

E S S A Y S

Both of the essayists that follow agree that the Atlantic slave trade relied on trading partnerships between Africans and Europeans and was not the product of European control over African societies. In the first essay, however, the late Walter Rodney, an African historian and Guyanese political activist, argues that the Atlantic slave trade produced a "protocolonial" relationship between Europeans and Africans. At first, interethnic wars were a primary but incidental source of slaves for the Atlantic trade, but as demand increased, warfare was pursued for the sole purpose of capturing slaves for sale to the Europeans. The villains of Rodney's story are the increasingly venal African ruling classes that corrupted traditional African legal and social systems to produce more and more slaves for sale. In the second essay, John Thornton, of Millersville University in Pennsylvania, argues that the slave trade was governed largely by factors and needs internal to African social and political systems. The most important factor was that people, not land, were the major source of wealth and security in African societies and, consequently, slavery was an important institution; thus the shift from a domestic slave economy to supplying the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a natural one. Lacking a monopoly of the arms trade and unable consistently to defeat Africans militarily, European traders could not force Africans to undertake the slave trade or even dictate the terms of trade.

African Societies Were Transformed by the Slave Trade

WALTER RODNEY

Together with the Senegambia, the Upper Guinea Coast was being exploited for slaves in the 1460s, even before the southern sections of the West African coast had been charted by the Portuguese. Four hundred years later, the Atlantic slave trade was still being prosecuted in the area. Over this span of centuries, the Upper Guinea Coast was involved in all the phases of the slave trade. It supplied Europe, the mines of Central and South America, and the plantations of the Caribbean and North America. In the late eighteenth century, it was Sierra Leone that was chosen as the site for the first settlement of freed slaves in West Africa; yet in spite of this memorial to freedom, and in spite of the British Navy, the slavers were still present in the neighbouring estuaries and rias until the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, though the Upper Guinea Coast was not as notorious and unfortunate as Angola and the Bight, it is in many ways a classic region for the study of the Atlantic slave trade.

Fifty years after these shores had been seen by the Portuguese, the latter were shipping abroad, "when the trade of the country was well ordered," more than 3,500 Africans every year. Captives taken were mainly destined for the nearby Cape Verde islands and the Iberian peninsula, with Madeira and the Canary Islands providing secondary markets. Sometimes captives from this section of the coast were procured by passing ships and became galley slaves—as, for example, in 1504, when the East Indies fleet of Alfonso de Albuquerque obtained seventy Negroes at Santiago. This may also have applied to ships bound for the Americas. The Cape Verde

islands were situated on the route of the sailing vessels proceeding from Portugal to Brazil, and it is not unlikely that small numbers of Africans from Upper Guinea were carried as slaves to Brazil at an early date.

It was the Spanish market which held out the greatest prospects. . . .

The close connection with the Spanish Indies can be seen from the Spanish records of the registration of slave ships. The principal administrative device which the Spanish developed to organize the importation of slaves into the Americas was the register or licence (*registro*) which, on payment of a fee, was issued to a ship's captain, authorizing him to transport an agreed number of slaves from a given point in West Africa to a specific port in the Americas. . . .

During the height of the register system up to 1595, there seems to have been no standard annual issue, and the number of slaves which each captain was allowed to carry varied considerably. Some licences authorized the transport of more than 600 slaves, others less than 100. Nevertheless it is possible to arrive at some conception of the over-all volume of slave exports in this period. Both de Almada and André Dornelas left the firm impression that the years of trade in their experience from the 1560s and 1570s to the end of the century were years of boom and prosperity for the slave traders. . . .

The size of the vessels used in the Atlantic slave trade was quite small. Even in the eighteenth century they seldom went above 300 tons, while craft of only sixty tons were known to make the Atlantic crossing. However, the size of the ships belied the number of slaves transported. Dornelas remarked that it was not unusual to find 200 "pieces" of humanity packed into a small coastal boat, and the ships which made the Atlantic journey carried at least twice that amount. At the onset of the register system, the ships to the Spanish Indies carried 400 to 500 slaves each, and this was later increased. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the average annual export of Guinala alone was close to 3,000 slaves.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Spanish authorities were having great difficulties in regulating the influx of slaves in such a way as to collect revenue. In 1590, the House of Trade in Seville, having received reports that the customs of Cartagena were being systematically defrauded by the arrival of vessels with large numbers of slaves beyond the amount authorized by the registers, demanded a complete account of slaves entering the port for the preceding five years. The Cartagena officials were bent on denying their own complicity, and tried to convince the House of Trade that ships licensed to carry, say, 139 or 311 slaves arrived in America with exactly that number on board. Not only were these claims false, but whatever numbers arrived in the New World represented a considerable reduction of those who were embarked. In 1569, the mortality of slaves shipped from the Cape Verde islands to Spanish America was estimated to be at least 20 per cent on each ship, and much higher in some individual cases.

It is clear that the register system was not being complied with in terms of the numbers of captives taken on board on the African coast, ships being packed with cargoes of 800, 1,000 or more slaves. The object of the ships' captains was to defeat the revenue provisions on both sides of the Atlantic, robbing the Portuguese coffers in Guinea and the Spanish coffers in the Americas, because they paid duty only on the number inscribed on their registers. Furthermore, ever since the 1560s there were ships which obtained slaves even without registers.

... It is probable that as many as 5,000 slaves per annum were exported from the Upper Guinea Coast between 1562 and 1640; that is to say during the period of *registros*, corresponding to a substantial Spanish interest in African slaves, but preceding both the extension of plantation slavery in the Americas and the full development of the *asiento* agreements. . . .

According to another Spaniard, the Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval, who was in close contact with slavers and slave-owners in Cartagena in the early seventeenth century, the slaves of Upper Guinea were the most popular in the Spanish Indies, and were known as *escravos de ley*. This expression probably stemmed from the fact that the slaves were brought under special contract, but it came to mean they were slaves of the highest quality. They were said to have been diligent, keen, intelligent, and good-natured, and they never lost an opportunity to play their instruments, sing, and dance. They were also quick to learn the Spanish language, adopt the Spanish dress, and follow the *fiesta a la Española*. To this already imposing list of "virtues," the Conselho Ultramarino added that the slaves of Cacheu were known for their fidelity. These dubious compliments belong mainly to the realm of myth, though it is possible that, in adapting themselves to the New World situation, Upper Guinea Africans placed a noticeably greater emphasis on forms of amusement than did others of their countrymen. In any case, the resort to song and dance constitutes one of the most important survival techniques of Africans enslaved in the Americas.

Some scholars have felt that the specific provenance of the slaves has some significance for New World studies. However, quite apart from the likelihood that many of the alleged tribal characteristics were misleading stereotypes, what is relevant from an African viewpoint is whether the reputation of a given tribe or locality was sufficiently decisive to affect the conduct of the trade with respect to that tribe or locality. De Sandoval held that the preference for the Negroes of Upper Guinea meant that the Spanish American buyers paid more for them. Later writers, like Barbot and Ogilby, made similar claims; while a local report was provided by the English chief factor in the Gambia in 1678 that he was unable to buy slaves at Cacheu, because of the excessive price offered by his Spanish competitors.

One must therefore consider the possibility that the Spanish preference for *escravos de ley* was affecting the volume of slaves exported from the Upper Guinea Coast. This was implied by the Conselho Ultramarino when it stressed the importance of preserving Cacheu, because of the quality of the slaves, and because "it was from there that the greater part of the slaves needed in the Spanish Indies and the mines of Potosi were obtained. Furthermore, its loss would ruin the sugar estates of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro." The mention of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro is misleading, since Angola and Congo were supplying those markets. It could be that the element of preference affected the destination and consequently the numbers of Africans taken from their homes. Certainly, since the total of victims was not as tremendous in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, then the few thousands per annum transported from Upper Guinea were relatively more significant in the Spanish Indies.

... Of the 6,884 slaves said to have been imported between 1585 and 1590, all but 507 originated from Cape Verde-Guinea. At the same time, the Upper Guinea Coast was also exporting slaves to Nueva España (Mexico), Tierra Firme (Panama), La Guira (Venezuela), and Rio de la Plata (Argentina).

To obtain even a few thousand captives per year from this small stretch of coast was a major undertaking, providing a clear example of the organization which went into slaving activities on African soil and the disorganization which resulted within African society. How were such numbers of Africans made available for shipment? A modern history of the Atlantic slave trade states:

African natives became merchantable slaves in any one of five ways. They were criminals sold by the native chiefs as punishment; or they were individuals sold by themselves or their families in time of famine; or they were persons kidnapped either by European slavers or, more often, by native gangs; or they had been slaves in Africa and sold by their masters; or else they were prisoners of war.

This list can serve as a basis for the discussion of the conduct of the slave trade on the Upper Guinea Coast, with the exception of the category who were supposedly slaves in Africa, since that will require fuller attention at a later stage.

Up till the end of the era of slave trading, a ship's captain would occasionally risk kidnapping Africans from the shore (as Hawkins and the Portuguese before him had done), but such forays did not really pay, since they entailed casualties to the ship's crew. Besides, no regular or seasoned trader would resort to man-stealing, because it damaged future prospects. At the time of de Almada's writing, the Nalus on the Cogon had for several years been hostile to all Europeans, because a ship, which was loading ivory at the Cogon, sailed away with a dozen Nalus. The ship was manned by "individuals who had no experience of trade in those parts."

Given that for the most part the Europeans paid for their African cargoes, then the main issue relates to the methods by which Africans were made available for purchase. In times of famine, it is said that they volunteered themselves. Occasionally, such instances are documented, usually with reference to the Senegambia, where famine was produced by locust plagues. However, to cite famine as a major contributor to the slave trade is a gross distortion, and to add that "most of the tribes had no means of storing food for long periods" is to obscure the issue. Food shortages did occur among certain tribes on the Upper Guinea Coast, and those who were not rich enough to have food stocks all the year round had other means of meeting their wants until the main grain crop had been reaped. Famine could be said to have struck only when the staple crop failed and other supplementaries were simultaneously affected. Only a serious locust plague did this, and, for most of the West African coast, they were rarities.

The first record of a locust attack on the Upper Guinea Coast is provided by a captain-major of Cacheu, who reported that locusts caused a famine in the area in 1639-41. In 1750, fears were expressed that since locusts were swarming the hinterland they would descend to the coast. Shortly afterwards, the locusts were at the estuary of the Gambia, spreading desolation, and they may conceivably have visited the coast farther south. Of course these may not have been the only instances, but from 1750 onwards the chronicling of events was more continuous and more complete, and yet one does not hear of another locust swarm until 1841-3, and then again in 1893. Furthermore, even in these rare instances, there was no allegation that Africans proceeded to sell themselves or their children, so that the original proposition that such were the consequences of famine is itself extremely dubious.

Africans, in the main, were not captured by Europeans nor did individuals rush to sell themselves—they were forcibly brought to the European buyers by other Africans. "Wars" are admittedly the most prolific agency for the recruiting of captives. When the Manes led the invasion into Sierra Leone in 1545, they sparked off a period of unprecedented slaving. The Portuguese seized the opportunity to profit from the rout of the Sapes. The ocean-going slavers remained in the coastal bays and estuaries, while the boats of the *lançados* [local slave dealers] hovered like vultures in every river, waiting to take hold of the victims of the struggles. So numerous were the unfortunates, that the boats sometimes rejected further offers of slaves after they had gorged themselves until full.

After recruiting some Sape youths as soldiers, the Manes sold as many as possible to make the restless population manageable. Whenever a ship needed slaves, the Sapes were the ones to be sold. Farma, the first Mane overlord, died in 1606, and during his long regime it was not unusual to have twenty or thirty vessels loading slaves at any given time in the ports of Sierra Leone. . . .

The Mane example illustrates one extreme of the relationship between tribal wars and the slave trade. The origins of the Mane wars were entirely independent of the presence of the Europeans but, as a by-product, they filled the holds of the slave ships. Yet it is significant that the Mane invasions coincided with the activities of European slavers. Inevitably the Manes came to look upon the supply of slaves to the Europeans as an end in itself. English slave traders in the 1580s reported that Farma would obtain 300 or 400 slaves on request, by embarking on a campaign. This was one indication of what was largely true of Upper Guinea in the era of slave trading; namely that most of the inter-group hostilities were motivated by and orientated towards the Atlantic slave trade. The mêlée of peoples on the river Cacheu—Banhuns, Casangas, Djolas, Papels, and Balantas—was regarded by the slave traders as a paradise. Indeed, the whole of the Upper Guinea offered ample opportunities for conflicts between ethnic groups, localized wars being fought specifically to procure slaves for export.

One small but dependable source of slaves in Upper Guinea lay in the antagonism between the Bijagos islanders and the residents of the adjacent mainland. Bijagos society was geared towards the conduct of war. While the women cultivated the land, built the houses, gathered sea-food, and fished, the men dedicated themselves to building *almadias* and waging war. They attacked indiscriminately all the peoples of the nearby mainland; and the inhabitants of one island preyed upon those of another, once they were at sea—for the sea, they said, had no king. The Bijagos were excellent sailors and swimmers, and disciplined soldiers. Their weapons were handled with a dexterity born of assiduous practice, and tremendous prestige resulted from success in the use of arms. Women took the initiative in choosing their husbands, and they sought warriors with fine reputations. A successful combatant acquired many wives and *almadias*, and this in turn led to more wealth, especially since the owner of the *almadia* was entitled to one-third of the spoils from any expedition.

Bijagos assaults on the mainland had all the elements of cinematographic spectacle. The warriors anointed their bodies with red ochre, coal, and white clay, stuck feathers in their hair, and hung horses' tails on their breasts, attaching little bells to them. An elaborate ceremony was presided over by a priestess, whose final

duty was the breaking of an addled egg on the stern of each *almadia*. Then, with a dip of paddles, they went scudding off at a rate that the Europeans found amazing. Their journey was timed so that they landed during the hours of darkness. Surrounding a given village, they quickly set fire to the thatched huts. If the occupants came out fighting, they were cut to pieces by the expert Bijago warriors; and, more often than not, they were prepared to surrender.

The sordid reality behind these bizarre episodes was that the Bijago activities had been considerably stimulated and enlarged on account of European slave traders. It is true that some Portuguese opposed the Bijago tactics. Sebastiao Casao, a prominent merchant in the Geba-Ria Grande area, was in the forefront of a move to enlist the aid of the Portuguese government to put down the Bijagos, because they were harassing the Beafadas, among whom he traded. However, the more important consideration for the Portuguese was that they could buy slaves from the Bijagos, and the more frequent and ferocious were the attacks, the better were the slave merchants pleased. Up to 1594, de Almada seems to have been quite happy with the fact that the Bijago attacks yielded large numbers of Beafadas and Papels as slaves. In an account of 1669, another Cape Verde trader with long experience on the coast waxed ecstatic over the capacity of the small Bijagos islands to provide slaves. In twenty-five trips over a period of years in his own small boat, Coelho had personally acquired well over 1,000 slaves, apart from large quantities of other merchandise.

Bijago response to the European demand for slaves can be measured by the development of unity among the different islanders, with respect to the pursuit of slaves. By the early seventeenth century each island decided to put aside insular jealousies in favour of joint campaigns against the mainland, amassing fleets of *almadias* for this purpose. As the century progressed, Portuguese talk of defending the coast from the Bijagos was no longer heard. They (and other Europeans) concentrated wholeheartedly on exploiting the potential of the Bijago market. When slavers found few or no slaves, they would reproach the islanders, insisting that this was a stain on the latter's good name. Other Europeans, they said, would ignore the Bijagos on hearing that these famous warriors had become decadent. Such appeals, accompanied by the liberal distribution of alcohol, usually achieved the purpose of inciting the Bijagos to go out and bring in more victims for the slave merchants.

The Beafadas were particularly exposed to the Bijago attacks, but they in turn were active slave raiders, who spread terror in the hinterland. The same was true of the Papels, especially those on Bissau who had the direct assistance of the European traders. Like the ships' captains, the resident traders did not usually undertake raiding on their own initiative. However, there were exceptions, the most important being the *lançados* and *grumetes* on the island of Bissau. In 1686, three Spanish Capuchins carrying out missionary work in Upper Guinea prepared a description of the conduct of the slave trade. They reported aggrievedly that the Bissau *lançados* and their descendants not only engineered hostilities, but had also demanded of the missionaries that they should bless the slaving expeditions—threatening to hang them if they did not comply.

No tribe was free from involvement in these hostilities. Some did not take an aggressive stand, but were liable to attack from other tribes: the Nalus from the Beafadas, Papels, and Bijagos; the Balantas from the Papels and Bijagos; and the Djolas from the Mandingas. This last instance—that of the Djola-Mandinga

confrontation—had the same piratical overtones as the Bijago attacks. Sailing south of the estuary of the Gambia, the Mandingas fell upon the Djolas as they gathered seafood in large parties upon the coast. At first, the Djolas were taken unawares, but obviously they soon began to prepare for these attacks, and many Mandingas were in turn made captive.

None of these "wars" was fought to gain territory or political dominance. Few of them arose out of tribal animosities. This was the view consistently maintained by observers like de Mercado in 1569, the Bishop of Cape Verde at the end of the sixteenth century, and the Jesuits in the early seventeenth century. Even though their eyewitness accounts of slaving in the era of the "registers" were usually as brief as they were condemnatory, the picture can legitimately be filled in with evidence taken from later in the seventeenth century. For instance, the three Capuchins mentioned above had nearly forty years of intermittent Capuchin activity in Upper Guinea behind them, and they fully corroborated comments made in the previous century and earlier in the seventeenth, and added further details.

One of the things about which the Capuchins were quite definite was that all the conflicts which they heard termed "wars" were nothing more than robberies and manhunts; and the coastal *lingua franca* was rich in terms denoting the violent seizure of persons for sale into slavery.

With the incentive of European goods, slave raiding became a profession, with persons dedicating themselves entirely to the service of the slave trade. The heir to the throne of Bissau in 1606 was one such individual. In 1663 the Franciscan, André de Faro, encountered (and baptized) a noble on the river Nunez, who had a retinue of over sixty servants, all employed in manhunting. His name was Salim, but the Portuguese nicknamed him "The Highwayman." Such professional slave hunters were called *gampisas* by the Beafadas. It was their custom to acquire with the purchase price of their captives some wine or food, which was offered to the captives. This, apparently, was a sop to the consciences of the *gampisas*. The Portuguese found it cheaper to baptize the slaves.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the individuals who could be deprived of their freedom by process of law were those condemned to death, those who administered poison to or placed a fatal fetish on others, adulterers with a king's wife, and those who solicited war against the king or asked the *xinas* to bring about his death. To these it must be added that debts often led to slavery, and the same can be said for the variety of offences which came under the term *chai*: namely the failure to comply with prohibitions or taboos. The slaves obtained in these several ways could be considered in one sense as criminals, since they were duly convicted by the law of the land. At the same time, it is clear that customary law in Upper Guinea was functioning in a radically different way during the slave trade era than it did before and afterwards.

Many of the charges which resulted in enslavement were complete fabrications. Adultery, as many observers realized, was one of the charges which offered great scope for fraud. Marital infidelity was a common affair in the polygamous societies of the area, especially since many of the wives of kings, chiefs, and nobles were simply domestic servants. If in the normal course of things enough accusations were not made, traps were set by husbands with the complicity of their wives, so that "woman palavers" could be raised.

Above all, the allegations relating to the deaths of individuals were the ones which gave opportunities for chicanery. Crimes were essentially of two sorts: those which were discoverable by physical proof (such as murder, theft, or adultery), and those which were discoverable only because sickness or death had come about. Many deaths were attributable to evil influences, emanating from a *feticeiro*. He was sought out and charged with the offence of "eating the spirit" of the deceased. Sometimes the evil was conceived of as residing in the deceased himself. The Africans were prone to come to this latter conclusion when death resulted from accident.

Clearly, offences in the latter category had to be detected in a manner that was quite different from ordinary crimes. It was the interrogation of the dead person by the priest which yielded information as to whether a given person had died because of a fatal "fetish" being placed upon him; and it was the priest who ferreted out the guilty party, though ostensibly it was the dead man who acted as accuser. The possibilities for fraud in these cases were infinite. It was not that every death was attributed to witchcraft—at least, things had not deteriorated to that extent before the end of the sixteenth century—but when the interrogation led to someone being branded a *feticeiro*, this had all the appearances of a deliberate plot, with the slave trade as the incentive. Travelling in 1822 in a section of Temne country where the slave trade had been stamped out, Major Laing was witness to the interrogation of a dead girl. On that occasion, the answer was that nobody was responsible for her death, but, as Laing remarked, "had the slave trade existed, some unfortunate individual might have been accused and sold into captivity."

When anyone was successfully arraigned on a charge, his family and dependants often followed him into slavery—as though he had committed Adam's original sin, reported the Capuchins. This was always so in witchcraft cases, and sometimes an extended family could be wiped out in one sale. In part, this was a safeguard for the enslavers, since they were freed from the vengeance of the victim's family. In some cases, however, it was the family alone who were sold, because the supposed *feticeiro* was already dead. If, as outlined above, accidental death was held to be proof of evil dealings, then the person's family was also liable to penalties. *Lançados* were at the court of Masatamba, the Casanga king, in 1570, when a man fell from a palm tree and died. Immediately the officials of the king went to the house of the dead man, seized his wives, children, and relatives, and sold them all. This was not an isolated instance. By the end of the sixteenth century, a fatal fall from a palm tree seems to have become a "crime," the punishment for which was that the deceased's family was automatically sold.

From the example given above, it can be discerned that not only was there scope for fraud on the basis of the pre-existing law, but that the customary laws were themselves changing, especially with respect to the penalties imposed. This is the aspect of the situation which stands in need of greatest emphasis. Sale into slavery was becoming the punishment meted out for an ever-increasing number of crimes, descending to the most trivial, so that even when a charge was not spurious, there was a ludicrous disparity between crime and punishment.

Perhaps the assumptions of savagery which were long current in relation to the "Dark Continent" may lead to the belief that, slavery or no slavery, the system of law on the Upper Guinea Coast may have been unenlightened. This is far from the truth. In the opening years of the sixteenth century, murder alone was punishable

by death among the Bulloms, while the Temnes had no capital offences. Indeed, on the whole West African coast, capital punishment was a rarity, in distinct contrast to Europe. The principal penalties were in the form of fines. Adultery, for instance, was easily resolved by the offending male paying agreed damages. Deprivation of liberty seems to have been entirely unknown, but with the advent of the Atlantic slave trade Africans were led to become parties in plots which resulted in the life-long deprivation of the liberty of their fellows.

When the *lançados* violated local taboos, they were subject to fines, and they claimed that every pretext was used to mulct them. Some of the Africans themselves were open to the same kind of exploitation, with the vital difference that they suffered slavery as a consequence. Another example of the severity and ruthlessness introduced by the slave trade is seen in the treatment of debtors. To borrow and fail to repay the most trifling item in the seventeenth century was sufficient warrant for arrest, conviction, and execution by sale. That people should have been sold for debts may seem plausible in the light of the imprisonment of debtors in Europe, but it must be reiterated that it was by indigenous standards that the punishment of offences by slavery was lopsided and vicious.

The Djolas and the Balantas were hostile to the slave trade, and did not indulge in the various dodges and stratagems just outlined. On the other hand, the Casangas and the Beafadas were prolific producers of criminals for the benefit of the Portuguese *lançados* and the slave ships. Perhaps this may lie at the basis of the charge which the neighbours of the Beafadas levelled at them—that it was the Beafadas who introduced slavery into the world. On the Upper Guinea Coast taken as a whole, during the period of intensive trade with the Spanish Indies, the victims produced as alleged criminals were substantial in number. No lengthy list of slaving methods is required. The two forms of conducting the slave trade were force of arms (wielded by Africans) and the chicanery of a warped system of customary law.

From the methods of slave trade there arose certain consequences. Since some tribes were more predatory than others, it is possible very broadly to assess the results of slaving on individual tribes. The small Bijagos Islands appear to have been relatively immune to enslavement. To begin with, the mainland peoples could not counter-attack the Bijagos in their island homes; and, in the second place, the Bijagos were not favoured as slaves by the Europeans. It was claimed that Bijago children made good slaves, but adults (especially males) were not good bargains as they were able to wish death upon themselves, and frequently did so. Lemos Coelho pinpointed the Bijagos of the island of Ferosa as being prone to committing suicide, because of the belief that their spirits would return home. It is indeed true that the inhabitants of Ferosa believe that the spirits of the initiated find rest in an adjacent islet. In any event, the Portuguese steered clear of the Bijagos as far as securing slaves for service on the coast was concerned, and the Bijago reputation in the Americas was equally discouraging. Labat, a well-informed commentator on the American scene, said that the Bijagos were noted for rebellion on the slave ships and were sold with great difficulty in the Caribbean, because of their ferocity and tendency to escape. They would not work except under the whip, they wounded themselves, and they frequently committed suicide. . . .

A few other tribes may also have escaped with relatively slight losses in the period under discussion. De Almada thought that the Djolas were increasing in

number because they did not indulge in slave trading. This is not difficult to believe, because from all accounts the Djolas did a good job of defending themselves. The same can be said of the Balantas, so that comparatively few of these tribes must have appeared on the market.

The Upper Guinea Coast was unfortunate in that it comprised so many petty politics, offering scope for inter-group conflicts; and it was doubly unfortunate in having the powerful Mande peoples as its neighbours. When the Portuguese reached the Gambia in 1455, their reputation as dealers in human kind had already preceded them from the Senegal, and the Mandingas would have nothing to do with them. However, the very next year, the Mandingas accorded a friendly welcome to the Portuguese, and for the remainder of the long period of pre-colonial trade they were the chief collaborators with the Europeans in Upper Guinea. In the light of the Mande inclination towards trade (particularly the Muslim element), it was not surprising that the Europeans and the Mande should have forged strong trading relations. If human beings were the most saleable objects, then the Mande were willing to provide them; and they could exploit the vestiges of military and political control which they still maintained over several littoral groups in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. . . .

Tribes who had come closely under Mandinga influence also took the initiative in raiding their neighbours for slaves. The Casangas were outstanding in this respect—their ready supply of slaves and exceptionally favourable treatment of the *lançados* made Casanga territory a haven for the Portuguese. That the Casanga king should have been in the habit of bestowing on his Cape Verde friends gifts of ten or a dozen slaves attests to the amicable relations with the Portuguese, as well as his ability to produce this particular merchandise. . . .

Unlike the Mandingas, the Susus and the Fulas did not wield political or military dominance over the coastal people in the sixteenth century, but one effect of the Mane invasion was to set the Bulloms, Temnes, and Lokos at odds with the Susus and Fulas. Once conflicts flared, the captives invariably found their way into the holds of the slave ships. The Susus themselves began to move closer to the sea after routing the Manes. By the mid eighteenth century they had found an outlet on the Atlantic between the Pongo and the Scarcies, largely at the expense of the Bagas. By this time, the Susus and the Fulas had joined the Mandingas as the most active agents of the trade in Upper Guinea; but long before that, the Susus and Fulas had taken to raiding. During the second half of the seventeenth century the majority of the slaves shipped from Sierra Leone were provided by these two tribes.

The greatest victims of the slave trade may not have been people of the littoral fringe, but rather the Paleo-Negritics, who occupied the interior plateau and parts of the Futa Djallon. The Tenda country, as described by Mungo Park, was a vast tract of land along the Gambia between 10 degrees and 14 degrees longitude West. All this was under the rule of Mandinga chiefs and Farims from the earliest European reports, but discerning observers noticed that the supposed Mandinga population was not homogeneous. Jobson, for example, found that above Barracunda on the Gambia the men wore hides instead of cloth, the women were heavily tattooed, and a different language was spoken—though Mandinga was understood by the "better sort." Lemos Coelho was also able to point out that the population of the Gambia and Cabo was Mandinga only in the sense that this tribe had come to dominate the

inhabitants in every cultural sphere. The Mandingas had become "naturalized," and the indigenous people had taken the name of the Mandingas. Thus many of the slaves who may have been described as Mandingas must have been Tendas or Paleo-Negritics in the process of assimilation. Apart from these, Coelho also specified that the Bassarels, a distinct Tenda group, were the principal captives sold by the Mandingas; and some years later de la Courbe found that the slaves on the Gambia had become merchantable because of war, crimes, sorcery, or the fact of belonging to a "subject race." The latter could hardly have been other than the Paleo-Negritics.

For the period 1562–1640, the great slave-raiding tribes on the Upper Guinea Coast were the Manes, the Mandingas, the Casangas, the Cocolis, and (to a lesser extent) the Susus and Fulas. It is therefore accurate to represent the littoral non-Mande peoples as being to a considerable degree encircled and exploited by their Mande neighbours of the interior. One principal result of slave raiding was to emphasize and prolong the harassment of those ethnic groups who had sought the coast as a refuge, following political turmoil in the Western Sudan. When the *lançados* met the Mande on the mangrove line of farthest river travel they forged a trading partnership which boded ill for the peoples of the coast.

With respect to intra-tribal slaving operations, it is equally imperative to seek out the aggressors and the aggrieved parties. The slave trade exacerbated personal rivalries of all sorts, and no section of the society was exempted from these. There must have been conflicts among nobles, and among individuals in the lesser ranks of society, bearing in mind the fact that every act of violence and every piece of chicanery perpetrated in the interests of the slave trade often brought on its own train of vengeance and retribution. But superimposed upon these personal struggles, and indeed upon the inter-tribal conflicts also, there was a definite pattern of class exploitation, with the ruling class as the offending party.

The "ruling class" must be taken to mean the kings, chiefs and nobles. At times it appears possible to draw a dividing line between the king and his nobles. The slave ship offered a most convenient vehicle for the disposal of rivals to the king's authority, and the noble was obviously a profitable target for plots leading to the sale of his numerous family and dependents. De Almada stated that the persons who died after submitting to the "red-water" ordeal in Casanga territory were the rich ones whom the king wished to kill. But the king of Casanga was unusually autocratic. The typical king or chief of the Upper Guinea Coast was simply *primus inter pares* [first among equals] as far as the other nobles were concerned. The possibility did not exist for the kings or chiefs to victimize their principal subjects at will. Only with the substantial support of the nobles themselves can one envisage the king taking measures against one of their number. In the latter sixteenth and the early seventeenth century, the ruling class in Sierra Leone was not ethnically homogeneous, and the Mane element was bent on the extermination of the Sape nobility. Elsewhere, however, there is no evidence to suggest divisions between king and noble or between noble and noble leading to any significant export of the privileged class.

It must be borne in mind that when the Europeans arrived they dealt with the Africans through the ruling class. Only the ruler of a given area could grant the *lançados* permission to reside and trade there, and only he could extend protection to them subsequently. The responsibility for the slave trade, as far as Africans themselves bear part of this responsibility, lies squarely upon the shoulders of the

tribal rulers and élites. They were in alliance with the European slave merchants, and it was upon the mass of the people that they jointly preyed.

The law of the land was the king's law, administered by himself and the nobility. When this law was made into the handmaid of the slave trade, this came about because the ruling class so desired, knowing that it was they who stood to benefit from the perversion of justice. Another examination of the question of adultery will illustrate this. Though polygamy was theoretically possible for all, it was wealth which determined how many wives a man possessed. The nobles had dozens of wives, and thus plenty of opportunity to encourage "woman palavers." Besides, the very definition of adultery depended upon class considerations. Actual copulation constituted adultery when the wife of a Beafada commoner was involved; when the wife of a noble was concerned, physical attempt was sufficient for a charge; while an indelicate proposal to one of the king's wives was enough for conviction.

As with adultery, so with every other charge—the ruling class were the ones who instituted them, and the common people were the victims. Contemporary European observers had no difficulty in discerning this. Ogilby, for example, affirmed that individuals became slaves either through war "or else under the pretext of some imperious and arbitrary laws by the kings and great men of the country." The Capuchins were very explicit on this latter point.

The crimes for which innumerable men, women and children are condemned to slavery usually consist of deceptions, frauds and acts of violence of the powerful men; these latter are the judges, plaintiffs and witnesses, and in the end the unfortunate poor who cannot resist them are enslaved.

The same observers added that

the rich and powerful enjoy the privilege of making captives, because there is nobody to resist them. They [the nobles] look upon so many persons with dislike, and when they feel so inclined, they easily exercise their privilege, because their own interests are not harmed by their greed. The king proceeds with the same licence.

Apart from the unlikely possibility of being sold by the king, the noble could be certain that the law offered him protection. In Sierra Leone in the mid eighteenth century, the rich still only paid fines if they were guilty of crimes, except where the offender transgressed any basic rule of the Poro. Where slave raiding was concerned, the noble remained to a large extent inviolate because, if captured, he was almost always returned to his own people on payment of a ransom. Even the fearsome Bijagos were prepared to offer captured nobles for ransom in return for two commoners or five oxen. Up to the end of the eighteenth century, the ruling class on the Upper Guinea Coast continued to follow this practice of ransom for their own security.

If a noble was actually sold to the Europeans, he still had an excellent chance of recovering his freedom. In June 1622 the residents of Cacheu complained to the Governor of Cape Verde that the trade factor in Cacheu had been so foolhardy as to export a Negro related to the king. The consequences were not stated, but other instances of a similar nature indicate that the Cacheu traders had good cause for complaint. For example, in June 1680 the chief factor of the Royal African Company in Sierra Leone reported that two English private traders had stolen a noble

from the Nunez, and the residents had threatened to kill all the Englishmen who fell into their power. Fortunately the private traders carried the noble to the Company's factory at Sherbro, and the chief factor purchased the individual in question and returned him to his homeland. It therefore seems to have been the convention that nobles were not to suffer servitude, and that every effort should be made to secure the release of any noble who inadvertently fell into the hands of the slave traders.

The noble suffered a minimum of disadvantages through the degeneration of the customary law and the rise of slave trading, and if he was sold he stood a very good chance of regaining his freedom; the commoner was the target of all the abuses of the law, he was the victim of slave raids, and when he was sold his position was desperate. . . .

. . . [T]he *lançados* could purchase any captive without inquiring after the title by which he had been acquired, and with the assurance that they were not to be perpetually challenged to return purchases on the grounds that the individuals concerned had been stolen. This arrangement was essential if the Europeans were to trade simultaneously in the territories of the Casangas, Banhuns, Papels, Beafadas, and Bijagos—all within a limited compass, and each one selling its neighbours. When de Almada said that the river Cacheu was a slaver's delight, it must have been made so by the conjoint action of the ruling groups in each tribe to allow the *lançados* to buy persons freely, irrespective of how they were acquired. In the second place, Barreira's report that the kings did not challenge a sale when any of their subjects was involved implies that the several tribal rulers on the coast had come to a reciprocal understanding to equalize their greed. One king was not afraid to turn a blind eye when he saw his subjects being sold by another king, because perhaps the very next day their positions would be reversed.

There was another reciprocal agreement between the *lançados* and the African ruling class which militated against the ordinary individual who sought to escape after being sold. When a captive escaped from a *lançado*, the latter turned to the nearest chief or noble (with a "gift") and asked him to announce on his *bombalon* that such and such a person had fled. Such communications were the exclusive preserve of the ruling class, and without their co-operation the *lançados* could not have coped with the frequent escape of captives for whom they had already paid. Later the Royal African Company also found it necessary to pay neighbouring *fidalgos* to return fugitive slaves.

It is an obvious and well-recognized fact that the African chiefs and kings were actively engaged in partnership with the European slavers all along the coast, but the impression given of inter-tribal conflicts has usually seemed to outweigh that of internal struggles. On the Upper Guinea Coast at least, one is forced to give much more attention to the way that victims were produced for the slave ships from within individual tribes. As Basil Davidson points out, throughout the history of slaving all over the world the distinction between selling people within a group (such as an ethnic group or religious community) and those who were outsiders was not rigidly maintained. The same applied on the Upper Guinea Coast, where the kings were just as likely to rob their own people as to attack their neighbours. The isolated exceptions only serve to reinforce this generalization; because it could scarcely have been simple coincidence that the Djolas and the Balantas, who produced the least slaves either by raiding or by preying upon each other, were the

very tribes with an amorphous state structure from which a well-defined ruling class was absent.

Tribal divisions were not, then, the most important. When the line of demarcation is clearly drawn between the agents and the victims of slaving as it was carried on among the littoral peoples, that line coincides with the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged in the society as a whole. The Atlantic slave trade was deliberately selective in its impact on the society of the Upper Guinea Coast, with the ruling class protecting itself, while helping the Europeans to exploit the common people. This is of course the widespread pattern of modern neo-colonialism; and by the same token the period of slave trading in West Africa should be regarded as protocolonial. Though on the one hand there was no semblance of European political control over the African rulers, on the other it was the Europeans who were accumulating capital.

In the midst of lamenting the trials and tribulations of the *lançados*, Barreira related that one day a Mandinga arrived at Cacheu, having journeyed there to resolve a doubt which was besetting him. He asked the Moslem *imam* of Cacheu: "Why is it that the whites are free, and the blacks are their slaves?" The reply was that God made the whites first and the blacks afterwards, and he decreed that the latter should serve their elder brothers. This was an imaginative portrayal of the colonial relationship.

Indirectly, via European testimony, the African rulers made it manifest that they regarded the slave trade as an imposition, but were prepared to pay that price for European goods. On this point, the Capuchins offered evidence which they elicited by questioning the African rulers on their attitude to the Atlantic slave trade. They found, as Barreira before them had done, that the African slavers recognized their profession for the evil it was, but contended that they indulged in man-stealing because the whites would purchase no other goods. In the long run, the terrible logic of this situation caused the African chiefs to cling to the Atlantic slave trade as their staple economic activity, even after it had become an anachronism within the capitalist system. . . .

African Societies Voluntarily Participated in the Slave Trade

JOHN THORNTON

Warfare and Slavery

We have established so far that Africans were not under any direct commercial or economic pressure to deal in slaves. Furthermore, we have seen not only that Africans accepted the institution of slavery in their own societies, but that the special place of slaves as private productive property made slavery widespread. At the beginning, at least, Europeans were only tapping existing slave markets. Nevertheless, one need not accept that these factors alone can explain the slave trade. There