

Tribhuvan University

**Abolitionist voice in *The Interesting Narrative Of Life Of Olaudah Equiano*
Or *Gustavus Vassa***

**A Thesis submitted to the Central Department of English,
Tribhuvan University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

**By
Runa Gautam**

**Central Department of English
Kirtipur, Kathmandu
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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “The Abolitionist Voice in the Life of Olaudah Equiano” by Mrs. Runa Gautam has been submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Abstract

The research work analyzes the abolitionist voice of the protagonist or the author Olaudah Equiano in the narrative written by himself. The autobiographical narrative *The interesting narrative of life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa* puts light on the horrible treatment of whites to the blacks during the time of slavery. As such, this thesis explores the sole aspiration of the blacks to get liberation and emancipation from slavery.

Admittedly, abolition of slavery was the dream of every black people. The major argument is that racism is responsible for such fierceful domination, suppression and violation. Slaves were no more taken as human being. Colour is the means to identify race and a way of establishing the relationship between the masters and the slaves. Olaudah Equiano undergoes this form of suppression. He gets sold for ten times to different masters and faces many problems as normal slaves in that scenario face. However, he gets managed to liberate from slavery in the later part of his life. He works as the abolitionist after being free. Thus, the thesis argues that a desire for freedom is the key factor for the slaves to resist the institution of slavery.

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I. Representation of Race and Racial Identity

The narrator in *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* is badly affected by racism. He dreams to be free from slavery, and various prejudices. He is sold to several white masters. Each master handles him aggressively. Fed up with his life in captivity, he wants to be free. He dreams to be free from white man's racial arrogance. His vision of liberation from slavery is spoiled by several racist practices. Segregation along racial lines makes the narrator devoid of humanity. Racism appears to be the basis of excluding and oppressing Blacks in this narrative. When racism takes the institutionalized form, it would be very difficult for the victims to come out of this social evil. Olaudah has to go through several problems before he gets liberation.

Racism offers works as a platform where various dehumanizing activities take place. Blacks are too weak to endure the burden of racist practice. Color discrimination arises from the rigid racial difference. The victims of discrimination are affected in every aspect. From every angle, Blacks are affected by racism-backed discrimination. They are prone to nightmare, and anxiety attack. When they are hopeless in their mission of getting freedom, they hallucinate.

People define and talk about a particular conception of race. They create a social reality through which social categorization is achieved. Race has real material effects in the lives of people. Socioeconomic factors have increased suffering within racial groups. Slaves were punished by whipping, hanging, beating, and burning. Sometimes abuse was carried out simply to re-assert the dominance of the master over the slave. Treatment was usually harsher on large plantations. If any slave fails in his or her quota, he or she is given lashes of the whip.

Slave women in the United States were raped frequently by their white masters. Many slaves fought back against sexual attacks. Some died resisting. Others carried psychological and physical scars from the attacks. Sexual abuse of slaves was partially rooted in a patriarchal Southern culture. Southerners treated black women as property or chattel.

Southern culture strongly denied the chance of sexual relations between white women and black men. Many mixed race slaves showed that white men had often taken advantage of slave women. The narrator asserts his racial identity in the midst of the harsh effects of slavery. Equiano is subjected to the cruel process. He is conscious of his freedom and identity. He had to endure the cycle of injustice. Equiano comes to see the prospect of freedom from slavery.

Equiano's attempt to liberate himself from slavery is made unproductive by various white masters. They do not allow him to buy his freedom so easily. He is rather punished by them for this attempt. Equiano seeks to act independently. He acts on principle in the later part of his life. He does not avoid the moment to redefine himself in the process. The voices in slave narrative contribute to the creation of inspiring atmosphere. This research is strictly confined in how the protagonist is confined in racial threat. His suffering and the chance of deliverance from slavery are two things round which this research moves.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano shows the undying love of a slave for freedom. He searches for a moment which shows the value of freedom from slavery. Carretta puts forward his view:

Disinherited as we are from Equiano's referential systems, it is reasonable to question whether we are adequately aware of the scope of his allusions and their part in constituting the fabric of his

autobiography. Hence, the ultimate question at issue here will be whether only the text of Equiano's allusion acts upon his book or whether it also imports its own context. (79)

The referential system in the narrative of Equiano is vague. There is symmetry and meaningful cohesion in the allusions. In one context, different kinds of allusions indicate harshness of segregation.

Brychhan Carey treats Olaudah Equiano's narrative as an expression of spiritual voyage. The more he is involved in the journey, the more wisdom he develops. In parallel to the literal journey of Equiano, spiritual journey also begins. With regard to this, Carey makes the following point:

By contrast, Olaudah Equiano's role as an active abolitionist has never been in doubt. His interesting Narrative has been categorized as autobiography, spiritual narrative, voyage literature, and abolitionist polemic, and it is only recently that critics have placed it in the context of contemporary literary works. Equiano subverts representations of cannibalism in order to expose slavery itself as a form of anthropology. (5)

Equiano's narrative is a satirical piece. It is subversive of the narrative of cannibalism. Actually, Africans are not cannibalistic. On the contrary, it is the white slave holders whose actions seem to be cannibalistic. The white slaveholders exploit slaves to the optimum point.

According to Wood, the narrators of the majority of slave narratives have the authentic experience of travelling across continents. The narrative of Equiano belongs to this category. Marcus Wood argues:

Slave ship has been more adapted and played with than any other image generated by Atlantic slavery, and my feeling is that it may be all played out, that it may be on the point of cultural exhaustion. The stuffing is knocked out of it and we cannot see the wood for the trees, or the slaves for the banana boxes, bottles of blood, tar fetishes, animal skulls, excrement or gasoline cans. (172)

Wood thinks on the cluster of images. They are expressive and communicative. The actual message cannot be communicated straightforwardly in the image sequence. Perspective blurs. But the confounding message remains strong enough to appeal readers.

Oldfield warns every reader that slave narrative cannot be reliable wholeheartedly. It is necessary to think seriously about the narrative account. Its proximity with the autobiographical thematic is called into question. He makes smart observation about this narrative:

Authenticity was another key word associated with slave testimony. We entertain no doubt of the general authenticity of this very intelligent African's interesting story. The quality of the writing itself raised an important related issue. Authenticity and meditation, in relation to both story and style, were central questions in the reception of slave narratives at the time of publication, and ever since. (5)

Slave narrative is full of autobiographical details. Its truth is occasionally questionable. Certain degree of autobiographical elements is hidden beneath the aura of fiction. The narrator tends to express his happiness. It can graphically color the reality regarding the horror of the Middle Passage.

Kaplan examines the horrors of the middle passage. There is hardly any slave narrative without pathos and plight of Africans held in captivity. Every slave narrative tends to make reference to the middle passage. This narrative deals with the hellish conditions of the captives. Focusing on this aspect of the narrative, Kaplan makes the following point:

Others, like the former slave Olaudah Equiano, volunteered their services, or else agreed to speak before the bar of the House of Commons. In each case, these witnesses contributed to an ever-increasing pool of information that, in turn, helped to shape popular perceptions of transatlantic slavery. Scenes of depredation on the West Coast of Africa, the unmitigated horrors of the Middle Passage, the brutality and oppression of slavery in the Americas; all of these would become familiar tropes during the late eighteenth century. (2)

The narrative contains some distinct vision of deliverance from slavery. The hostile environment is handled by the narrator. Racial hatred and hostility reduces the narrator's power and patience. He decides to face predicament boldly. He is unknowingly optimistic about the increasing prospect of buying freedom.

Paquet examines Equiano's narrative in the light of the public self-consciousness of the slave narrative. He briefly gives expression to the following view in regard to this aspect:

While Equiano's original language is partially lost in translation from an oral to a written text, what remains is an authorial voice that fuses the public self-consciousness of the slave narrative with the private self-consciousness of the slave. The central focus of his narrative is

slavery as a lived historical reality. But Olaudh is as much the subject of his narrative as slavery is. (12)

Slavery is portrayed as a lived historical reality. This historical reality is intensified. The strong and undaunted authorial voice exists side by side. The narrative's sharp exterior focus on slavery coincides with the personal. Slavery is the determinant of consciousness.

Hall praises Olaudh's narrative. West Indies is portrayed as the homeland. It nourishes Olaudh's longing for a return to homeland. It is this undying sense of returning to one's past. It creates the core component of narrative. The following throws light on this aspect of Hall's analytical account:

Olaudh's narrative reveals a profound identification with the West Indies as a territorial cradle. The trope of return to one's native land is fully formed here as a return to the West Indies-past, present, and future. Olaudah is a West Indian slave born of slaves; his estranged past and necessary future is located geographically and historically in the West Indies. (3)

The repeated sense of identification drives the narrator forward. The geographical integrity and historical root are two things. These two things put deep sense of influence on him. The entire narrative is linked to emancipation. The journey of Olaudah is full of the promise.

The theme of self-assertion and longing with reconnection with homeland exist side by side. This theme makes the entire narrative a dynamic expression of ex-slave's pride. Concentrating on this aspect of the narrative, Pryse adds:

Equiano's narrative modulates between an aggressive assertion of self as an uncompromising arbiter of value on behalf of an oppressed

community and a longing for reconnection with an ideal Caribbean community. It is an ideal, as Thomas Pringle's Supplement informs us that would restore a freedom-loving heart and a broken body to the safety and security of a loving husband in a West Indian landscape. (4)

The tortured self finds instant outlet. The narrator is torn between despair and dignity. The narrator wants to be free. But he is trapped in slavery. The vision of emancipation appears to be a demanding thing. Radical change seldom occurs in society which is divided racially. That is why it is necessary for narrator to compromise with the unfavorable situation.

Wynter claims that the language of this slave narrative bears dual characteristics. Vernacular and literary nature of language is noticeable in the entire narrative. The presence of vernacular does not harm the literary standard of the narrative. Within the periphery this interpretation, Wynter expresses her view:

Olaudah Equiano's speaking voice, transformed into a literate text, prefigures narrational aspects of primary autobiographical texts in modern Caribbean writing. It stands at the crossroads of the black vernacular and the literate white text, of the spoken and written word, of oral and printed forms of literary discourse. It is a site of resistance and accommodation among different traditions, languages, and cultures, between Europe and Africa. (14)

The slave narrative is not dominated by univocal voice. It contains multiple voices. The voice of slaveholder and voice of slave both exist in the narrative. Slave narrative has its own literary standard. Its vernacular characters do not decrease its merit. It serves as the common medium of communication. The common bond of sympathy is the unmaking of slavery.

Ferguson carefully examines the use of direct speech in the narrative of Equiano. He argues that the repeated use of direct speech intends to create an aura of resistance. The narrative has dialogic structure. It offers scope for various interpretive possibilities. Ferguson elucidates the point further:

Equiano uses direct and reported speech to create the background necessary for his own voice. He repeats and refashions the words of resistance that are the legacy of his own community, giving special attention to the words of love and support from his mother and his father. Self is crafted in dialogue with the voices of fellow slaves and the voices of the world that opposes it. (16)

The self is embedded in the very language he employs in the narrative. The subjectivity of the narrator is shaped by the language. He has to consider many things to describe events with some genuine expectation. The choice of direct speech is instrumental in highlighting the historical sense. The narrator gives direct speech to his characters to highlight a conflict. Such mode of description gives depth and tone to a character.

Olaudah Equiano known as Gustavus Vassa for his lifetime, became the freed slave in his later part of his life. He supported the British movement to end the slave trade. His autobiography published in 1789, drawn attention to wide range of people and critics. It was considered highly influential in gaining passage of Slave Trade Act 1807, which abolished the African slave trade. As an explorer, writer, merchant and active abolitionist, Equiano traveled many countries. Though he wanted to be free in the early phase of his life, he could manage it only in the later part with the support of his last master Robert King, an American Quaker merchant. He allowed Equiano to trade on his own account and purchase his freedom in 1766.

Although all these critics and reviewers examined *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah* from different points of view and came up with different findings and conclusions, none of them notice how the issue of racism is presented. Racism generates various actualities and possibilities of discriminations. The slave narrative explores how trust in self-nature brings the possibility of emancipation. However, my research does not deny the above views rather attempts to explore the issue of romanticism, religious reforms and abolitionist appeal of slave narratives pave the way for the end of slavery.

This study studies how the lingering trace of discrimination and racism make appearance in various discourses and representation. The issue of existing racial practice is examined in this slave narrative. This issue is examined in relation to *The Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*. In this slave narrative, the narrator undergoes the harsh and harrowing process of enslavement. Olaudah is forcibly kidnapped by white slave hunters in his homeland Eboe. The romantic sense of adventure and frequent journey from one place to the other shape the innermost liking of both the characters for emancipation.

This research has three chapters. The first chapter introduces issue, elaborates hypothesis and quotes the different views of critics and reviewers. Typical characteristics of the author and some of his works are discussed. It mentions the point of departure and the purpose of the research. The second chapter deals with the theory of race and racism. It is concerned with the thorough analysis of the slave narrative. The researcher analyzes the narratives by adopting the insights of reform and freedom as discussed by liberationists and the supporters of anti-racism. The last chapter projects the conclusive findings of the research.

II. Racism in *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equiano*

This research examines racism in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. A victimized black boy fights against slavery. He has a vision of liberty and dignity. The narrator presents a portrait of slavery and its effects. From his childhood, the narrator is separated from his family. He is taken to Barbados. Barbados is an island which is famous for its cruelty to Africans. Slaves have to endure plenty of harsh conditions. Not only male slaves but female slaves are also given harsh torture.

Slave bodies are brutalized. Slaves are denied access to property. They are treated as the assets of their masters. Their white master can take anything which belongs to slaves. Everything they have is their master's properties. Even their children can be sold by their white masters. They have no legal rights. This treatment does not change much from island to island. The narrator condemns the effect of slavery. He mentions an immediate need to abolish it. Slavery and racial discrimination weaken the feelings of humanity. The superiority of whiteness over blackness is an artificial construct. Racial arrogance leads men towards an unnatural baseness. He does not believe any man can be born with such cruelty and viciousness.

The researcher uses the theory of racial identity, racism and slavery. When racist practices reach its height, the victims are no longer taken as human being. The victims of slavery and racial politics seek their identity. Their identity is rooted on the origin, culture and tradition of the victims. The researcher has to consider the historic-cultural tradition and the ground reality to explore and affirm racial identity. Race is the classification of the human beings into distinguishable groups. This classification is based on biological, race-based, cultural and historical characteristics. Racism is

misbehavior of a group of people on the basis of color. It is an expression of hatred, envy or prejudice.

Racism is rooted on the belief in one's racial supremacy over other. It involves a generalized lack of knowledge or experience. It is inherently unchangeable. The concept of race was originally introduced in the field of natural history. It is "a convenient way to refer to groups of human beings in different geographic locations not with the intention of separating human beings into physiologically distinct groups" (Benjamin 27).

Race word has very harmful effect on people in the world. Race divides human beings into categories that tear our psyches. Racial differences divides our psychological understandings of whom we are and who we should be. Madonna G. Constantine delivers the following remarks regarding race:

Race is indeed a pre-eminently socio-historical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. Racial meanings have varied tremendously over time and between societies. Racism continues to tear at the soul of America. Understanding the definition and impact of racism is critical to all citizens of this country, from parents to educators to politicians. (22)

Constantine represents the complexity of racism. She unpacks three forms of racism. She attempts to define race in context. She explicitly sorts out racisms of multiple kinds. According to her, these three types of racism are individual racism, institutional racism and cultural racism.

The narrative opens with the description of the account of his country, their manners, customs, marriage, ceremony, dress, buildings, etc. The protagonist or the

writer, Equiano was unaware of the fact that he was from the inferior race that he was black negro. He was born in 1745 in Essaka, a small province, so far from the sea that he had never heard of it or of white people. He was the youngest son of seven brothers and sisters and was trained in agriculture and war, was happily living with his parents. One day he and his one of the sisters were seized by the kidnappers. He was sold in many hands one after another. During this process he had to travel many countries sometimes by land or sometimes by water. Equiano got wonder at new sights and experiences. His childish nature got evaporated in the process of sale in different places.

Equiano's life ends up in the hands of a chieftain in a lovely part of the country. He plans to escape from this situation. Unfortunately, his plan is spoiled when he accidentally kills an old slave woman's chicken. The bad effect of his failed attempt to escape is narrated in the following extract:

For this fault, he has to hide himself for fear of her wrath. Everyone looks for him, but he is perfectly concealed in the dense brush. He is afraid of being stung by poisonous snakes but held out until he is rescued by the very same old woman. Equiano is sold again, and traveled closer to the sea coast. Until he reached the sea, his language was similar enough to those of other tribes. (89)

Equiano is even able to pick up two or three new languages. By chance, he and his sister are reunited when their masters crossed paths. However, the reunion is short-lived. The second separation brings fresh grief and anxiety to Equiano. He fears they would force him to undergo such alteration. He would have had much more trouble integrating with Europeans.

Equiano's time in slavery is spent serving the captains of slave ships. One of his masters, Henry Pascal is the captain of a British trading vessel. He gives Equiano the name Gustavas Vassa. He uses this name throughout his life. In service to Captain Pascal, Equiano traveled extensively over many countries. He visited England, Holland, Scotland, Gibraltar, Nova Scotia, the Caribbean, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and South Carolina. Equiano is allowed to engage in his own minor trade exchanges. He is able to save enough money to purchase his freedom in 1766. The following extract throws light on Equiano's love of adventure:

Equiano continued to travel, making several voyages aboard trading vessels to Turkey, Portugal, Italy, Jamaica, Grenada, and North America. He also accompanied Irving on a polar expedition in search of a northeast passage from Europe to Asia. Captivating are the events like his native African culture, his enslaved life in service to captains of ships and merchant masters, and the beginnings of his own entrepreneurial ventures. Motivated by Robert King's promise to allow him to buy his freedom for forty pounds, Equiano views each voyage as an opportunity of getting a sum large enough to purchase his liberty through his own trades. (43)

Equiano describes his engagement in trade and transaction. He is happy with his master for getting some freedom to make money. He eventually acquires forty-seven pounds. In his money-making activity, he is supported by his captain. He surprises his master with the requisite sum. He receives his manumission papers. King and the captain implore him to continue working for them. Equiano sails with Captain Farmer. He travels as a free man with the intention to make a voyage. Equiano exercises his new freedom. He dislikes threatening manners of some white traders.

Individual racism is taken as a person's race prejudice. This prejudice is based on biological considerations. It involves actual behavior. This behavior is discriminatory in nature. Jones defines the individual racist as "one who considers the black people as a group, who are inferior to whites because of physical traits" (143). He believes that these physical traits are determinants of social behavior. An important consideration is that "all judgments of superiority are based on the corresponding traits of white people as norms of comparison" (Jones 417). Jones points out a second form of racism. It is commonly called institutional racism. It includes the intentional or unintentional manipulation.

Jones defines institutional racism as "those established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities in American society"(65). Institutional racism can be "either overt or covert and either intentional or unintentional" (438). Jones's third form of racism is cultural racism. It is the more subtle form of racism. This form of racism includes the individual expression of the superiority of one race's cultural heritage.

Cultural racism is an imposition of racially affected worldview. It is based on belief in essential racial differences. These effects are felt throughout the culture. As claimed by Gordon Allport, "Civilized men have gained notable mastery over energy, matter, and inanimate nature generally, and are rapidly learning to control physical suffering and premature death. But, by contrast, we appear to be living in the Stone Age so far as our handling of human relationships is concerned"(132). Psychological and physical violence toward persons based on prejudice continue to take place in direct or subtle forms. People all are involved in fighting prejudice. The world is too dangerous to live in. When prejudice takes aggressive form, it takes the form of racist practice. Racist practice destabilizes social integrity.

Equiano and the captain maintain a close relationship. He is deeply affected at the captain's untimely death at sea:

I found that I did not know, till he was gone, the strength of my regard for him. He was to me a friend and a father. Despite his desire to travel to England, he continues to sail on merchant ships throughout the West Indies and Americas under King's newly appointed captain, William Phillips. He describes in detail two shipwrecks in which his ship is damaged by rocks but does not sink, thus avoiding utter disaster and resulting in exploratory adventures to uninhabited islands. (32)

Equiano is habituated to think in a fatalistic way. He believes the mishaps are divine punishment for his own sins. He views their rescue as a sign of forgiveness or the mercy of God. He makes his way back to the West Indies and then to Savannah, Georgia. But he is faced with new dangers as a free black man. He is persecuted by patrollers. They know that he has no master to protect him from abuse. Two white men attempt to kidnap him. They claim that he is a runaway slave. Equiano escapes re-enslavement. He applies some tricks on the favorable moment.

Todorov says that the word racism refers to a couple of things. In his own words, "On the one hand, it is a matter of physical characteristics different from our own; on the other hand, it is matter of ideology, a doctrine concerning human races" (213). Like Todorov, Du Bois provides the bad picture of the Blacks living in white society. He suggests with the white the conflict of the Black. He further adds:

With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny. Their youth shrink into tasteless sycophancy or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry. Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine

own house? The shade of the prison-house closed round about us all.

It waits walls strait and stubborn to the whitest. (5).

To be black means to be so in exclusively white terms. A black living in the white society suffers from the double consciousness. The double standards of a citizen are inevitable. One is born an American but discovers that one is not fully a citizen. This is because of being racially designated black. This leads to the notion of irreconcilable doubleness. Being black does not equal being an American. There occurs a crisis in identity and the self-respect of the African American.

There are changes in the idea of the race. As a result of changes, race is viewed differently. The meaning and representation of racial politics have been greatly changed. Its strategic importance relative to other aspect of government has been formed. "The theme of primal racial difference is not being articulated into political languages of nationality, culture and belonging in the simple exclusionary ways that it was not so very long ago"(Gilroy 227). The discrimination is operated through newer strategies. It is practised through policies such as positive of images.

Equiano goes on repeating his trade and transaction. His wish to go to England remains firm. He travels to Montserrat to take leave of his former master, Robert King. Equiano books passage on a ship to London. He reunites with his former patrons in England. Finding no employment as a servant, Equiano learns a new trade. He becomes a hair-dresser to Dr. Charles Irving. He finds his wages insufficient and "thought it best, therefore, to try the sea again in quest of more money, as I had been bred to it, and had hitherto found the profession of it successful"(35). Equiano hires out as hair-dresser and steward to the captains of ships. These ships sail to Turkey as well as the West Indies. He describes impressions of the various Mediterranean and West Indian countries. He is appreciative of cultures found where his ship docks.

Omi studies both the seen and unseen effect of racial ideology. He points out some of the dreadful effects of racial ideology. He argues:

The continuing persistence of racial ideology suggests that these racial myths and stereotypes cannot be exposed as such in popular imagination. They are, we think, too essential, too integral, to the maintenance of social order. Of course, particular meaning, stereotypes and can change, but the presence of a system of racial meaning and stereotypes, of racial ideology, seems to be permanent feature of American culture. (26)

The racial ideology shows the African American people in a positive way. They can fit in the democratic social order of the U. S. society. They are not treated physically as harshly as they were treated before. In the literature they are shown with the positive color like having knowledge, courage and calmness. This way of treating the people with some positive images is an identity politics. Such politics intends to keep the social order smooth.

Equiano also joins Dr. Irving on an expedition. He praises the unusual arctic landscape and animals. He is increasingly aware of dreadful events on the way. His ship gets trapped in the ice for eleven days. Equiano returns to London with Dr. Irving. He remains with him for some time. The near-tragic events of their arctic journey make a lasting impression on his mind. It caused him to reflect deeply on his eternal state. He is determined to become a first-rate Christian. He embarks on a “spiritual journey in which he attends multiple churches, closely reads The Bible, and even researches the principles of other faiths. He finds some measure of comfort with mentors who discuss Christian doctrines” (41). His spiritual crisis peaks while working as a steward on a ship traveling to Spain.

Equiano's own life is an example of how everyone is harmed by horrors of racism. The bonds of “mother and child, husband and wife, and brother and sister were destroyed. Slaves were given new names, their identities virtually erased” (76).

The following extract describes how harsh racial hatred is:

Any sense of history, culture, tradition, and were almost obliterated by the dominant society that kept them as chattel. They were subject to the most horrible punishments, delivered for capricious and unjust reasons. The chastity of female slaves was violated. Deleterious behavior resulted from the unnatural elevation of the white man over black. (26)

Even white men are corrupted by the slave trade. It pushes them towards their baser instincts. It turns their decent people into monsters. Different masters show Equiano varying degrees of cruelty or kindness. They are all complicit in its horrors.

In American society, most of the blacks fall into the underclass and lower class. They are discriminated since their arrival at New Land. Since then, their aspirations have been overlooked in terms of color. The structure of the American society overlooks the diverse social realities-reality of minority, ethnicity, race, immigrants. Clarifying this reality, Lois Tyson, in *Critical Theory Today*, outlines:

What about members of middle class? Are they economically oppressed or economically privileged. They have more financial stability than the lower classes, yet they are often hard hit by economic recessions and usually have good reason to worry about their financial future; they benefit from institutionalized forms of economic security, such as good medical insurance and pension plans

but they shoulder an enormous tax burden relative to their income.

(51)

The culture and the aspirations of the working class are always suppressed. Extreme state of insecurity and fear of being abused are two factors that frighten the vulnerable groups.

Equiano distinguishes between the Christianity of white slave holders and the true Christianity practiced by him. He even touts “the simple faith of his African brethren as being more honest and legitimate, comparing them with the Jews. White Christians involved in the slave trade perverted their faith” (47). Equiano exemplifies the true tenets of Christianity. He “tries to control his pride, relies on God for all things, tries to live by the Commandments, and evinces the virtues of fortitude and patience” (57).

Equiano works on behalf of his enslaved people. He demonstrates kindness and mercy on their behalf. He is chaste and charitable. Concern with liberation dominates the forefront of the text. Equiano is able to procure his emancipation from Robert King. This physical liberation from slavery turns him from object into subject and from slave into man. He takes control of his own personal affairs. He asserts the sense of self that he has so fitfully pursued during his enslavement.

Olaudah Equiano experiences liberation. He learns how to read and write. As a young slave, he thinks about how the books subjects people always talk about. The following extract shows how he is attracted towards learning and its value:

Learning how to read opened up a new world of knowledge for him, and learning to write allowed him to thrust himself into the very public world of letters to influence the abolitionist movement. Equiano's

conversion to Christianity represents liberation from sin; his embrace of God's salvation changes him. (71)

Equiano is motivated by the importance and advantages of learning. He devotes his later years to increase the physical liberation of the millions of Africans. Implicitly, he argues for the freedom of those who are trapped in the clutch of slavery.

Dubois's notion of double consciousness sounds relevant in this context. Defining double consciousness as the attribute of the consciousness of Blacks, he argues:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (5)

What Du Bois argues is that double consciousness is the defining characteristic of Blacks and their psyche. It is a situation in which an African American sees his self from the perspective of an American. He finds two selves: American and African. And this twoness leaves confusion. The recognition of these stereotypes has been immensely useful. It enables to detect structural patterns of prejudice imbricate in society.

Equiano faces difficulties as a black man. He is able to participate in business. He eventually saves up enough money to purchase his freedom. As a free man, he found many ways to support himself. The following extract presents Equiano's passage from bondage to freedom:

He continued trading and got involved in other skill-based industries. He was for the first time able to choose which ships he wanted to work on. Equiano apologizes that he is neither a saint nor a tyrant. He is merely lucky enough to have been favored by Heaven. He believes has blessed him in all the events of his life. (87)

Equiano hopes that his work will serve the purpose of helping his enslaved fellows. Equiano explains how his memories are source of torture. He is the youngest son of seven brothers and sisters.

Moynihan introduces the deterioration of the African American family. “It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the black community” (52). In essence, “The Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the groups as a whole”(Moynihan 29). Moynihan argues that African American family believes in the matriarchal structure and it is the cause of their regression.

Moynihan’s point is that mothers work inside the house and fathers do outside the house. During the period of servitude, African family traditions could not be replicated in the new world after Africans were forced into slavery. The slave trade was responsible for breaking up African families. Husbands, wives, and children were liable to be sold separately because U. S. law did not legally recognize their families. Enslaved Africans were denied a secure family life. Enslaved men and women were property of the white. They could not legally marry. They had no right to live or stay together, no right to their own children.

The American Negro family has been “characterized as a matriarchy so often that the assertion is widely accepted as a truth rather than a proposition still in need of empirical evidence and critical analysis” (Ball 57). The fact is indisputable that

father-absent families are relatively more frequent among Negroes. The conception, however, usually implies that the mother is the dominant member of the intact Negro family. By exploring the theme of absentee fatherhood, African American discourses “give a corrective response to the mainstream culture which thinks African American family values and the parental care along the line of matriarchal structure”(44). A child identity is determined through the line of the mother. Father is absent in the family. He has to go for the external works outside the family.

According to Hortense J. Slippers, family is the vertical transfer of a bloodline. It is a way to transfer titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of cold cash. It descends from fathers to sons. It becomes the mythically respected privileges of a free and freed community. Slippers further adds:

In that sense, African peoples in the historic Diaspora had nothing to prove, if the point had been that they were not capable of family, since it is stunningly evident. For instance, that Africans were not only capable of the concept and the practice of family, including slaves but in modes of elaboration and naming that at least as complex as those of the nuclear in the west. (75)

In the African American family tradition, child rearing is viewed in terms of motherly devotion. The males are supposed to take on the other external burdens. The male are supposed to take on the other external burdens.

Equiano see the many black people chained together with expressions of profound sorrow on their faces. He realizes what awaits him. He knows that he would never return to his native country. He suddenly wishes to return to former slavery. He endures this new punishment. He describes the sensation of being put under the decks:

I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. His hunger for new thing is the most important part of the narrative. (46)

He feels a little better when he finds people of his own nation. He is convinced that the white men are evil spirits. Similarly, he is amazed by the workings of the ship. Down in the hold, he is assaulted by hot air unfit to breathe because of its loathsome smells.

The model of racial identity is originally developed for African Americans to understand the black experience in the United States. Tina Q. Richardson says remarks:

The individual ideally moves from a complete unawareness of race through embracing black culture exclusively toward a commitment to many cultures and addressing the concerns of all oppressed groups. The model of racial identity is helpful in outlining racial identity as a dynamic progression, as influenced by those in a particular individual's ethnic group as well as those outside it. Grounded in the context of the civil rights movement, this model is problematic. (147)

Before blacks experience identity, they are first unaware of their race and the race of others. Individuals move through angry feelings about whites. They develop a positive black frame of reference.

Many people grow sick and died, "thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers" (58). The screams and cries of anguish and terror make the hold like a scene from Hell. Equiano is not put into chains. He

has had more freedom to move about. The following extract contains his perception about the white man:

The white men are strange to him, especially in their wastefulness. They capture a large fish and only take a small part from it. They are also remarkably cruel. Three slaves try to jump overboard and end their lives. The ship finally comes in sight of Barbados. All of the slaves are gathered on deck and examined by frightening men. (91)

Equiano is convinced that they desire to eat him. After the examination, the slaves are sent to the merchant's yard. They are crammed together regardless of age or sex.

Equiano is in awe of his surroundings, noting that the houses are two stories and made of bricks. He marvels at the men on horseback. Equiano is disturbed by the loudness and frenzy of the buyers.

Ideally fluid boundary of identity leads to a realistic perception of one's racial identity. Richardson relates black identity directly to white people in a way that moves individual black identity from the unconscious to the conscious. To quote Richardson:

This model clearly delineates that when blacks brush up against white culture and negative differential treatment by others, feelings of difference are triggered and subsequently a consciousness of racial identity is as well. What is helpful in Parham's model is a sense of progression. In addition, the model outlines a movement from an unconscious to a conscious racial identity. Problematic in Parham's model is his identification of unavoidable exposure to racial difference as the primary trigger for the development of racial identity.

The primary factor for individual racial identity is engagement in one's own racial group. Racial self can be transferred through involvement. Richardson's model presupposes the existence of white superiority. Individuals can be in more than one stage at a time.

Equiano is shipped onboard a slave ship which bound for the West Indies. His vivid account of the Middle Passage is "heartrending in its evocation of grief, fear, despair, violence, and fetidness. Equiano's utter confusion and terror is highly subjective"(97). He is able to evoke the feeling of how Africans feel when removed from their home. He is exposed to the gradual introduction to a life of forced labor.

Equiano seeks to differentiate between the brutality and immorality of the civilized Europeans and their African counterparts. This distinction begins even when he is enslaved by native Africans. His experience varies "wildly depending on the masters. What most marks the white slave-owners is what he observes while at sea. He is astonished at their wastefulness"(107). Their behavior to their captives is violent, and depraved.

Slavery corrupts not only the slave but the slave-owner as well. Abolitionists also argued that the Middle Passage is deadly not only for the slaves but for the crew as well. When the slaves arrive in Barbados after their voyage, they are forced into a merchant's custody. The buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined. She makes choice of that parcel they like best. The following extract describes the case in point:

Equiano and other slaves remain on Barbados for a few days, but are then shipped off in a sloop to North America. On this journey, they treated better and have more to eat. They land in Virginia country,

which they accessed by sailing up a river. They work on a plantation for a rich old gentleman. (113)

Equiano watches as all of his friends are sold off to traders. He is the only one left on the plantation. He is miserable in his loneliness. He wishes for death. He is terrified of his owner. He also resents that he is given new names.

Benjamin refers to the status of white racial identity. His first three statuses outline how a white individual progresses away from a racist frame. Benjamin's model is helpful in outlining interracial exposure. Benjamin asserts his position thus:

Problematic in this model is Helms's confusion of an individual's development toward a nonracist frame with development of a racial identity. His premise is that racial identity for whites is about their perceptions, feelings, and behaviors toward blacks rather than about the development and consciousness of an actual white racial identity. Racial identity models all discuss what we would describe as an intersection between racial perceptions of others and racial perception of self. (67)

Victims' perceptions of others are important and act as triggers for development and consciousness. There is great value in the consideration of racial and ethnic identity for oneself and groups of individuals. The African American has absorbed many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the notion that "White is right" and "Black is wrong."

On this ship, Equiano meets Richard Baker. He is a young white man about four or five years older than him. Baker is an educated native of America. He has "a mind superior to prejudice; and who was not ashamed to notice, to associate with, and to be the friend and instructor of one who was ignorant, a stranger, of a different

complexion, and a slave!" (45). Equiano adds that he and Baker remained friends until Baker's death.

Many impactful events shape Equiano's life. All of them bear repeating. They develop his character in ways that will continue to pay off throughout the narrative. He travels to America. He is purchased by a British Navy lieutenant, Michael Henry Pascal. His familiarity with the lieutenant exemplifies many aspects of horror of physical assault:

He spends time in England and is brought with Pascal onboard his various vessels while fighting in the Seven Years' War. While in Pascal's service, Equiano witnesses many dramatic sea battles, as well as the activities of the British press-gangs, significant forces during the hostilities. He receives a new name – Gustavus Vassa – by which he will be known for the rest of his life. (118)

Equiano develops an interest in reading. He has his legs amputated from sickness. He grows accustomed to his enslavement. He begins to long for the violence and excitement of an engagement.

The internalization of negative Black stereotypes may be outside of his or her conscious awareness. The individual seeks to assimilate and be accepted by Whites. In this regard, John W. Wilson makes the following observation:

Instances of social rejection by White friends or colleagues may lead the individual to the conclusion that many Whites will not view him or her as an equal. Faced with the reality that he or she cannot truly be White, the individual is forced to focus on his or her identity as a member of a group targeted by racism. This stage is characterized by the simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of

one's racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of Whiteness.

(41)

The result of this exploration is an emerging security in a newly defined self. While still maintaining his or her connections with Black peers, the internalized individual is willing to establish meaningful relationships with Whites. At this moment, even the whites acknowledge his self-definition. The individual is also ready to build coalitions with members of other oppressed groups.

Equiano stays in England for between three and four years. He grows accustomed to his situation. He feels little terror from his daily challenges. He speaks English very well. He desires to adjust his manners, spirit, and movement to those of the Europeans. He wants to learn how to read and write. He is able to see much of London. Equiano began to notice the ways in which providence guided the lives of men. He gives a few examples of what he observed. The following extract gives an account of how his deep faith in providence modifies the direction of his struggle for freedom:

There are many more engagements with the French. What Equiano enjoys most is visiting and wandering the island. However, his curiosity almost gets him into trouble one day. An English sergeant sees the near-accident and reprimands him harshly. Equiano sees a French horse belonging to some islanders. He decides to ride it back to safety. The fleet remains in this area for a bit, then sailed to Basse-road. (110)

Many more commanders are named and many more battles are fought. Equiano is happy to reunite with the widow and her daughter. Equiano had come to believe that his master Pascal would ultimately grant his freedom.

Equiano assumes that he had no right to detain me. He always treats me with the greatest kindness. Equiano works under the assumption that he could not be detained any longer than he wished. Further, he had saved some money. The following extract presents the reverse case of reality:

One day, while sailing from Portsmouth to the Thames, the ship cast anchor and Pascal ordered the barge to be manned. Without any warning, he grabbed Equiano and forced him into the barge, telling him that he knew of the slave's plans to escape him. Equiano was shocked at the accusation, but once he gathered his senses, he insisted to Pascal that the law ensured him his freedom. (139)

The crew tries to comfort Equiano from the deck. It is to no avail. Equiano is dragged behind the ship. The Barbados Slave Code became a model for other colonies as they established slavery. Equiano writes that this law was "unmerciful, unjust, and unwise, and would even shock the morality and common sense of a Samaanite or a Hottentot" (109). This reference may be unfamiliar to most modern readers.

Equiano is endeavoring to seem unbiased by using examples of people from the geographical and racial extremes of the globe. Equiano is a witness to these examples of brutality and injustice. He does not suffer too harshly. It is from this example that Equiano shapes his business argument. People work harder when they are well-treated. He notes that he "had the good fortune to please my master in every department in which he employed me" (103). The Quakers put pressure on its members to denounce slavery. Equiano describes his beliefs more vividly than he yet has. He has not given the reader an in-depth picture of his faith. One big event is his acquisition of a Bible. While traveling with King, he first purchases a Bible.

There is a fruitable debate during the period regarding whether or not Bible reading would increase rebellious impulse. Equiano's beliefs proved not only comforting but also practical. He is able to bear his situation. He would have died much earlier. He seems quite content with having allowed circumstances to guide his life. The following extract gives a glimpse of how situation turns in the favor of Equiano:

Equiano's life as a sailor serves as something of an equalizer for his struggles with slavery. Because of his abilities, he is able to flourish under less supervision. He begins to make the money that would later enable his freedom. Equiano - a man is defined by his abilities and usefulness, not by his skin color. Equiano achieves the monumental feat of securing his manumission from King. (123)

Equiano accomplished something that almost all slaves found impossible to do. Securing his freedom would have been much more difficult during the first half of the nineteenth century. Equiano has endeavored to craft an identity in the work. This moment suddenly allows the reader to understand that such a work could not exist. This inspiration is an inner light than could be shared with church brethren at meetings.

Quakers do not have clergy or church government. They did not believe there was an authority separating a believer from his or her God. Equiano wants to develop a voice of his own. Africans are invisible and inaudible. He uses the Anglo-American racial discourse to actually undermine and reformulate culture's notion of slave and African. He uses religious, economic, and political discourses to put himself and his life story at the center of a crucial debate on the merits of the slave trade. He speaks

for Africans but legitimate himself as an Englishman. Equiano makes the following remarks about his growing maturity:

He plays both sides with an eye solely on his political purpose. This slavery creates marginalized beings, unlike the African slavery system. The irony is that his success reveals how much English society wants individuals to join their mainstream. (127)

Equiano's quest is directed towards liberation from the bondage of slavery. Equiano initially comes into contact with white men. He conceives of them in spiritual ideas and themes. He later begins to notice differences among white men.

When Equiano embarks upon his quest for true religion, he visits many places of worship. He notes the differences between them. He also distinguishes between the Christianity of white slave-owners and the Christianity of Christ. About the perversion of Christianity by slave trade the following extract serves as a clear proof:

The slave-trading world perverts Christianity. Equiano is clear in his condemnation. Equiano does not tout freedom as a path towards political hegemony. Overall, he proves himself a capable, adventurous, hardy, and ambitious young man. He also harbors a sense of restlessness. (218)

The sea-horses are actually walruses. He even cites the same differences that white noticed in blacks. He is able to look through multiple viewpoints. He avoids ideological blindness in regards to race.

The slave traders had taken over "four million Africans from Africa and forced them into slavery, all before the European transatlantic slave system had been established"(104). Over three million may have been taken after that latter slave trade

ended. The Turks used the terms Frank and Christian interchangeably, as many of the Christian invaders during the Crusade were from France.

It is obvious that he embraced the financial freedom of the marketplace. It is through trade that he purchased his freedom. However, this work places him squarely within the dehumanizing ideology of capitalism's driving slave market. Equiano's conversion to Methodism did not fully avoid election. The following extract shows how his presence in the market place enables him to earn freedom:

The participation in the marketplace both represented freedom of action. He points out those free blacks deny protection. He has managed to fashion himself a juridical subject, by creating his own legal framework, honored at least within the pages. (139)

Equiano becomes politically involved in abolitionist activities. He explains his views on the economics of abolition. Many people he encounters as a leader of “abolition - the Quakers, the Queen, the government - speaks to how well known he became. The effort to send former and current slaves back to Sierra Leone began with the efforts of Henry Smeathson”(141). This man spent time in Africa researching termites. He married into the local African rulers' families.

Slavery and freedom have been the central points of reference in America's history. The history of black Americans begins with slavery. Blacks contributed little to American or world civilization. About the repression and erasure of the traces of historical truth of racism the following extract illustrates the point:

This, of course, ignores the fact that rich civilizations flourished in Africa while Europe was still in its infancy; that there were black explorers, conquerors, inventors, mathematicians, doctors, scientists before, during, and after slavery. Black slaves already know the

accomplishments and achievements of white Americans. It is in the fabric of the standard history of America, as seen through the eyes of white Americans. (56)

This is not to suggest that the learning of black history would bring decisive end to racism. But it is a critical pillar in the building of a bridge between the two Americas. It serves as a bridge of knowledge. It symbolizes a bridge of respect.

Equiano experiences a vision in which "the Lord was pleased to break in upon my soul with his bright beams of heavenly light; and in an instant as it were, removing the veil, and letting light into a dark place"(49). Equiano returns to London "rejoiced in spirit, making melody in my heart to the God of all my mercies. Though content to remain in England, Equiano is convinced by friends to again join his ship during its next voyage"(76). He thus continues his travelogue, "describing another minor shipwreck outside of Cadiz and the riches and festivals of Malaga. He reunites with Dr. Irving and travels with him to the West Indies to assist him in establishing a plantation on the Musquito Shore outside of Jamaica, acting as Dr. Irving's overseer and helping to maintain good relations with the Musquito Indians"(79). Equiano begs leave of Dr. Irving and attempts to make his way back to England.

Thus, it is safe to conclude that racism rings loudly in the narrative of Olaudah Equiano. After passing through various phases of trials and tribulations, he finally happens to achieve freedom from slavery. The horror of slavery and the vision of freedom exist side by side in the narratives of Mary Prince and Equiano.

III. Equiano's Vision of Liberation from Slavery

The core finding of this research is that Blacks are subjected to various injustice and atrocities. They are judged in terms of their color. They are deprived of even a common opportunity which every man deserves. In *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*, Equiano is exposed to indescribable bulk of misery, brutalization, dehumanization and oppression. It is this depth of suffering and brutality that uplift them to reach the glorious peak of freedom from slavery. In slavery, the blacks are dehumanized and deprived of even the basic access to rest, peace, food, water and self-esteem. Female slaves are sexually abused. The males are subjected to backbreaking works on plantation.

In the midst of slavery, the enslaved black, Equiano do not hesitate to hope against hope. He gives continuity to cultural tradition. The Afro-American culture, history and historical tradition are special to them, though blacks are trapped in the hell of slavery. The need of labor force on plantation and deep-seated racism compel the white to go to African continent and capture the black people. Those black people who are forcibly captured are dehumanized and tortured harshly. The white often produce the narrative that harsh treatment is necessary for those slaves because if their cannibalistic manner is not checked, they would be threat to civilization. Olaudah is enslaved by the white and brought to the soil of America. He is a witness to all the atrocities and tortures of Blacks. He witnesses how countless numbers of slaves died in the middle passage.

The exploitation of blacks is written down in slave narratives. Slave narratives offer a striking insight into the reality of being a slave. The notion of equality amidst all human beings is marked by romantic gestures. Equiano is driven by this ideal. The narratives speak for equality between whites and African Americans. Black people are

regarded as the true worshippers. A certain pattern can be traced in most of these narratives. They commonly depict the slave's growing up. The characteristics mentioned above are true for slave narratives that ought to be analyzed in the following. The narrator is born into slavery, separated from their families and treated cruelly as slaves.

Black slaves do not hesitate to dream freedom. This activity is typically romantic in nature. In the hell of captivity, he gives continuity to African tradition, culture and ritual. His dream of liberation does not come true initially at the easy cost. He finally gets freedom. Freedom is the most precious thing all the black captives give utmost value. Equiano inwardly assumes that only in the state of freedom an individual freely gets a chance to think who they are. Lives of black slaves are devoid of dignity, security and self-esteem.

The question of identity of the black captives does not arise even in the heyday of slave narrative. Racism takes root in the psyche of people. It generates vicious social evils like slavery. If slavery takes an institutionalized form, humanity gets shattered and finally dehumanization takes place at a high scale. In this situation, it would be really tough to deal with this evil. That is why, search for root and identity is a must to come out of the hell of racism. This narrative works as a watershed in the history of how slavery has been depicted in slave narrative. The telling of a solid genealogy in fact reverses some of the most enduring stereotypes about black slaves. The narrative provides a counter-hegemonic narration of abolition.

Anti-slavery voice attests to a rediscovered racial pride in the forgotten and distant Africanness of Equiano. He proves a particularly valuable ancestor. He survives slavery without losing his freedom and individuality. He has turned into an example of self-determination, proud racial identity, and a popular mythical

forefather. Equiano's ability to retain memories from his homeland and the family's original name is the central vehicle for a broader self-determination. His knowledge of his African origin distinguishes him from the other the oppressors. Blacks are proposed as an authorizing piece of memory.

The slaves achieve their humanity only after they come out of the shackle of slavery. Dehumanization, oppression along racial line and prospect of freedom are inseparably joined in the narratives of Equiano. It is concluded that the most beautiful aspect of the narrative is to show how the black captives responded to their oppressions and the prospect of freedom from slavery.

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