whom were undoubtedly abducted, were probably enslaved into the African intra-continental slavery systems for which written slave census data has yet to be uncovered. Therefore, a more comprehensive total of the number of African persons enslaved from 1440 to 1886 may never be ascertained.

Conclusion

Kidnapping undoubtedly had existed as a phenomenon in Africa since antiquity, but it intensified and grew seemingly unrestrained during the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries before the various European governments colonized most of the continent's regions and harnessed the rampage for their own purposes, which were as ignoble as the enslavement of humans they had abetted by providing the weaponry that the indigenous Africans utilized to prey upon one another.

The kidnappers violated not only their victims but themselves and their cultures. Baum(1999) shows that the participants knew the impact of their activities on their own mental health as well as the reverberations caused by their acts on the psychic and social well-being of their communities' posterity. Indeed he discusses shrines that are still maintained by families to ensure forgiveness for the actions of their forbearers. Shaw (2002) provides additional examples of efforts by some beneficiaries meant to mitigate the enduring impact of the inescapable knowledge that their inherited riches emanate from enslaving others. Piot (1996) tells of an Ewe ritual in which the heirs of slave owners attempt to deliver their bodies over to the spirits of their dead *slave* ancestors as a way of atonement for the actions of their dead *slaver* ancestors. These rituals momentarily serve their purpose but do nothing for the descendants of the brutalized Africans who have yet to share in the wealth that their ancestors' lives and labor generated. From this perspective, the ceremonies appear to be unintentionally cynical and self-serving, for the economic, social, and cultural positions of the slaves' descendants remain relatively the same to that of the enslaving classes' posterity.

Many Africans seem to have been willing accomplices and agents in the most important phase of the Atlantic Slave Trade process—seizing and selling their fellow humans. Cugoano's comment implies that he confronted and accepted, with heavy heart, the truth of by whom he was violated; a few years later, Equiano's narrative confirmed

Cugoano's assertion when he wrote, "Such a mode of obtaining slaves in Africa is common; and I believe more are procured this way (warfare), and by kidnapping, than any other" (Curtin, 1969, 77).

We live today with the consequences of kidnapping and concomitant actions that irrevocably altered the destinies of millions of people who were condemned and brutalized by others whose quest for wealth drove them to be unrelentingly harsh. They grew rich as they plundered, raped, and commodified other humans; they disregarded many of their cultures' moral principles; the effects of their actions reverberate throughout the countries of the globe to where the abductees were exported. The memory of abduction, compounded with the horrors they subsequently endured, did not die with them.

Perhaps public acknowledgement of their ancestors' participation in the enslavement of their friends, neighbors, and fellow-humans may encourage inter-group conversations, with the goal of repairing their broken communities. If the reality of African complicity with the various slave systems, particularly the Trans-Atlantic phase, continues to be a topic that is talked about in hushed tones, then genuine unity will continue to elude the continental populations' grasp. There is also a need to convene conversations of this type on an international level in order to provide the descendants of enslaved Africans in the Diaspora—especially the North American Africans—with knowledge that may help disabuse them of misinformation which until fairly recently tended to downplay or omit altogether the participation of some of the continent's indigenous populations in supplying the slaves that were dispersed throughout the African continent and to several countries around the globe. One of the perhaps

unintentional consequences of this has been to keep some Africans in the Diaspora focused on the Middle Passage and subsequent phases, the majority of which were overwhelmingly European-controlled. The result of the efforts to concentrate almost exclusively on this phase all but ignores the capture and drive to the internal markets, as well as to the slave-ports along the Atlantic coast from which their forebears were exported. This essay is an attempt to assess the importance of kidnapping as having been an underreported aspect of African agency during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Era. To paraphrase Thornton, no lone scholar can grapple with the enormity of the “primary literature in its entirety, even with the help of the existing secondary literature” (Thornton, 1998, 9) It is hoped that the information presented in this article will become a meaningful addition to the growing body of literature dedicated to better understanding the scope of African agency.

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Endnote

For an additional perspective on the *bocio* and their applications within the land and culture (formerly known as the Kingdom of Dahomey) that include regions of the modern West African nations Benin and Togo, Suzanne Preston Blier's *African Vodun: Art, Psychology, and Power* offers a comprehensive exposition of the *bocio*'s current and historical usages.

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