

# Daily Life in Western Africa During the Era of the "Slave Route"

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The slave route from Africa to the Americas is as old as the contact between Europe and the New World itself, and the slave route across the Sahara is older still. Hence to describe the lives of ordinary people in western Africa during the era of slavery would require an examination of the whole of African history over the past five hundred years and more.<sup>1</sup> And in Africa, as in Europe and the Americas, there was tremendous change over this period and extensive variation at any point in time. Life in 1807, when Britain and the United States outlawed the slave trade, was considerably different than in 1492, when Columbus first sailed to the Caribbean. Hence to give an impression of how people in Africa lived during the era of transatlantic slavery is also to understand how the lives of people changed over the course of the slave trade. In 1492, a *coup d'état* brought a Muslim ruler, Askia Muhammad, to the throne of the great empire of Songhay, and for the next hundred years, Songhay ruled much of West Africa. As empires have always done, Songhay's influence extended to areas beyond its military control. At this time, the slavery of Africans in the Americas was in its infancy. Yet, in 1593, a military invasion from Morocco across the Sahara destroyed Songhay, and much of the internal cohesion of western Africa came to an end, precisely when transatlantic slavery emerged as the principal means of exploiting the agricultural and mineral wealth of the Americas. The lives of ordinary people changed because of this monumental collapse of Songhay. Similarly, the changes imposed by European abolition of the slave trade after 1807, although confusing and often delayed in their impact, were also monumental. Hence the first task in considering how people

lived during the slavery era is to identify the differences over time that affected both people who were forced, through slavery, to cross the Atlantic and those who remained behind in Africa. Africa in 1492 or 1593 was not the same as in 1807, any more than Europe and America were.

Where people lived also made a difference because not all parts of Africa were affected by the transatlantic slave trade; some places supplied the trans-Saharan trade, while other places were too remote to be affected by either. Here, my concern is with those areas of western Africa that became tied to the slave route to the Americas; but even with this restriction, modes of livelihood varied as well, also affecting lifestyles, cultures, and material prosperity. Whether people relied extensively on hunting and gathering to survive, or were agriculturists in the forest or savanna, or livestock herders in the Sahel or Sahara affected their lives totally. Muslims or animists lived in close proximity, if not always in peaceful coexistence, in the northern savanna and along trade routes that crisscrossed much of West Africa. Yet there were areas that fed the slave trade where there was no Islamic presence. For example, the Igbo region of southeastern Nigeria, one of the major origins of enslaved Africans who crossed the Atlantic, especially in the eighteenth century, did not experience this Muslim influence.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Kingdom of Congo, which established diplomatic and commercial relations with Portugal virtually at the same time that Columbus set sail, was another situation entirely. While there was no Islamic impact, by the middle of the sixteenth century, many people in Congo had converted to Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Understandably, the lives of people in Congo were different from their contemporaries in Songhay, which at that time was at its height as a Muslim empire. Most of the Guinea coast, below the Gambia, was neither Muslim nor Christian; although not well understood in terms of historical development, people in these areas believed in a spirit world comprised of ancestors and natural forces that were propitiated through rituals and possession cults. Local shrines were the counterparts of mosques and churches.

To capture these geographical and temporal differences, and their religious and cultural manifestations, this essay considers the experiences of a few individuals as a means of portraying how

Africans lived and died during the height of the slave trade to the Americas. The accounts of Muslims describing life in West Africa are numerous in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Over one hundred biographical accounts have been recovered that describe some features of life in the western and central Sudan and the resulting impact of enslavement and slavery in the Americas. We also have other accounts of enslaved individuals from these same regions who went north across the Sahara or, indeed, stayed in West Africa. This approach focuses on real people and their lives.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it requires a degree of specificity in establishing historical context essential to understanding the impact of the slave trade on Africa and the influence of enslaved Africans on the development of the cultures and societies of the Americas. For this reason, this method of following individuals is intended to show the importance of historical context in considering the slave route. People in Africa lived in history, which is essential to emphasize because slavery as an institution tried to strip people of their social identity, and therefore their history. The oppressive conditions of slavery in the Americas imposed a degree of adjustment that required the adaptation of the enslaved in ways that would not have happened in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Forced to adjust in order to survive, enslaved Africans proved to be inventive in the ways in which they made sense of their lives and their pasts; the new cultures of the Americas drew heavily on the reinterpretation of the African background.

For the enslaved, the first adjustment was in response to the brutality of the enslavement experience in Africa. Enslavement as a historical force caused death and destruction as well. Those who survived suffered dislocation, even if they were able to escape capture and avoid death. The political and economic consequences of this process of dislocation and adjustment have been central to African history, and its legacy continues to affect the present. The slave trade meant that the daily lives of individuals could end abruptly during a slave raid, kidnapping expedition, or war. People were reduced to a condition of destitution because of such activities, and localized and periodic droughts were made worse because of related political insecurity. Besides the many people who did not survive enslavement, many others remained

behind in Africa rather than being shipped overseas or across the Sahara. Their status was altered. Where individuals had once lived in villages surrounded by kin, and where their sense of belonging was based on culture, religion, and language, they now became property, stripped of identity, that could be bought, sold, bequeathed, and even sacrificed at funerals in some non-Muslim areas. The enslaved who remained in Africa could become concubines and junior wives, if female, or military commanders and tax collectors, if male; and their material well-being thereby benefited from their attachment to the commercial and political elite. Many others who had been enslaved or were born into slavery performed the daily chores and the hard work, whether it was the preparation of food and transport of water by girls and women, or farming and tending livestock by boys and men. The slave trade affected the lives of all these people. An understanding of the living conditions of people from western Africa must therefore assess the extent of death and destruction as well as the impact on those reduced to a servile status, whether or not they stayed in Africa or were sent to the Americas. Conditions in Africa underwent a process of transformation that was not only tied closely to fluctuations in the demand for slave labor in the Americas, but also to conditions in the Islamic world and to the internal history of western Africa itself. While many people lived in isolated communities, hilltop retreats, or dispersed settlements only loosely under some central authority, if at all, we know very little about the lives of ordinary people in these places, except through vague oral traditions and later anthropological projections into the past. We know much more about the daily lives of those people who lived in centralized states, towns along trade routes, or places where iron working, textile manufacturing, salt mining, or palm oil extraction took place.

For the fortunate few in Africa, as well as for the European slave merchants and slave owners in the Americas, the slave route led to military success, political power, and commercial gain that enabled a level of prosperity and influence strongly affecting the organization of society and the development of culture in Africa.<sup>7</sup> The towns and cities of western Africa had their palaces and courts, public gardens, prayer grounds, market places and com-

mercial districts, as well as mosques, shrines, and, even in a few places, churches. At the centers of commercial and political power, the elite was often literate, at least by the sixteenth century in Muslim towns and by the eighteenth century at the ports along the Guinea coast and in the courts of the major states in the immediate interior.<sup>8</sup> Towns and cities were closely linked to the Muslim centers of North Africa and the Middle East, to the European-dominated Atlantic rim, or to both. The existence of these connections, whether to the Islamic or the transatlantic world, was long denied or misrepresented in European and North American scholarship, but a close examination of the historical record, as biographical accounts make clear, suggests otherwise. Moreover, the emphasis on memory and on the oral preservation of traditions has, to some extent, obscured the importance of literacy in connecting western Africa to the wider world. The oral tradition continued to function in the context of local religious, political, and social structures, but much of western Africa was not isolated from the Islamic and Atlantic worlds. The literate culture connected the Muslim elite to the Islamic heartland and to a "westernized" elite along the Guinea coast to the European-dominated Atlantic. Despite the scourge of slavery, the cultural history of western Africa reveals a level of education and a complexity of social interaction that demonstrates that many places in Africa were in the mainstream of world history.

How ever we look at daily life, we have to distinguish between the politically powerful, usually male, and those of subordinate and sometimes exploited status, whether because of ethnicity, age or gender. The range of experiences can be sensed from a consideration of the biographical profiles of enslaved people. Those who traveled the slave route offer a glimpse into what life was like at the time. The life histories discussed here relied both on memory and literacy; in some cases accounts were dictated to European authors, but in other cases the enslaved were themselves literate. Because the enslaved experienced life on both sides of the Atlantic, these comparisons are not only warranted but also provide a useful way of documenting the lived experiences of real people.

The specificity of biographical accounts are intended to highlight the importance of historical context. The reason for empha-

sizing context is to demonstrate that African history was as complex as the history of Europe and the Americas, and that to understand the emergence of the modern world, Africa cannot be considered in an ahistorical and unscientific manner without recognizing that a perpetuation of such distortions constitutes a form of institutionalized racism. Coming to terms with the past, including an examination of how western Africa did and did not merge into the world of the Atlantic rim, is essential in this process. For Muslims in the western and central Sudan, there were certain fundamental changes that affected how they lived. The period of Songhay rule in the sixteenth century and the turbulence of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries punctuated by outbreaks of Muslim holy war beginning in the 1680s and 1690s, set the tone for the period when the western Sudan became enmeshed in the slave network that supplied the Americas. The outbreak of holy war in the first decade of the nineteenth century produced the Sokoto Caliphate, which came into existence as a militant Muslim state. The result of this political consolidation was the massive enslavement of people. The *jihad* (holy war) is an important example of religious war as a cause of enslavement. The Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century were an extension of this movement, showing the importance of the religious component in West African history; the *jihad* of the central Sudan was the key factor in the collapse of Oyo after 1817. The key role of Islam made the area of the "Nigerian" hinterland quite different from the Kingdom of Congo, although the religious factor does call for comparison; the Christian civil wars of the Kingdom of Congo in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were similarly devastating.

The background to life in the western and central Sudan can be gleaned from examining Songhay. The writings of Ahmad Baba, the learned jurist from Timbuktu, are an indigenous description revealing a cosmopolitan world of learning and culture that unfortunately was nonetheless subjected to the tragedy of history – war, destruction, and slavery. Ahmad Baba witnessed the Moroccan invasion of Songhay in 1493 and spent many years in captivity in Muslim Morocco, despite his scholarship and Islamic learning.<sup>9</sup> His descriptions of life in the western Sudan in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries reveal a world that had

achieved considerable development; major centers of learning at Timbuktu, Jenne, and Gao attracted students, mostly males, of all ages and many different, ethnic backgrounds. They studied advanced texts in Arabic on law, geography, religion and mysticism, medicine, and other subjects. After many years in captivity, Ahmad Baba was emancipated and allowed to return to Timbuktu, where he continued to write and teach until his death.

Ahmad Baba's account is verified by another captive, Leo Africanus, another Muslim who spent many years in Rome, in captivity to Christians.<sup>10</sup> Leo records life south of the Sahara, mentioning the staple crops (millet and sorghum) that were basic to the diet of West Africans at the time, and indeed have largely remained so. He also describes textile manufacturing, the production of leather goods, and the distribution of locally produced salt and other minerals. Leo's Africa, like that of Ahmad Baba, was on the frontiers of Islam, closely tied to North Africa and the Middle East, not to Europe or the Americas. In this world, Muslims and non-Muslims had experienced a long history of peaceful, commercial intercourse, punctuated by issues of enslavement, political confrontation, and social friction. The presence of the "slave route," initially directed northward toward the Islamic heartland,<sup>11</sup> but then reaching the Atlantic coast as well, was a major destabilizing influence in the lives of many people. As the demand for slaves in the Americas increased, especially after the time of Ahmad Baba and Leo Africanus in the early seventeenth century, this destabilization associated with the slave route became even more pronounced.

In the late seventeenth century in West Africa when Portugal was continuing to develop its Brazilian domains, France and Britain were emerging as the major sugar producers based on their occupation of key islands in the Caribbean, and the fledgling North American colonies were only beginning to develop more than frontier villages. This was a period of considerable change in Africa, but even in the aftermath of the Moroccan invasion of Songhay, the savanna and Sahelian regions remained a part of the Islamic world, forming the height of the Borno Caliphate in the basin of Lake Chad, where scholarship flourished.<sup>12</sup> In the Senegambia region, moreover, some Muslim schol-

ars and teachers began to teach and then to implement a form of militant Islam that would result in the overthrow of many governments and in the establishment of new regimes, and even new states, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The account of Ayuba Suleiman Ibrahima Diallo, who was born about 1701 in Futa Bondu on the Senegal River, the son of a prominent Muslim cleric of Futa Toro origin, is particularly valuable as a commentary on how daily life was affected in the early eighteenth century, for he followed the slave route both as a slave trader and as a slave. Most people along the Senegal River valley had been Muslim for centuries, but by the end of the seventeenth century, there was considerable unrest within the Muslim community as reformers attempted to establish strong governments with a commitment to Islam. Futa Bondu was one such country with a Muslim government, established at the end of the seventeenth century through *jihād*. Indeed, the foundation of Muslim government in Bondu began a movement that transformed the lives of many, many people, as large areas of western Africa experienced *jihād*, first in Bondu, then Futa Toro, Futa Jallon, and inland as far as Lake Chad. By the early nineteenth century, much of the western and central Sudan had come under the rule of Islamic governments. Understandably this *jihād* movement met resistance, which is clear in Ayuba Suleiman's case. At the time he was enslaved in 1731, he was on a commercial expedition to the coast, where he had actually sold slaves for his father! He was later seized himself, sold to a British ship and taken to Maryland in North America, but secured his emancipation and subsequently returned to West Africa in 1734.<sup>13</sup>

There are other accounts, besides that of Ayuba Suleiman, that describe commercial life, which was closely linked with the far-reaching Muslim networks that connected Senegambia with the Sahara and North Africa, as well as European ships at the coast, during the eighteenth century. Abu Bakr al-Saddiq, who was born in Timbuktu in about 1790, describes the Muslim towns of Jenne, Kong, and Buna that were on the commercial axis from Asante and the Gold Coast to Timbuktu, an important route for the movement of gold, salt, textiles, and kola nuts, as well as slaves. His father was a wealthy merchant and learned scholar, and his mother was

from Borno, the daughter of a Hausa merchant. This background was reflected in Abu Bakr's education and life experiences. Yet Abu Bakr was also enslaved because he was at Buna when the town was invaded by an army from Asante.<sup>14</sup>

As these lives make clear, issues of slavery were complicated in West Africa. Both sides enslaved war captives and helpless villagers, and sometimes sold them along the slave route that led across the Atlantic, or put them to work in the fields in West Africa itself. But Ayuba Suleiman's testimony also indicates that people were freed from slavery, and indeed in Futa Bondu, Ayuba Suleiman claimed that "no person who flies thither [to Bondu] for protection shall be made a slave."

This privilege is in force there to this day, and is extended to all in general, that can read and know God, as they express it; and it has contributed much to the peopling of the place, which is now very large and flourishing.<sup>15</sup>

Ayuba Suleiman's account suggests that people in West Africa lived in the real world, where war and political struggle were capable of interfering with the daily lives of people. Moreover, his travels across the Atlantic, both ways, indicate that the history of the slave route was not unidirectional or simple. While most Africans who were enslaved in the Americas never returned to their homelands, of course, Ayuba Suleiman did, and inevitably his account is evidence that transatlantic contact, and hence influence, was not severed by the slave trade. The transatlantic world interacted with the Muslim world in ways that people at the time did not always know about. Both the accounts of Ayuba Suleiman and Abu Bakr al-Saddiq also establish the extent of literacy and Islamic culture in parts of western Africa in the century after the fall of Songhay. Rather than collapse as Songhay had, Islam had flourished and was now experiencing a degree of militancy that was to revolutionize West Africa to an extent comparable to the impact of the French Revolution in Europe.

Hence, Islam had a considerable effect on the lives of people in the northern savanna and Sahel. Moreover, despite the wars and crises of history, the general level of life for most people was reasonably prosperous for its day, not unlike other parts of the Muslim world. As described in the early 1780s, the various countries in the western and central Sudan were prosperous and religious:

... everywhere one finds towns and villages which are built according to the taste of Barbary; one should not be surprised that the inhabitants of these countries, because they have so much contact with the Arabs, have adopted both their customs and their religion. This is, as is well known, the Muslim faith which they all profess in this part of Africa. All the towns are provided with mosques; in some of these, especially in the states of Bornou and Tombouctou, one finds also public schools, in which writing and reading with arabic letters is taught, as these are the only ones that are known, and where also the Koran is explained to those who want to become marabouts or priests.<sup>16</sup>

In the recollections of Salih Bilali, a Muslim from Massina, the Fulbe country south of Timbuktu, housing in the towns consisted of two types:

Those occupied by the richer classes are built of *cylindrical* bricks, made of clay mixed with rice chaff, and dried in the sun. They contain two rooms only; one of which is used as a store-room, and the other as an eating and sleeping apartment, for the whole family. They are of one story high, with flat roofs, made of joists, overlaid with strips of wood, and plastered with a very white clay. The inhabitants sleep on raised platforms, covered with mats; and during the cold weather, which occurs about the season of the rice harvest, blankets of wool made from their own sheep, are used. The fires are made on the floors, and the smoke escapes by a hole left in the roof. The poorer classes live in small conical huts, made of poles, connected at the tops, and covered with straw.<sup>17</sup>

This description of mud-brick houses and thatched huts would have applied to other parts of West Africa as well.

The stories of individuals reveal the historical movement of Islam in West Africa, but also uncover human tragedy in the face of slavery. Through biographical accounts, we are able to visit the major cities of Africa, to gain glimpses into the *jiḥād* movement, and to follow the routes of commerce. In so doing, we see how people lived before the *jiḥād* movement, during the *jiḥāds* themselves, after the consolidation of Muslim states, even as *jiḥād* continued. One Muslim who was originally from Gobir, Abubakar was captured during the *jiḥād* that formed the Sokoto Caliphate, in the Nigerian interior, after 1804. He was then "sold to a Gonja trader," who then sold him to "a native of Ashantee [Asante]," who in turn sold him to a trader going to Whydah, where he was sold to a Portuguese ship.<sup>18</sup> Like Ayuba Suleiman, Abubakar returned to his home country after his emancipation. He was attached to the British diplomatic mission of the early 1820s, and

while still a Muslim, was known by the name of Pasko. Then there is the case of Dan Kano, "born at Brinee Yawoori [Birnin Yauri] and was there about sixteen or seventeen years ago [before 8 April 1821]"; seized by Fulani while on trading expedition "and carried to the Gold Coast," where he was also sold to a Portuguese ship.<sup>19</sup> The British officer who reported Muhammad Misrah's account of his westward travels through Borno and the Sokoto Caliphate noted that, "many natives from Houssa have been made prisoners by the Foulahs [Fulani] and [have] been brought overland to the Cold Coast."<sup>20</sup> Sergeant Frazer of the 2nd West India regiment in Sierra Leone was born in Hausaland, "and resided there a long time, was taken prisoner in Goingia [Gonja], and brought to the Gold Coast, where he was sold." Frazer was clearly a merchant who had dealt in the important trade in natron, which was mined on the eastern shores of Lake Chad and in northern Borno, and used in cooking, pharmacy, textile dyeing, and tobacco chewing. The route was the same "Gonja" road that Abubakar Pasko had followed; it was the road to Asante and its forests of kola nuts.<sup>21</sup>

As these accounts make clear, Muslims had been enslaved, and we are not always sure why, especially since there were legal prohibitions on the sale of free-born Muslims, just as Ayuba Suleiman had reported in Futa Bondu in the mid-eighteenth century. For example, Ali Eisami, almost certainly a free-born Muslim, was seized during the *jihād* in Borno, taken through the Sokoto Caliphate, and eventually sold to a master in Katunga, the capital of the non-Muslim government of Oyo. But Oyo itself was subject to the *jihād*, which erupted in the form of an uprising by Muslim slaves in the Oyo military in 1817. Because Ali Eisami was a Muslim and hence likely to be sympathetic to the uprising, he was sold to the coast in that year, and sold to a European slave ship.<sup>22</sup> Many Muslim slaves who shared a background with Ali Eisami, Sgt. Frazer, or Abubakar Pasko ended up in Brazil, especially in Bahia. Castelnau interviewed a number of Hausa slaves there, including Boué who had come from Zaria, apparently in the 1830s or 1840s, and was taken to Asante, where he was sold to European, probably Portuguese, slavers. Castelnau reports that most Hausa slaves had reached the coast at Lagos, not the Gold Coast.<sup>23</sup>

In 1819, Menèzes de Drumond interviewed six male slaves in Bahia who had come from Nupe or the Hausa region. All had passed to the coast at Lagos ("Ico") and were taken prisoner during the *jihad*. François was from Kano; Guillaume Pasco, alias Abubakar, was from Katsina; Mathieu was from Daura; Joseph was from Tabarau in Nupe; Bernard was from Gobir; Benoit from Gaya [Ghuiah]; and Boniface was from Kebbi.<sup>24</sup>

Among the Muslim informants interviewed by S. Koelle for his linguistic studies in Sierra Leone in the 1840s was Ofen, or Sam Pratt, whose name was Yasgua, born in "Nduro" [unidentified], and sold at age twenty-two by the chief and taken to the sea via Asante. This happened around 1843; "Nduro" was seven days from Rabba, east of Goali [Gwari], southwest of "Hausa", near Kambali [the Kambari people on the Niger] and Nupe.<sup>25</sup> Another of Koelle's informants was Habu, or Sam Jackson, who was born in Kano, but seized in a raid by Gobir when he was twenty, sometime in the late 1840s, and sold south of Lagos. Also there was Mohammadu from Katsina who was seized by Fulani while working on his farm, and then sold to Gobir, taken to Damagaram, and then sold south to Rabba and Ilorin before reaching the coast, probably at Lagos, in the 1840s.<sup>26</sup> Abali, who was born in Kanem, was seized during a Borno raid on Kano, and from there was sold south to Lagos in 1844.<sup>27</sup> Another slave, born in Kano, was captured in a raid on Gobir, "where he was bought by slave-dealers, and at once carried to the sea by way of Kadzina [Katsina], Zalia [Zaria], Nupe, Ilori [Ilorin], Dsebu [Ijebu], and Eko [Ikko, i.e., Lagos]," also in 1844.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Mohammadu, alias Jacob Brown, was kidnapped while farming, sold to Damagaram but ultimately reached the coast via Rabba and Ilorin, arriving in Sierra Leone in 1844.<sup>29</sup> These were Muslims from central Sudan. The stories of these men indicate that the disruptions of the *jihad* upset the lives of many people. Additionally, their enslavement and deportation resulted in the concentrations of Muslims in Brazil, specifically in Bahia. The movement of enslaved Muslims along the "slave route," both in West Africa and in the diaspora, also promoted the spread of Islam among the Yoruba. Moreover, a sizable community of Muslims also developed in Sierra Leone as a result of British policies that settled liberated captives there.

Transatlantic slavery pulled the Islamic lands of western Africa into the orbit of the most notorious section of the international "slave route." As the various biographical accounts of enslaved Muslims reveal, this extension of Islam to the Americas through slavery partially isolated these Muslims from the central lands of Islam, but not entirely. In Bahia, Jamaica, the United States, and other places in the Americas, Muslims were able to reconstruct the institutional basis of their religion and culture, which by the tenets of faith emphasized the community of Islam and the connection with the pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>30</sup> Explicitly, this meant that Muslims in the Americas did all they could to retain ties with Islamic Africa.

Except in the Senegambia region, coastal western Africa was more dramatically and immediately affected by transatlantic slavery. Wherever the deportation of the enslaved became significant, local societies and economies were affected, sometimes through destruction, death or enslavement, and other times as the beneficiaries of the profits of the "slave route." In the seventeenth century, a series of coastal states emerged in the Akan region of the "gold coast" and the interior of the Bight of Benin, where the Yoruba state of Oyo had risen to prominence. These states were heavily militarized; it has been said that their prosperity rested in part on the profits of the slave trade. As early as the seventeenth century, the coastal ports had become fully integrated into the larger Atlantic world, including the Americas and Europe. The letters of Philip Quaque [Kweku] of Cape Coast Castle demonstrate this integration. Born on the Gold Coast in 1741, and educated as an Anglican priest in Britain, Quaque was the first Anglican priest from West Africa, and spent his life teaching and spreading the gospel on the Gold Coast. His lengthy correspondence from Cape Coast Castle between 1765 and 1811 is a valuable source, by an African, on daily life on the coast. There are similar accounts of life among the Yoruba in the nineteenth century, both in West Africa and in the Americas (Brazil and Cuba). These accounts also suggest the link across the Atlantic, thereby demonstrating the important role of the major ports, such as Whydah and Lagos, in linking western Africa with the wider world, despite the personal tragedies for those who were enslaved.

So far, the stories have been those of men but what about women? What do we know about their lives in the same period? One account comes from Angola in the early nineteenth century. Catherine Mulgrave-Zimmerman, probably born in 1827, spent her childhood near Luanda in Angola.<sup>31</sup> As was the case with many people from Angola and Congo, she was a product of the "slave route." Her father was the son of a local African official; her mother was mulatto. She was seized by a "Portuguese" crew from a ship attempting to complete its cargo of slaves for Brazil. The ship was actually from Brazil and its crew was of mixed race, as was Catherine. Ship-wrecked on the shores of Jamaica, Catherine and other survivors were rescued by a British patrol. Christian by birth, Catherine was a brilliant student and teacher, eventually living on the Gold Coast and teaching for the Basel Mission. As her life demonstrates, daily life could cross the Atlantic. Moreover her name Mulgrave-Zimmerman reflects the even greater complexities of life along the "slave route," for she was named both after Lady Mulgrave, the wife of the Jamaican governor and patroness of the school where she was educated, and also after her second husband, Zimmerman, the German missionary who ran the Mission on the Gold Coast. Her first husband, George Thompson, was himself a product of the diaspora, being Liberian. The extent to which this story is exceptional reveals the complexity of the "slave route," for the Zimmerman's was the only interracial marriage sanctioned, despite great opposition and severe restrictions by the Basel Mission.

The children of the slave route were particularly tragic victims. The sad tale of Equiano, kidnapped as a boy in the interior of the Bight of Biafra, is well known, but it is representative of countless other tales.<sup>32</sup> Children were always a prime target of enslavement because their ability to resist was limited, and because in many situations they were more likely to adjust to a condition of servility. Equiano found himself in the hands of several owners before he was fortunate to secure his emancipation. His early life, nonetheless, reveals what life was like in mid-eighteenth century Igboland, where many enslaved Africans in the Americas traced their origins. Equiano's saga calls attention to the age of enslavement and to issues of memory. The plight of children is demon-

strated by his varied career. Equiano's native land was one of the most densely populated regions in Africa in the eighteenth century. The countryside included countless villages, with markets planned in four-day cycles among sets of villages. People worshipped at local shrines, where ancestors were venerated and the spirit world was dealt with. Equiano lived in a fenced compound. His father, a respected local gentleman, belonged to a local order in which he had purchased a title that reflected his status in society. He owned several slaves who assisted in farming and other activities around the compound. Throughout Igbo country, yams were the principal staple, but many trees were cultivated, the most important being the oil palm. As the example of Equiano being kidnapped makes clear, life was not always safe in the interior of the Bight of Biafra, but in general the land was productive, virtually free from drought, so that most people had enough food to eat and were able to purchase or otherwise acquire the material comforts common in the eighteenth century – clothing, shelter, jewellery, etc. However, unlike Muslim areas and some countries along the Guinea coast, this region in the interior of the Bight of Biafra was almost entirely cut off from the outside world, other than through the trade of slaves for export and the resulting commodities imported in exchange. There were no Muslim merchants, unlike in most other parts of western Africa, and like the region stretching south from the ports of Old Calabar and Bonny as far as Angola, the Islamic factor was absent. Moreover, there was virtually no Christian influence in this area before the middle of the nineteenth century, again marking this area off from coastal ports to the west and from Angola and Congo to the south.

These accounts are representative of those areas from where slaves came who ended up in the Americas. Specifically, they demonstrate that many Africans were as fully caught up in the affairs of the world as Europeans were. In fact, the various lives that have been examined here show several overlapping and intersecting worlds and most clearly indicate a distinction between a transatlantic culture that arose along the slave route, and an Islamic world that crossed the Sahara but also reached the Americas. From a European perspective, these other worlds have sometimes appeared blurred or nonexistent, but the life histories of individu-

als who followed the slave routes show that other perspectives can nonetheless be recovered. For many people in Africa, the modern world emerged in the context of the transatlantic scourge of slavery and the expansionist aims of militant Islam, although it should be remembered that the majority of Africans lived elsewhere. This sketch is intended to be time and place specific.

Because my intention has been to look at daily life in those areas that were most closely tied to the slave route to the Americas, I have inevitably relied on the accounts of individuals whose lives have become known to us, most often as a result of later accounts that chronicle enslavement and life under slavery. Moreover, I have restricted my coverage to the region of the western and central Sudan, which was heavily influenced by the course of Islamic history. The specificity of the situations that have been described are important. Historical context has to be individualized to understand the plight of people who lived in the age of the "slave route." Inevitably, my selection of individuals introduces distortions to an understanding of how other people were affected, and it overlooks those Africans, particularly those who lived outside the sphere of large, centralized states, who lived beyond the slave routes. These people, primarily farmers who tended some livestock but supplemented their food supply by hunting and collecting wild foods, lived in villages and hamlets that tended to be organized on the basis of kinship and marital relationships. Religious and cultural practices emphasized the spirit world; the rich artistic and musical heritage of Africa was fully developed in many of these isolated enclaves. These were areas beyond Islamic penetration and Christian influence, and in many ways were more typical of Africa as a whole in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at the height of the transatlantic slave route. An examination of areas where Islam was important does not diminish the experiences of these people. Rather, my intention has been to demonstrate that daily life in Africa was affected by the slave route in ways that were historically specific.

## Notes

1. See, for example, the multivolume UNESCO *History of Africa*, and more local studies such as Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan, 1980).
2. Kenneth Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980* (Ibadan, 1990); A.E. Afigbo, "Igboland before 1800," in Ikime, *Groundwork of Nigerian History*.
3. See, for example, John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge, 1992).
4. See, for example, Philip D. Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered: Narratives of West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, 1967); Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stores and Spiritual Struggles* (New York, 1997); Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York, 1984); and Carl Campbell, "Mohammedu Sisei of Gambia and Trinidad, c. 1788-1838," *African Studies of the West Indies Bulletin* 7 (1974): 29-38.
5. See Paul E. Lovejoy, "Biography as Source Material: Towards a Biographical Archive of Enslaved Africans," in Robin Law (ed.), *Sources for the Study of the Slave Trade and the African Diaspora* (Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, 1997).
6. This process of adjustment has sometimes been referred to as "creolization," which originally distinguished between those people born in the Americas, and those who were born in the Old World, whether Africa or Europe; see Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford, 1971); and Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992 [1956]).  
For a critique of this approach, see my paper "Identifying Enslaved Africans: Methodological and Conceptual Considerations in Studying the African Diaspora," paper presented at the UNESCO Summer Institute, "Identifying Enslaved Africans: The 'Nigerian' Hinterland and the African Diaspora," York University, Canada, 1997.
7. Claude Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de l'esclavage. Le ventre de fer et d'argent* (Paris, 1986).
8. For the extent of literacy among Muslims, see, for example, the detailed bibliography of texts written in Arabic that has been compiled by John Hunwick, *The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa: Arabic Literature of Africa*, Vol. II (Leiden, 1995). For the development of literacy along the Guinea coast, see Daryll Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London, 1956), p.viii.
9. The literature on Ahmad Baba is extensive, but see Bernard Bernard and Michelle Jacobs, "The Mi'raj: A Legal Treatise on Slavery by Ahmad Baba," in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1, pp.125-59. Also see Elias N. Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu: The Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables 1400-1900* (Cambridge, 1983).
10. Joannes Leo Africanus, *Description de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1956).
11. John Hunwick, "Black Africans in the Mediterranean World: Introduction to a Neglected Aspect of the African Diaspora," in Elizabeth Savage (ed.), *The Human Commodity: Perspectives on the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (London, 1992).

12. See Bala Usman and Nur Alkali (eds.), *Studies in the History of Pre-Colonial Borno* (Zaria, 1983).
13. The most convenient source of Ayuba Suleiman's account, with introduction and annotation, is in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, pp.17-59.
14. See Abu Bakr's account and the commentary by Ivor Wilks, in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, pp.152-69.
15. Ayuba Suleiman Ibrahima, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job*, in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, p.37.
16. August von Einsiedel, "Nachricht von den innern Länder von Afrika, auf einer 1785 nach Tunis unternommenen Reise," in Ernst Wilhelm Cuhn, (ed.), *Sammlung merkwürdiger Reisen in das Innre von Afrika*, vol.III (Leipzig,1791), p.446.
17. Salih Bilali's recollections of Massina, in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, p.149.
18. Richard Lander, Records of Captain Clapperton's *Last Expedition to Africa*, vol. I (London, 1830), pp.204, 206.
19. "Narrative of a Journey from Egypt to the Western Coast of Africa, by Mahomed Misrah. Communicated by an Officer Serving in Sierra Leone, 8 April 1821," *The Quarterly Journal* (October 1822): 6.
20. *Ibid.*, p.14.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.
22. H. F. C. Smith, Murray Last, and Gambo Gubio (eds.), "Ali Eisami Gazirmabe of Bornu," in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, pp.202, 211-12.
23. Frances de Castelnau, *Renseignements sur l'Afrique centrale* (Paris, 1851), p.40.
24. M. Menèzes de Drumond, "Lettres sur l'Afrique ancienne et moderne," *Journal des Voyages* 32 (1826): 290-324.
25. Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana* (London, 1854), p.19.
26. *Ibid.*, p.17.
27. *Ibid.*, p.10.
28. *Ibid.*, p.17.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Sultana Afroz, "The Unsung Slaves: Islam in Plantation Jamaica," *Caribbean Quarterly*, 41, no.3/4 (1995): 30-44; Allan Austin, "Islamic Identities in Africans in North America in the Days of Slavery (1731-1865)," *Islam et sociétés au sud du Sahara* 7 (1993): 205-19; Michael A. Gomez, "Muslims in Early America," *The Journal of Southern History*, 60, no.4 (1994): 671-710; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Background to Rebellion: The Origins of Muslim Slaves in Bahia", *Slavery and Abolition* 15 (1994): 151-80; Joao José Reis, "Slave Resistance in Brazil: Bahia, 1807-1835," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 25, 1 (1988): 111-44; Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore, 1993); and Reis and Paulo F. de Moraes Farias, "Islam and Slave Resistance in Bahia, Brazil," *Islam and sociétés au sud du Sahara* 3 (1989): 41-66.
31. Peter Haenger, "Ein Missionar fällt aus dem Rahmen," based on reports and letters in the Basel Mission Archives. Also see John Henry Buchner, *The Moravians in Jamaica: History of the Mission of the United Brethren's Church to the Negroes in the Island of Jamaica, from the Year 1754 to 1854* (London, 1854); and Jon Miller, *The Social Control of Religious Zeal: A Study of Organizational Contradictions* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1994).
32. Olaudah Equiano, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa The African*, 2 vols.(London, 1969 [1789]); Paul Edwards, "Three West African Writers of the

1780s," in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative* (New York, 1985); Paul Edwards, "...Written by Himself: A Manuscript Letter of Olaudah Equiano," *Notes and Queries*, no.2/3 (1968): 222-25; Ian Duffield and Paul Edwards, "Equiano's Turks and Christians: An Eighteenth-Century African View of Islam," *Journal of African Studies*, 2 (1975/76); and Catherine O. Acholonu, *The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano – An Anthropological Research* (Owerri, 1989). Even in the case of Equiano, a full biography is only now being written; see James Walvin, "An African's Life: Olaudah Equiano, 1745-1797," conference on "West Africa and the Americas: Repercussions of the Slave Trade," University of the West Indies, Jamaica, February 1997.

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