Trust and the African Slave Trade:
A Study of the African-European Relationship of Trust during the height of trade 1600-1800

Senior Honors History Thesis
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I. Introduction

It was three o’clock on June 18 in the year 1727. English slave trader William Snelgrave was beckoned by a native messenger of the great King Agaja while trading in Jakin. The King had appointed to meet with Snelgrave to settle negotiations over payments for permission to trade, slave prices, and the details of the contents of Snelgrave’s cargo.¹ Upon arriving at the court, Snelgrave and company were introduced to “the king” who was seated richly dressed and cross-legged on a silk carpet spread on the ground. Upon approaching the king, his Majesty asked them how they fared and ordered that his guests should be placed near him. Accordingly, fine mats were set on the ground and, although an uncomfortable posture for the Englishmen, they proceeded to sit.

The King ordered his interpreters to ask Snelgrave what he had desired of him. Snelgrave answered that it was his business to trade, relying upon his majesty’s goodness to give him a “quick dispatch and fill his ship with negroes.”² If the request was fulfilled, Snelgrave assured the King he would return to his own country and make known how great and powerful a king he had seen. To this, the king replied to the interpreter that his desires should be fulfilled, but the first business to be settled was his customs.³ He added that the best way to make trade flourish was to impose early trading fees, to protect both the Europeans and his kingdom from thievery of the natives. Snelgrave and company agreed to the King’s conditions, and the king reciprocated by expressing his trust and asking Snelgrave to name his own custom. At first Snelgrave declined, but being pressed to answer, he proposed whether he would be pleased to take the price one half of what he

² Snelgrave, 61.
³ Payments for trade.
used to pay at Whydah, another powerful trading port. The King agreed. Snelgrave recorded the negotiated prices with a pencil for his records. He recorded as well the result of negotiations about his cargo of slaves: “That I should have three males to one female and take none but what I liked.” Before leaving, the King declared that “if suffered by their people, either in person or goods, he [Snelgrave] should answer for it, moreover if any person stole my goods…they should be impaled alive on the sea side.”

William Snelgrave’s account of his visit with King Agaja is just one example of the customary sequence of trade negotiations between European merchants and African Kings during the height of the slave trade. It was common for slave traders to address kings respectfully, present gifts, and negotiate prices for slaves and custom fees. Snelgrave’s account offers insight into eighteenth-century relationships between traders and African kings, and at the same time illuminates an extremely lucrative but dangerous career. Stories from traders such as Snelgrave debunk the notion that European merchants dictated terms of trade or took as many slaves as they wanted from African natives. The intricacies of the slave trade have not been thoroughly addressed in North American secondary schools which have carelessly categorized Europeans as the evil wrongdoers and Africans as innocent victims.

My aim for this study is to explore how the customary sequence of trading procedures between European slave traders and African royalty established a relationship of trust. The reader should keep in mind that African royalty, rulers, and wealthy merchants are referred to as “kings” because of their chief role in trading procedures. In addition to trading procedures, this thesis focuses on the maintenance of trust, its

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4 Snelgrave, 74.
progression, and its importance to commerce between 1600 and 1800 along the major trading ports of the West African Coast.

I will also describe ups and downs of European experience along the west coast of Africa and examine instances where trust was not preserved. For purposes of this paper, trust between traders and kings is mainly defined as placing confidence in the payments of merchandise as well as the reliability in the goods received. However, evidence at the end of the study shows trust can take various forms in relation to the African-European merchant alliance. According to historian Paul Lovejoy, slavery was perhaps the most important factor in shaping pre-colonial African kingdoms socially and economically.\(^5\)

The period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries represents one of the most important stages in the slave trade due to the rapid growth of human exports. A long stretch of west African coastal settlements including Elimina, Cape Coast Castle, Little Popo, Whydah, Lagos, Benin, New Calabar, Bonny, and Old Calabar constituted the major West African slave trading ports. These stretched through four major zones, the Winward Coast, the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast (Bight of Benin), and the Bight of Biafra. This study will only focus on the ports Whydah and Old Calabar, along with adjoining inland areas of Allada, Abomey, and Dahomey, also central areas of slave trading.\(^6\) The narrow geographical scope of this study was due to my desire to focus on ports that offered a rich history of trust. In addition to offering primary sources that were the basis of this paper, the ports were economically successful in trade. During the eighteenth century, these coasts accounted for 88 percent of the trade between Europe,

\(^5\) Lovejoy, 22.
\(^6\) Allada, Abomey, and Dahomey were important to the slave trade because they were powerful Kingdoms located between the interior of Africa and the West African Coast, acting as an important “middleman” in slave transport.
Africa, and the Americas. The respective slave ports were frequented by the most powerful Europeans in trade: Portuguese, English, Dutch, French, and Danish merchants. They were not limited to trading slaves but also practiced subsidiary “legitimate” trade in gold, ivory, gum, salt, and other products.

The increasing demand for labor in the West Indies and American plantations made slave trading an ideal source of financial profit for European merchant companies. European nations fought hard to secure the most advantageous trading grounds. West Africa became one of the main exporters of slaves during this period, sending thousands of slaves per year to North and South America as well as the Caribbean. The presence

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9 Lovejoy, 47.
of European merchants in turn helped further develop trade within Africa. According to historian Herbert Klein, trading in slaves was not unknown to Africans before the arrival of Europeans. An established network of trade routes, specialized tasks, seizure of captives, taxation procedures, and a defined merchant class was already thriving. Typically, Africans who were guilty of debts, witchcraft, criminal acts, or taken as war prisoners or pawns were originally collected by other Africans to be enslaved within their localities. As a result, slave trading with Europeans could be commenced without major difficulties. Soon, forts and factories were built along the coast to organize and bulk the slaves funneled toward Europeans at the sea.

Many European powers attempted to establish exclusive rights to trade within certain regions where the forts or factories were located. These factories were known as “storehouses” where European goods could be permanently kept (not the definition we associate with factories today). Slaves were often stored in these factories and supplied to the ships that anchored in port. The factories lining the African coast were important posts for trade. The West African coast was ruled by African Kings. The Kings held power over many people within their respective kingdoms that included an army as well. The armies of kingdoms were deployed in political disputes, raids, wars, and massive destruction during a chaotic period of political expansion, placing the European factories in an unstable location. As the slave trade progressed, profits were generated from numerous duties, taxes, and customary tributes imposed by African authorities. While the Europeans remained at the coast, tensions increased between neighboring African kingdoms which made every attempt to maximize their profit. In the 1720’s, the profits

11 Lovejoy, 44.
from the slave trade increased hostility in Dahomey. King Agaja of Dahomey and his army conquered the area between his kingdom and the coast, both Allada (1724) and Whydah (1727), in order to eliminate all the middlemen. Not only did the defeat of middlemen kingdoms provide better access to the slave trade, it also maximized his profit.  

Because this study relies on European trading accounts, the reader must understand the pattern of communication between traders and kings. Although most European traders had no interest in learning the various African languages, a common trade language developed over the centuries between Africans and Europeans. The vocabulary of the trading languages varied from place to place along the coast and was usually dependent upon which country traded the most in a given area. The most widespread language was “Creole Portuguese” because the Portuguese were the most prominent along the coast and were the first Europeans to come into contact with the Africans. In areas where the English traded, a language called the “Pigin” developed. Pigdin, a unique mixture of mostly English words with African languages, was used in commerce between Africans and Europeans and eventually became standardized as its use migrated down the West African Coast. Fortunately for modern-day historians, communication brought written records by Europeans that have been translated from various languages. For the most part, European merchants’ accounts of African culture and history are gathered from stories told by African informants rather than their own observations of the coastal regions.

12 Law, 50.
14 Forde, viii.
The European accounts used throughout this paper may not be entirely truthful or reliable. European slavers’ accounts tended to describe absurd stories and exotic descriptions of a slave trader’s expedition. The accounts were sold to readers throughout Europe for a taste of the African landscape. Stories of decapitation, bloody religious sacrifices, strange African food, and unusual customs suggest that the more shocking stories made books sellable to a curious European audience. Other sources enlightened the public by describing the difficulties, harsh lifestyles, and risks of the slave trade. Despite these flaws, European accounts are still valuable to historians and provide an interesting perspective on the African environment. Historians are able to gain a sense of European attitudes towards Africans, as well as appreciate their reliance upon certain commercial relationships.

Information for this study was gathered from primary published records, journals, diaries, and letter correspondence between European slave traders at various locations along the West Coast of Africa. The value of the letters as sources of historical reference is evident in their documentation of European commerce along the West African coast, which was mainly trade in slaves. The letters illuminate operations of the trading companies in addition to the difficulties they experienced in enforcing trade monopolies and providing resources to support trade. But the written complaints and excuses of the trading company employees provided evidence of European activities. They illustrate the critical involvement of Africans in the operation of European commerce on the West African coast as well. Several published manuscripts written by European traders who visited the West African coast (mainly the Slave Coast) provide the most informative accounts. Throughout this study, traders’ extensive references to political events in Africa
as well as their own experiences and observations are the most frequently used. However, some source material is not written in English and I utilize them in translation.

This study is divided into three sections. The first section identifies the differences between the African and European cultures that met at the West African coast. Although both Africans and Europeans were merchants, diverse cultures assembled with the same intent: to trade slaves. Therefore, the first part of this thesis will address the groundwork for trust in terms of conducting trade. The second section is devoted to presenting evidence of the African-European relationship of trust. Specific accounts of trading procedures, and hierarchy of players involved in trade will help define when, where and why trust was initiated. It will also make clear why trust was such an important component to establishing a successful business partnership. The study will conclude in the third section with examples of European betrayal of trust to shed light on its various dimensions. The last section will also reiterate the importance of trust and identify the effects of crossing relationship boundaries.

**Part 1: The Conditions that made Trust an important matter in trade**

This section introduces two distinct cultures, the European and African, and emphasizes their differences and similarities that somehow brought them together under a common purpose. The differences between these two cultures ranged from the obvious elements of skin color, clothing, language, customs, religion, rituals, currency, climate and goods desired. Yet, despite their differences, these cultures assembled along the coast of Africa to conduct business, and both participants were dependent upon each other. Both sides needed to maintain a certain level of trust to become successful. This section
will introduce the conditions and sometimes misunderstandings that would establish the foundation of trust between two different cultures during the height of slave trade.

To begin, I will describe the life and difficulty of a European slave trader in both a private enterprise and a large company. To gain a sense of the slave trade’s appeal and its dangers, primary accounts of European merchants will be studied. Then, the focus will shift to conditions in Africa during the height of the slave trade between 1600 and 1800. This will set the framework for the paper’s specific focus on trade relationships.

**European Slave Traders**

The adversities of a slave trader are best expressed in the story of Archibald Dalzel, a surgeon who served in the Royal Navy during the Seven Years’ War. Born in Scotland in 1740, Dalzel faced financial troubles after the death of his father in 1763.\(^\text{15}\) As the oldest sibling and son, Dalzel was responsible for supporting his family. After his discharge from the Navy however, Dalzel did not have sufficient financial resources to cope with his family’s needs. Dalzel was hired as the surgeon for the Company of Merchants at their fort in Anomabu on the Gold Coast of West Africa.\(^\text{16}\) Dalzel quickly lost interest in medicine, in part because his salary was not sufficient, and within a year he decided to become a slave-trader to increase his income. In 1767, Dalzel was promoted to Director of the Company’s fort at Whydah, located on the slave coast of West Africa. The new promotion enabled Dalzel to acquire the wealth he had desired. In three years, Dalzel earned enough money to support his family and begin his own private trading ventures to

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the West Indies. Eventually, Dalzel settled in London in 1771, frequently sending ships to West Africa to purchase slaves to sell in the West Indies. Dalzel’s letters recorded a hefty annual income of £1000, giving him the ability to support his family. In a letter to his younger brother, Andrew, Dalzel expresses his years of happiness: “Let us therefore suffice for the present to acquaint you in brief that I have an excellent constitution, [and] am situated in the most pleasant of the luxuries of life…[I] live genteelly and I am in a fair way of speedily acquiring a decent subsistence for life.”\(^{17}\) Despite Dalzel’s years of success, most of his income was sent to his family. Eventually his business suffered from a number of failed voyages, forcing him to take a leave of absence from trading.\(^{18}\)

Archibald Dalzel’s narrative conveys the financial enticement of the slave-trade. Dalzel was a surgeon, hired by trading companies only to ensure that slaves were kept alive as they traveled across the Atlantic. Nevertheless, the quick financial profit tempted Dalzel to neglect his years of medical training and instead of keeping slaves alive, he turned to selling them. Dalzel’s letters to his brother in Scotland express his years of happiness as he reaped the financial rewards and successes that slave trading provided. However, with great financial rewards also came bodily risks. These included the threat of slave ship mutiny, piracy, and illness aboard ship. Dalzel unfortunately suffered from financial risk in the end.

It should be noted that Dalzel’s transition from working with the Company of Merchants to forming his own private trading venture was quite rare during the slave trade. It was expensive to enter the slave trade and required planning and capital. Aspiring merchants required money to buy goods to trade, knowledge of local markets,

\(^{17}\) Archibald Dalziel to Andrew Dalziel, 20 April 1768 (E.U.L. Dk. 7).
\(^{18}\) Dalzel, 7.
soldiers to protect ships and to guard slaves, in addition to extensive personal contacts over a wide range of areas in case of emergencies or credit for goods when needed.\textsuperscript{19}

Large trading companies relied on limiting competition to prevent an increase in slave prices and other goods for export from Africa. African traders favored open competition amongst slave trading companies and private merchants to raise the purchase price for slaves. By not having one company control a specific slave coast zone, Africans could raise prices without fear of becoming dependent upon one major European company. Africans were experienced in market strategies and promoted competition among European buyers. More European trading companies gave African kings more power to negotiate and bargain for the most profitable trade option. They often refused to settle with one trading nation which resulted in wide fluctuations in slave prices along the coast.

While these nations represented larger trade companies with state monopolies, competition between Europeans remained a major factor. Allada is a prime example of a specific African slave port that conducted business with the two most powerful trading participants: the Portuguese and the Dutch. From 1553 to 1635 the Portuguese held a monopoly over the sale of slaves but eventually lost their monopoly in certain coastal slave-trading ports to the Dutch due to piracy against Portuguese ships in sometimes violent takeovers. The Dutch animosity towards the Portuguese encouraged theft of ships, slaves, and commodities. The Dutch had developed the West India Company (WIC), which maintained a monopoly over the slave trade after the Portuguese from 1636 to

\textsuperscript{19} Klein, 122.
However, a constant fear of a Portuguese return to the Dutch forts remained. European raiding along coastal forts and factories was common, especially along the Gold Coast. From 1630 to 1720, control of forts and locations led to several battles between European powers. European forts were built with stone to protect from raids by other Europeans from the sea.

Although Archibald Dalzel described the financial gains from trading, he did not directly express the difficult lifestyle a slave trader could encounter. The memoirs of a few slave traders present a picture of hardships, illness, bankruptcy, and personal abuse by fellow shipmates. In his popular narrative *The Account of the Slave Trade (1788)*, Alexander Falconbridge, a former surgeon employed aboard various slave ships, related in detail certain aspects of the slave trade. Abuse of hired men was rampant on board ships as well. Crew members were brutally beaten for trivial errors in judgment. Falconbridge also recounts instances where captains of the slave ships traveled to shore every evening to conduct business with black traders, only to return to the ship heavily intoxicated, “beating and ill-using their crew.” Perhaps it was inevitable that abuse and hostility between co-workers ensued aboard ships. The tight quarters, filthy conditions, and lack of proper nourishment added to the hostile environment a slave trader encountered. In sum, while the monetary benefits seemed profitable, the threat of abuse, deadly conditions, and the surge of competition were not ideal situations.

Given the evidence of Europeans raiding their competitors’ forts and abuse between European crewmembers, Europeans seemed to struggle with issues of trust.

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21 Klein, 65.
between their own ethnic group as well as the indigenous population they encountered in Africa. European trading companies competed against each other for the healthiest slaves and other goods along the trading coast and the stress of the job took its toll upon some. In addition, local warfare put many traders in danger of fort destruction or injury in crossfire. Indeed, a slave trader’s culture, language, clothing, currency, and weapons were very different from those found in Africa, yet the desire for commercial gain brought these two very different cultures together and to establish a distinctive working relationship.

**Environment of Africa**

In Africa, the lack of a central government did not help unify the unstable political environment, as the states of West Africa were at odds, politically and commercially. Battles for commercial power were waged relentlessly, as aggressive African groups fought one another to secure captives to sell along the nearest coast. Brutal conquests between African states to eliminate groups that exercised too much control in trade were also a threat. Therefore, the most successful trading ports were sites of conflict and changed location regularly in the course of twenty years. The local wars were believed to have caused slave volumes to fluctuate and lowered prices when warfare created a surplus of slaves. In turn, traders had preferences for certain ports over others. The eighteenth century conquest of Allada and Whydah by the Kingdom of Dahomey, which will be described at the end of this section, was an example of using warfare as a strategy to improve one’s position in the slave trade.

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Local warfare facilitated European enslavement of Africans because war captives from the defeated faction had been used as slaves, pawns, and religious sacrifices before Europeans arrived. It was common to employ the captured as slaves in local areas of Africa until they were transported to the coast. A combination of increasing warfare between African states and technological improvements made transporting slaves from the interior to the coast easier. War captives were of value to a state’s army. They were seen by Africans not only as “war booty”\(^\text{24}\) but could be sold or traded for other goods such as clothes, liquor, and other commodities. Another profitable option for Africans was to hold captives for ransom. Collecting money from captives’ families in exchange for loved ones proved to be quite profitable. The unredeemed captives were either brought to the coast and delivered to European traders or sold in large quantities in “slave fairs” where thousands of Africans, mostly men and boys were disposed of, from forty to up to two-hundred at a time.\(^\text{25}\) At the coast, war captives could be sold to European merchants who awaited a shipment of slaves. Purchasing captives at the coast worked in the European favor because foreign traders did not need to travel into the unchartered interior of Africa in order to gather slaves.

Records show that African civil wars did not always increase the supply of slaves for the world market. Thomas Wilson at Whydah wrote to English merchants at Cabo Corso Castle in 1728. The Dahomian conquest was disrupting trade due to the King of Dahomey’s monopolization of goods:

> It’s needless to advise you of this dismal Condition this Country is at present in, and will continue so till either the King of Whydah or Dahumy [Dahomey] is

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\(^{24}\) “War booty” refers to property or in this case, humans, seized from the defeated group in times of war. Taking items after war symbolized the acquirement of power and authority as the defeated enemy was to obey the wishes of the conqueror.

\(^{25}\) Falconbridge, 12.
entirely routed, nor can it be expected that there can be any Trade, where the Enemy is Master of the Country one day and the Whydahs the other, so that the French & Portugueeze which have been here this four or five Months are now going off the Coast and not half slav’d…nor has Captain Hill purchased 200 since he’s been here and Captain Blinco has been here for above 2 months [and] has not purchased 40 yet, and the small Quantity of Slaves that are purchased now are only for Cowries and a few Sleatias since it’s the Whydahs that sells each other to maintaine themselves in Starveing Condition they are at present in, so that all other Goods are unvendable at this Juncture.  

This letter provides insight to one of the most turbulent periods during the slave trade: the conquest of Dahomey by its rival, Whydah, a rising powerhouse in 1727. Here, the Royal African Company was stationed along the Slave Coast at two factories, Cabo Corso Castle at Whydah and Little Popo Factory. The letter indicates that the conquest halted trade, causing French and Portuguese mercantile companies to wait along the coast for a minimal supply of slaves. The longer a merchant had to wait for slaves, the less profitable the trading expedition would be for human cargoes required continual supplies of food. The correspondence does not reflect the turbulence within the slave trade in general, but rather sheds light on a problematic situation: the African merchants’ tactic of a slow slave delivery. The violence between Whydah and Dahomey, two major areas of West African commerce, had a profound effect on European trade because the number of slaves purchased did not live up to European expectations. As the Africans delivered the slaves sporadically, it forced the Europeans to remain on the coast to fill their ship and raised prices of slaves for the Europeans competing for the small supply. The trading tactics suggest the shrewd business calculations of Africans. However, effects of trading

26 Robin Law, Correspondence of the Royal African Company's Chief Merchants at Cabo Corso Castle with William's Fort, Whydah and Little Popo Factory, 1727-1728, ed. Robin Law, David Henige (University of Wisconsin: The Board of Regents, 1991) 27. Cowries and Selatias are the currency in which slaves and other goods are purchased from the African merchants. Conquest of Dahomey took place in 1727.
maneuvers may have placed more European value in a business relationship founded on trust with Africans in order to avoid unprofitable situations.

Historian Herbert Klein cites hostile conflicts between powerful participants in the slave trade as an example of “market disruption.” Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, other states such as Allada, Whydah, the Dahomeans, and Oyo on the Slaves coast waged in numerous battles. Klein argues these wars were waged in order to gain control over the slave trade, European commerce, and local markets. However, some defeats were not productive as in the case of the conquest of Allada and Whydah by Dahomey. After Dahomey seized control of trade and defeated two productive trading ports, a disruption of trade routes halted the slave trade in other areas such as the Bight of Biafra. 27

Despite disruptions due to internal African warfare, some historians believe that African warfare helped the trade. Herbert Klein concludes that warfare in the long run was extremely important in generating captives. He also believes that enslavement “facilitated war and made it more economically viable” because selling captives made warfare more appealing. 28 Warfare brought land, power, captives, and possibly markets for trade to the conqueror. Each African province or kingdom had its own army, and like Whydah, was headed by a "Captain of War" appointed by the King. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, war in West Africa was transformed as Africans went from being responsible for defending themselves with self-made weapons to purchasing more advanced European firearms. 29

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27 Klein, 118.
28 Klein, 117.
29 Law, 101.
Although slavery was accepted in Africa, some scholars argue that Europeans promoted slavery through “indirect military pressure.” According to historian John Thornton, Africans willingly sold slaves to Europeans in turn for new military technology, such as horses and guns. This allowed Africans to defend themselves from warfare on their borders and the threat of conquest. In addition to protection, guns and horses provided the power for Africans to gather a larger number of slaves by traveling into the interior.

Evidence of providing weapons demonstrates an underlying African-European relationship of trust. A level of physical and political trust had to have been invested to ensure that the weapons would not be used against Europeans in times of warfare or hostile disagreements. Before 1680, there was no evidence that European technology was used in African warfare. Therefore, a correlation between the influence of European military technology and increased African warfare remains unclear.

Historians have debated the influence warfare had on the slave trade. Some historians believe that increased warfare did not necessarily lower slave prices or change the amount of slaves sold, especially along the Slave Coast during 1670s and 1680s. For example, in the eighteenth century, the collapse of the Oyo Empire did not affect the steady supply of slaves that entered into the Yoruba market. Therefore it was evident that there were other means of obtaining slaves, not just through warfare. Slaves were steadily acquired from other judicial and political sources like the enslavement of criminals and violent raids. Historian Robin Law states, “If there was a connection between war and

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31 Thornton, 98-99.
slave prices, it would seem that increased ‘slave-raiding’ was stimulated by rising prices, rather than increased slave raiding kept prices down.”

The different historical perspectives on the effect of warfare in Africa do not provide a clear answer to the fluctuations in the numbers of slaves. Did warfare lower slave prices or were there other reasons for various prices? However, one thing is certain: the unpredictable slave numbers, prices, and trading patterns caused European merchants to rely on others. A possible elimination or setback by an African middleman in trade could potentially disrupt business for others and create a major profit loss for European traders. Background for this section not only acknowledges the variable climate of Africa but also helps us to study more complex relationships during the slave trade.

**Part II. Relationship of trust between African Kings and European Slave traders**

Because of often difficult and volatile political conditions, relationships between African and European traders required a delicate process of trust building. Obligations during the slave trade for Europeans involved making payments for slaves and other goods, incurring debts, establishing credit, managing company investments, paying taxes, and supplying customary gifts to African merchants and Kings. In return, European traders relied upon Africans to maintain their end of the deal which was to supply slaves. European investment was physically and financially strenuous as foreign merchants traveled great lengths to establish business in Africa. Traders learned that trust would not be the only obligation that needed to be fulfilled. Respect was also necessary in order to establish good business contacts with Africans that held an important role in trade.

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33 Law, 83.
This section will analyze the importance of trust and the establishment of good relations between European and African merchants, as well as the customary events that were critical to commerce. Gift-giving, tributes, customs and other tokens of respect played a significant role in establishing a level of confidence and faith between vendors given the circumstances of the slave trade mentioned in the first part of the paper. The slave trade was an important monetary investment as well as a big commitment in terms of travel and risk, making predictable, reliable relationships essential. According to the evidence, gift exchanges and customary sequences of trade were quite similar along the West coast of Africa. They symbolized reliability and respect, making the relationship between two different cultures enlightening during the slave trade.

African and European participants of the slave trade had relatively defined duties that comprised an important social hierarchy. The hierarchy of duties influenced the slave trade’s efficiency and success. The social hierarchy of African jobs in the slave trade was developed before the arrival of Europeans. But once Europeans had arrived, more responsibilities began to take shape. At the top, African “kings”, princes, and local chiefs owned slaves themselves and sold them to African merchants. For example, William Snelgrave’s visit with King Agaja in 1727, began with the introduction of the King’s entourage which consisted of the King’s “principal chiefs.”34 While it is not certain that the King shared power with them, there is evidence that they had the right to contest certain decision-making.35 Perhaps the chiefs held certain trading privileges as well. Beneath them, wealthy African merchants and entrepreneurs made their living selling/trading slaves to Europeans along the coast. Next, middlemen and soldiers

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35 Law, 101.
comprised the largest section of the hierarchy and were divided into different duties as well, such as African translators that worked with European traders and canoemen. Canoemen were perhaps the most unified class of middleman workers. They were responsible for transporting slaves and other goods to and from European ships anchored along the coast. Due to their independent employment, canoemen were frequently accused of stealing European goods which led to disputes and feelings of distrust.\textsuperscript{36} Lastly, the paid domestic workers and slaves were at the bottom of the African hierarchy. These workers and slaves were predominantly captured by the African middleman from wars between interior kingdoms.

The top of the European hierarchy was composed of the foreign trading company, under the authority of a European government. Owners and high level administrators of the trading companies typically resided in major European cities. Next, the captain of the ship and European merchants were responsible for trading transactions with Africans. Below them were the ship’s surgeons and doctors that were responsible for keeping the slaves alive once they boarded the ship. At the bottom of the European hierarchy, crewmembers and overseers maintained the difficult duty of maintaining order on the ship, supervising food distribution and slave transport on/off the boat.

As previously mentioned, African leaders or “kings” were attentive to the welfare of those they ruled, enforcing rules, delivering justice, handling economic affairs, as well as ensuring protection of the group. However, the slave trade created what contemporary historian Rodney Walter calls, “a separate class which had no sympathy for the common people” as African rulers began capturing individuals within their domains or using them

as sacrificial victims.\textsuperscript{37} After local wars and the collection of war captives, the ruling class had the luxury of buying and selling their captives first, as well as determining which captives would be killed for sacrifice. Indeed, African Kings had the upper-hand in most decisions regarding slaves and designated rules to maintain their power and wealth.

The rules enforced by African Kings included customary trading procedures required by Europeans to initiate and continue commerce. The King’s customs ranged from elaborate festivals to casual meetings. Whatever the meeting type, European traders typically described their meetings in detail. An example can be seen in 1788, English surgeon Alexander Falconbridge wrote a comprehensive report about the trading etiquette employed by European merchants as they entered Bonny River, a major slave trading port in the Bight of Biafra:

\begin{quote}
The slave ships generally lie near a miles below the town, in Bonny River, in seven or eight fathom water. Sometimes fifteen sail, English and French, but chiefly the former, meet here together. Soon after they cast anchor, the captains go on shore, to make know their arrival, and to inquire into the state of the trade. They likewise invite the kings of Bonny to come on board…they usually make presents (in that country termed dashes) which generally consist of pieces of cloth, cotton, chintz, silk handkerchiefs, and other India goods, and sometimes brandy, wine, or beer.

The Kings of Bonny are absolute, though elective. They are assisted in the government by a small number of persons of a certain rank, who stile themselves parliament gentlemen; an office which they generally hold for life. Every ship, on its arrival, is expected to send a present to these gentlemen, of a small quantity of bread and beef, and likewise to treat them as often as they come on board. When they do this, their approach to the ship is announced by blowing through a hollow elephant’s tooth, which produces a sound resembling that of a post-horn.\textsuperscript{38}

Bonny River was a popular slave trading destination. However, it differed from other ports because most trade was conducted aboard European slaving ships, not on land. If for some reason one needed to travel to the shore, canoes were used as a vehicle to shuttle

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{37} Rodney, 9.
\textsuperscript{38} Falconbridge, 7.
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back and forth. In Falconbridge’s account, the “Kings” of Bonny were invited onto the European ship via canoe, and then given gifts of fine cloths, alcohol or sometimes food like bread or beef. It is important to note that the diplomatic sequence of customs was initiated by the blowing of a horn to announce the approach of African dealers. Falconbridge’s account implies a trading custom that was sequential and that Europeans stored a certain amount of goods in preparation to give to powerful African merchants in return for slaves. Falconbridge also stated, “After the kings have been on board and have received the usual presents, permission is granted by them for trafficking with any of the black traders. When the royal guests return from the ships, they are saluted by the guns.” The practice of saluting with guns suggests a code of respect that was given once business was conducted. Perhaps after the customary business deal, European merchants earned the respect from their fellow business partners. The merchant could be trusted to deliver his end of the deal and hopefully it would initiate a financially successful partnership.

The dispersal of European goods can be divided into two major sectors: (1) Voluntary gift-giving and (2) Involuntary payments. Voluntary gift-giving by Europeans was considered a form of respect. It established trust and created a foundation for further business-relationships with African merchants. The quality of gifts was crucial and somewhat dependent upon surrounding European competition and the demand for slaves. A large number of European merchants residing at a single slave port meant that one needed to present a respectable tribute. For example, the Portuguese merchants were highly favored due to their wealth in gold. The gold enticed African nobility and in turn provided the Portuguese with the healthiest, strongest slaves.

39 Falconbridge, 7-8.
According to historian John Thornton, Europeans abandoned unsuccessful attempts at raiding and trading on African coasts for a more “peaceful regulated trade”. The regulated trade involved negotiating peace treaties and commerce with African rulers along the coast. Some of the earliest examples of peaceful offerings date back to 1494. Hieronymous Megiser, a visitor to Portugal, observed that the Portuguese king frequently sent gifts to the rulers of African states to win their support and in return, would gain protection from the African rulers as they traveled freely in Africa. This was referred to by merchants as a practice of “trust trade,” in which a European trader provided goods to a native chief that maintained a good business reputation in order to purchase his quota of slaves. Items such as “copper bars, knives, rum, gin, basins, tankards, beads, locks, mirrors, guns, powder, and shot” were commonly given as gifts. The sequence of diplomatic peace offerings replaced the hostile “raid and trade” and the “raid and conquer” practice in Africa that rendered ill-feelings between European merchants and African rulers in the beginning of the slave trade. By engaging in a certain level of respect while conducting business, both cultures could enjoy a successful, long-term commercial relationship.

Gift dispersal was a form of involuntary payment. Unlike the voluntary payment, European traders were obligated to pay a specific amount in goods to their business partners to continue trade or for their work in trade. This type of involuntary payment was referred to as “dashes,” a word of mysterious origin. It was previously thought to be from the Portuguese “das-me,” meaning “give me” in English. However, others believe it to be derived from the English phrase “dash of rum” which was frequently given to

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40 Thornton, 38.
41 Forde, 5.
42 Thornton, 38.
natives when they boarded ships to trade.\textsuperscript{43} In his book, \textit{Trade and Travels in the Gulph of Guinea 1851}, English merchant J. Smith accounts for the importance of ‘dashes’ in commerce:

\begin{quote}
to know how to make presents judiciously is a very important part of the knowledge of it [trading]. When the trader comes to see your goods he asks for a dash; when he brings you goods he wants one; and when he receives payment another. The head slaves look for dashes. The pilots both in bringing you to and taking you out of the rivers, independent of a fixed payment, receive dashes.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

J. Smith’s example of dashes illustrates the number of payments European merchants were obligated to provide to each participant of the African trade. From the example, J. Smith provided dashes to the African trader, middleman, the slave overseer, and the canoeman respectively. Smith’s description of copious fees from different workers of the slave trade is one of disgust. It is evident that African merchants were tapping into the European mercantile wealth of trade by imposing various duties.

In addition to “dashes” there was another form of payment known as “comey” – a tariff on the ships anchored on the West African shores. The name comey was believed to be derived from the native pronunciation of “custom.”\textsuperscript{45} According to English merchant J. Smith, “comey” was arranged between the king and trader while the ship was safely moored. Smith adds: “The quantity [of payment] is regulated by the registered tonnage of the ship; you must settle with him [the king or merchant] the best way you can as to quality. Generally speaking he is not bad to deal with in settling for comey, not half so bad as in his [King] private trade transactions. The profits of the latter are his own.”\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{43} Nicholas Owen and Eveline Christiana Martin, \textit{Journal of a Slave-dealer: “A View of some Remarkable Axxcedents in the Life of Nics. Owen on the Coast of Africa and America from the year 1746 to the year 1757.”} Edited, with an introd. by Eveline Martin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930) 4.
\textsuperscript{44} J. Smith, \textit{Trade and Travels in the Gulph of Guinea, 1851} (London:, 1851). 186.
\textsuperscript{45} Forde, 6.
\textsuperscript{46} J. Smith, 184.
\end{flushright}
From Smith’s account, we can gather that the comey was similar to a tax on ships. The required amount of payment was calculated based upon the European ship tonnage and provided large revenue for kings. The kings of Africa also set taxes upon commercial transactions as well as property. For example, European factories had to pay a property tax upon their designated factory along the coast of Africa each year.

There is evidence of comey being divided among kings. In the 1800s, British supercargoes and the chiefs of Duke Town and Creek Town, two African trading ports, enforced a tax on Europeans at the rate of twenty coppers per registered ton, giving two-thirds to the King of Creek Town and one-third to the King of Duke Town. Although this scenario reflects a civil agreement between merchants, other situations were not as smooth. Arguments and disagreements as to who was liable for payments can be found in merchants’ letters.

Jean Barbot, a commercial agent for the French African Company, wrote about customary gifts and taxes. Originally from France, Barbot wrote detailed accounts of Western African voyages from Guinea to America from 1678 to 1679 and again from 1681 to 1682. Barbot noted about trade in Ardah (actually Allada) that:

As soon as a ship arrives there from Europe, the commander or supercargo must wait on the governor of Little Arda, to be conducted by him to the king, taking along with him the usual presents, which commonly consist in the parcel of about three or four pound weight of fine coral, six Cyprus cloths, three pieces of Morees, and one piece of damask, for the King.

Tis usual for the Europeans to give the king the value of fifty slaves in goods for his permission to trade, and custom for each ship.

The Europeans being obliged to deliver at their own charge, at Great Arda, all such goods of their cargo, as the king has pitched upon for himself out of their invoices…which being agreed on that prince causes a public crier to proclaim it

47 Forde, 184.
about the country, and to declare that every man may freely trade with the super-
cargo of such a ship, who is to satisfy the crier for his labour.\footnote{Barbot, et al, \textit{Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712} (London: Hakluyt Society, 1992) 113.}

A defined set of procedures initiates the beginning of business between two different cultures. First, Barbot’s customary gift consisted mainly of fine cloths in exchange for the fifty slaves he intended to purchase. Barbot provided evidence of a customary tax on the ship as well. Then, Barbot mentions a “public crier” who announces the permission to trade with the ship. It is assumed that there may have been multiple African merchants willing to trade with Barbot, and perhaps the crier alerted other African merchants to Barbot’s legitimacy.

J. Smith’s account from the mid 1800s provides an accurate overview of the trade experience. By this time, the slave trade procedures had been in effect for nearly 300 years and the savvy African merchants had learned to establish productive means of credit:

\begin{quote}
Few things astonish a white man so much on a first visit to this place on a trading expedition, as the amount of goods solicited by and entrusted to this people. With the utmost confidence a fellow nearly naked will ask you for three, or four, or even five thousand pounds worth of goods on credit, and individuals are often trusted to that amount. I have trusted more than one man with goods, the returns of which were worth between two and three thousand pounds.\footnote{Barbot, 113.}
\end{quote}

Trading procedures required not only voluntary gifts to African nobility to initiate European interest but also an organized system of credit. The combination of gifts and taxes regulated by African merchants and Kings were costly for Europeans and somewhat frivolous. At times, Europeans did not have money-objects to give to African merchants, therefore credit was extended to them. Europeans were expected to provide the African merchants with goods at a later date, honoring the relationship of trust as a form of credit.
Considering several primary accounts of trading relations between merchant and king, we can conclude there were certain measures and sequences of events that were similar throughout the slave trade at different ports. Historian Karl Polanyi studied the development of Savi, a village in the Kingdom of Dahomey which was frequented by many Portuguese and Dutch traders before it was transformed by the French Company into a new trading center. After studying trading rituals within the Savi village, Polanyi organized the king’s trading sequences by day. The first day the European commander sorted his goods and determined the proper amount of slaves to purchase. The goods were priced accordingly on the second day while the third day small samples of their goods were presented to the African king. The next day, lodgings and warehouses were assigned to Europeans. On the fifth day, the agreed annual customs amount was given to the king, following the ringing of a loud bell that alerted people to bring their slaves to sell. Merchants would present their finest quality slaves first. Polanyi’s itinerary of trade in Dahomey provides us with some insight to the stages of gift-giving to the various rankings within the King’s realm of power. The procedure described makes the tasks surrounding this process between slave trader and king ceremonial and suggests there was a certain “diplomatic etiquette” that needed to be followed when a ship arrived. Polanyi’s sequence of customary events that occurred during the slave trade is noteworthy because it was a five-day process. Perhaps this was normal for a “supercargo” that could carry hundreds of slaves on board. However most primary accounts written by slave traders do not mention the exact length of time that negotiations required.

Slave trader Robert Norris provides evidence to challenge Karl Polanyi’s notion

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51 Polanyi, 112.
that customary gifts were always given in a defined sequence of trading procedures. For example, gifts were exchanged during Annual Customs, a series of celebratory days in which a large public sacrifice of slaves and mostly criminals took place. Annual Customs was held within the King’s court in the company of many Africans as well as European guests. Sometimes ten to one hundred sacrifices were performed; however slaves were not a priority for execution because they could bring profit. In addition to the religious sacrifice, the King distributed gifts to his “people.” The king’s “people” might include not only the European merchants that were guests at the Annual Customs but also other workers in the African slave trade that were below him in power. Robert Norris provides a brief description of trade procedures at the Annual Customs in Dahomey in 1789:

On this occasion, a large stage is erected near one of the palace gates…on this are piled heaps of silesias, checks, calicoes, and a variety of other European and Indian goods; a great many fine cotton cloths that are manufactured in the Eyo country; and a prodigious quantity of cowries. When all is ready, the king comes upon that stage, accompanied by any of the [European] governors, or captains of ships, that may be there, and attended by the Tamegah, Mayhou, and a few others of his headmen; to each of these he gives, according to their rank, the choice of an Eyo clot, or a string of coralbeads.

Norris’s description of the “heaps” of various goods, both European and African, on a stage suggests that this was a large ceremonial exchange by the African King to his European guests. Despite the kind treatment of Europeans during Annual Customs by the African king, Annual Customs rendered European literature describing African barbarity and other horrors involving public sacrifice and celebration. For example, the King of Dahomey was known to decorate his living area with the skulls of the sacrificed.

52 Law, 45.  
Descriptions such as these fueled negative perceptions of Africans despite the fact that Europe conducted public executions as well.

Furthermore, Robert Norris’s reputation as a loyal merchant was recognized by African nobility. A description of Norris’s arrival in Abomey is rich in detail and suggests that a high level of respect was given to white merchants who frequently worked, traveled, and conducted business in Africa. His special welcoming by African nobility supports the fact that a certain level of reliability and credence amongst certain European traders was valued by African nobility. Robert Norris writes:

On my arrival at the gate of Abomey, I was saluted with fifteen guns, and conducted to the white men’s apartments in Mayhou’s house; Mayhou soon made his appearance, accompanied by the viceroy of Whydah, and presented the king’s compliments on my safe arrival, and escape from accidents, or sickness on the journey; which was followed by a present from the king, of a sheep, some fowls, two jars of pitto, two baskets of cornflour, a calabash of palm oil, one of salt, and a flask of brandy.”

Norris’s description of his arrival begins with a fifteen gun salute by the Africans. The custom salute was mentioned previously in this section by Alexander Falconbridge as well. However, one of the most surprising aspects of Norris’s description is the King’s concern for Norris’s health and well-being after his long journey. The concern for Norris’s health showed a level of personal friendship had existed. Norris does not mention the length of his friendship with Mayhou or the King of Abomey in his writings but it implied that it was long enough to develop a personal relationship. Norris’s description of this event was also unique because he mentioned that he received gifts from the king, including animals, which were not the customary gifts of cloth or alcohol typically found within traders’ descriptions.

Being an acquaintance or long-time business partner with an African King was

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54 Norris, 84-85.
not always necessary for a friendly reception. Archibald Dalzel’s account of his initial welcoming by the African King in Dahomey could be gathered as a form of camaraderie:

The King, and all his subjects, receives strangers with the most remarkable courtesy. Ambassadors, from whatever state, are not put to the necessity of learning the Dahoman etiquette from the master of the ceremonies. Every one salutes the Sovereign, according to the fashion practices in his own country. Chairs are placed for European governors, or masters of ships, upon which they sit, covered, till the King makes his appearance, when they make a bow, standing, and uncovered; after which, they resume their feats and put on their hats. Sometimes the Dahoman Monarch has been known to shake hands with a European; but this is a very uncommon mark of royal condescension, and bestowed only on some great favourite.55

Dalzel’s account is one of the very few that mentions the custom of “shaking hands” with a European. Hand shaking was possibly a token of civility or respect granted by the African monarch at the initiation of trade. Being “bestowed on some great favourite” has ties to trade as well. Perhaps to become a favorite, a trader needed to build credit or trust with the king from previous trading ventures.

The second description from Archibald Dalzel is one that introduces liquor. However his account can be read two different ways, as a form of camaraderie or torture:

White visitors are always honoured with a glass of some cordial liquor, filled by the King’s own hand; which if refused, is apt to give offence…On such occasions the subject lies on his back, while the King holds the bottle to his mouth. In this posture he must drink, till the royal hand be withdrawn; which sometimes does not happen before the whole contents be emptied, especially when he has a mind to sport with the drinker.56

From Dalzel’s account, the European was expected to drink from the hand of the powerful king, sometimes drinking the entire contents at once. The King’s ritual of pouring liquor into his guest’s mouth clearly indicated his authority and supremacy. It also provided a great metaphor: European merchants’ profits were “fed” to them by their

56 Dalzel, viii-ix.
African trading partners and owed much of their success to them. However, some questions have been left unanswered in this vivid description. Did the African king have a motive for obliging the European to drink in excess? Why did the king want the Europeans to become inebriated? Could forcing Europeans to drink be a form of torture to prove African power over trade? Clearly, Dalzel’s description could be read in a number of different ways.

Alcohol was one of many customary gifts given by Europeans, and stories of European captains drinking heavily with kings to the point of inebriation suggests this was perhaps a treat for the European governors and merchants. Alcohol consumption seemed to signify camaraderie between Africans and Europeans. Evidence of camaraderie is also found in another statement by Archibald Dalzel: “Each of the governors carries an annual present to the King, consisting of a piece of rich silk for a dress, together with some brandy and other articles…These are received, not as the consideration by which they hold their respective forts, but as a token of friendship and good correspondence.” Although different kings had different practices, Dalzel’s experience suggests that gifts to the king were more of a personal preference rather than an inclination to follow trading customs.

Africans conducted trade on their own terms with Europeans, establishing customary fees and duties. According to historian John Thornton, there were many “complexities that governed African trade.” For instance, large European chartered companies had to execute a series of duties that included taxation, control over routes and itineraries, and inventories of goods bought and sold. Africans required certain procedures such as taxes, customs, negotiations, establishing prices of goods for various

57 Dalzel, XX.
people, and performing courtesy calls on rulers. Each job was necessary to fulfill the duties of various African states they would visit as well.  

There is a wealth of information on European slave traders, yet little is known about the African traders themselves. Antera Duke of Old Calabar is one of the few sources that provides information on the lives of African merchants. Published in 1956, Antera Duke’s diary written between 1785 and 1788 gave insight to this successful African entrepreneur as well as the politically organized traders of Old Calabar. Historian P.E. Hair has written that Duke’s diary “satisfies his double role, that of an African notable who celebrated traditional wakes and feasts by ritually sacrificing slaves, and that of an up-to-the-minute-African trader who donned “whiteman trousers”’ to drink tea and talk business with Liverpool ships’ captains.” The few stories of African and European merchant relationships help to offset the imbalance of the cruel stories of abuse, violence and deceit that ravaged the slave trade. Here, it is evident that two different cultures were brought together to establish a successful working relationship. Africans welcomed a foreign band of Europeans into a strange, new climate. It is hard to determine if these “dinner meetings” were successful. The language barrier would not have socially hindered the two parties because of Antera Duke’s role as a British trading partner. Therefore, slaves and other goods were probably negotiated and settled over a meal. Antera Duke’s diary entry on August 18, 1787:

I had Captain Potter come ashore; after 11 o’clock Potter sent his tender and his ship to bring 35 white men and at noon they began to put up two sides of the house; and after 2pm. I have all the Captains to dinner and supper with me.

58 Thornton, 56.
60 Hair, 56
Here, a dinner is set, followed by a business transaction a few days later on August 25, 1787 which states: “at 4 o’clock after noon Captain Fiarweather’s tender went away with 210 slaves.” Could the dinner have helped Captain Fiarweather purchase 210 slaves assuming he was one of the 35 white men Antera Duke invited to dinner a week before?

Another entry on December 25, 1787 names European captains that attended Duke’s dinner at his home:

great morning fog, and at 1 o’clock we had Captain Fairweather, John Tatam, Captain Ford, Captain Hughes, Captain Potter, Captain Rogers and Captain Combesboch and Eyo Willy Honesty, and Willy Tom Robin. We had dinner in Duke’s house and supper. At 8 o’clock at night they went on board, and we fired three guns.

Antera Duke’s “supper” shows not only friendly relationships with the European captains but also a level of respect, trust and hospitality. At the end of the entry, Duke states three guns were fired. This may have been another sign of respect or a celebratory ending to a trade arrangement.

In addition to the practice of gift-giving, duties, and taxation to demonstrate trust within trade, African kings’ granted European merchants with the power of punishment over unruly Africans. Unruly African were mainly thieves that intruded the Europeans’ settlement and factories along the coast. The threat of thievery or other hostilities was rampant along the coast, where profitable goods were stored in factories. Europeans sometimes took the initiative to kill a thief “on the spot, to cut off his head, and private

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61 Hair, 58
62 Hair, 63
parts, and bring them to the king’s palace,” as stated by Jean Barbot, a trader who wrote an account of Whydah during the 1680s.\(^6^3\)

In 1703, a treaty enforced by the King of Whydah further demonstrated the desire to maintain order during the slave trade. The clause authorized Europeans to “seize any Whydahs guilty of insult of theft against them on the spot, and to kill or enslave them, provided the king was informed.”\(^6^4\) The clause laid down an interesting aspect of the slave trade because it emphasized the desire to maintain peace and order while conducting business. Was the treaty of 1703 imposed in order to maintain commerce or were African kings truly concerned for the European well-being? Peace along the African coast was indeed necessary to ensure profitable transactions. In many ways, the treaty was a sign of establishing a business-trust and political-trust between the Africans and European merchants. It gave Europeans permission to execute a form of justice or capital punishment upon an intruder, despite the fact that the Europeans were simply visitors to Africa.

The key role of trust can be expanded to help understand different aspects of the slave trade, and has broad implications that will be further described in the following section. So far in this thesis, trust has been a major component of establishing business credit between European and African merchants. In addition to monetary trust in the form of credit, evidence of physical trust between Antera Duke and European merchants is also noteworthy. Lastly, political trust with the introduction of the Treaty of 1703 has also broadened the idea of trust in the slave trade.


\(^6^4\) Law, 399.
Part III: Exploring the Betrayal of Trust

As a citizen of England and employee of the Royal African Company in the 1720s, Bulfinch Lambe was first sent to the west African coast to meet with King Sozo of Allada, a trading post located between Whydah and Dahomey. Although it was intended to be a routine business trip, Lambe was seized and detained by King Sozo for an unpaid debt.\textsuperscript{65} Holding a creditor captive if he failed to pay his debt was a normal practice in West Africa. However, capture of a white male had not been previously recorded. This practice was called “panyarring,” and Lambe was panyarred for the Royal African Company’s debt in 1722. Unbeknown to Lambe and to King Sozo, the Royal African Company disregarded him as an employee. The loss of trading rights created financial problems for the company, and consequently they eschewed responsibility for Lambe.

Lambe’s situation took a turn for the better when King Agaja’s army killed King Sozo and ransacked the Kingdom of Allada in 1724. Lambe, hidden within a house, was taken captive by King Agaja’s army.\textsuperscript{66} His European status and physical features separated him from the ranks of other war captives. After being carefully transported on a hammock for almost forty miles north to the Kingdom of Dahomey, Lambe was sent directly to King Agaja.\textsuperscript{67}

King Agaja was one of the most prominent figures in West Africa’s history during the 1720s. Agaja was the fourth king to rule in Dahomey and fought over 200 battles, making him one of the most dominant war leaders. Agaja was considered “a politic and

\textsuperscript{67} Harms, 166.
courageous prince.” Driven by power and success, he wanted his kingdom to succeed in trade. However, Dahomey’s middleman location between the European slave trading coast and surrounding landlocked kingdoms inhibited his ventures. His desire to conquer Whydah in order to break his dependence upon them for specific goods, such as military supplies, was a main reason for his conquest in 1724.

The King’s astonishment at meeting a European instantaneously made Lambe a treasure. Lambe was soon given the nickname “Yewo,” meaning white man. Agaja had never met a white man. Agaja’s kingdom had been secluded from the coastal port where European traders roamed. King Agaja had previously expressed in one of his letters that he himself was never able to physically meet a white male. Agaja’s kingdom lay about 300 miles inland and he would have had to cross the kingdoms of Ardah, Whydah, or Jacquin to achieve the coast.

Although Bulfinch Lambe was held captive for almost four years, his situation was far from miserable. The descriptions of Lambe’s treatment by King Agaja can best be taken from a letter written by Lambe on November 27, 1724 to Jeremiah Tinker, the new English governor of Whydah. Is is evident in the letter that Agaja and Lambe treated each other with the utmost respect. Lambe described his respect: smothered with food such as “hog, goat, sheep with plenty of Brandy to drink.” Lambe also mentioned he had

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68 Snelgrave, 6.
69 Harms, 174.
71 Law, 257.
72 Snelgrave, 8.
been given several “wives,” two houses, and supplied with many servants.\textsuperscript{74} With the long list of lavish items, Tinker’s letter suggests Lambe was spoiled by Agaja rather than mistreated. Lambe’s experience in Africa was not as traumatic as one would expect. Perhaps there was a level of physical trust that involved the assurance that the African King would not harm Lambe. Perhaps King Agaja treated Lambe kindly because he was the first European he had met. Maybe King Agaja feared violent repercussions if he mistreated Lambe. Lambe’s cordial relationship with King Agaja suggests that Lambe dealt successfully with four years of adversity.

Lambe was eventually released from captivity in January 1726 under the stipulation that he return to Dahomey. Lambe had offered himself as a conciliator between Agaja and King George I of England to present a proposal for the establishment of a sugar plantation in Dahomey, including collaboration in trade. More importantly, before Lambe set forth on his trip, Agaja gave Lambe eighty slaves. The slaves were a parting gift with which Agaja hoped to secure Lambe’s return with more Europeans. But little did Agaja know that Lambe did not plan to return. Once Lambe escaped Dahomey, he severed all relations with Agaja.

Lambe’s story comes to us from a 1734 book by English trader William Snelgrave. Snelgrave was informed of Lambe’s story by King Agaja himself. This first-hand account paints a vivid depiction of the threat of captivity to European slave dealers. The combination of being the victim of his company’s unpaid debts in addition to a bystander in local African warfare created the recipe for Lambe’s ransom. Lambe’s unlikely situation led him to be held captive in one of the most powerful African kingdoms for almost four years. His escape and unlikely plan to return to Africa stirred controversy.

\textsuperscript{74} Snelgrave, 8.
within England and eventually his reputation and dignity were impugned by the trading industry.

The previous sections of this thesis attest to the respectful partnerships and shrewd business deals between African and European merchants. To maintain a peaceful, successful trade, African Kings and European merchants established a delicate line between faith and distrust. The examples presented in this section will address African-European relationship after the delicate lines of trade and trust had been crossed. The examples will convey that trust was not only conceived narrowly as credit, but something much broader. Trust encompassed various dimensions of the trading relationship. In the following examples, trust constituted situations that were political, physical, and monetary in nature. When trust was broken by European merchants, there were consequences to be faced by the African rulers, whether it was violent measures or the demand of excessive payment such as ransom. The consequences faced by Europeans reiterate the importance of trust and peace during the height of the African slave trade.

It should be noted that stories of European captivity in which Africans physically harmed European traders have not surfaced. For example, Nicholas Owen was an English slave dealer in African waters from 1746 to 1757. He published personal accounts of his many journeys (six voyages in total) to West Africa. Owen writes of the hazards and “axcedents” that placed him in danger during his voyages. Owen’s account is slightly different from those of others because he distanced himself from the English settlements along the Gold Coast and never came into contact with traders of the RAC.

Owen began his sixth voyage to Africa in Rhode Island after delivering a shipment of rum to North America from the West Indies. However, Owen and company
set sail for the coast of Guinea on a leaky ship and were eventually forced to stop and fix the leak at Sierra Leone. After repairing the ship, they continued sailing to Banana Island, a few miles from the mainland. There, the captain and five shipmates “ware secur’d by the natives, put into irons, and hove down upon the ground in a barbarous manner, striping us of all our cloaths, and in short made a prize of us,” according to Owen.75 When Owen and shipmates questioned the reasons for such treatment, the natives responded that it was it for revenge against a Dutch Captain who had captured some of their free people. The natives proceeded to bind the Englishmen with ropes, hauled their ship to shore, and confiscated their goods, including rum, tobacco, sugar, chocolate, snuff, and household furniture.76 Owen further states: “[The people] drank and eat until they ware easey, rifling our chest and plundering us of everything they thought proper.”77 Owen added that Englishmen lost four years’ of pay in gold in addition to the forty or fifty dollars made in their previous trade in Rhode Island, as well as in Africa. Owen and company were detained for about five days. They were allowed to walk around the coast for recreation, yet remained in captivity until a man by the name of Mr. Hall rescued them. It is not certain whether Mr. Hall, also a trader, paid to have Owen and company released or whether he helped them to escape.

Owen’s account rings familiar to Bulfinch Lambe’s story. However, Owen’s situation was slightly different because he was detained for a Dutch Company’s debts. Despite the fact that Owen and his shipmates were Englishmen, they were nevertheless

76 Owen and Martin, 38.
77 Owen and Martin, 38.
held captive for another company’s debt. Perhaps the Africans were not as knowledgeable about their slave trading partners as might be thought. It is possible the African merchants on Banana Island were not aware of the different European merchant companies and grouped Europeans into a single company. By detaining crew of a different company, African merchants may have wanted to set an example that unpaid debts would result in the captivity of European merchants.

The custody of European traders by African merchants was a sign of betrayed trust. When European traders did not make regular payments for slaves or other items, it increased their debt and had the potential to become a major source of conflict. Captivity of Europeans likely ended trading relations with the respective European companies. The ransom fees established by powerful African merchants were not economically attractive to Europeans who tried to minimize their financial losses.

Owen’s internment set led to his dissatisfaction with West Africans. While living on the West Africa coast from 1754 until his death in 1759, Owen described his living conditions with honesty and dissatisfaction. In 1755, Owen wrote an entry about African traders’ shrewd business after residing in Africa for only one year:

> It may be imagined that white men on this coast live an uneasey life considering the aforesaid charectar of thers natives…I have never yet been hurt by any in the towns where I have been tradeing, indeed they have stole all they could come at of my goods, such as knives, beads, and tobaco and such things as are handey to cary away, but never broak into my house to do me damage by confiscateing my goods. I have found them several time saucey and give bad language, but these affronts must be past, as you consider you self at their mercy without the help of justice, you are liable to all their abuses without means of revenge.  

From Owen’s entry, the threat of thievery suggests that business trust and respect were non-existent. Is this a common account by most slave traders or was Owen biased.

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78 Owen and Martin, 64.
because he suffered miserably from sickness and old age? Did African merchants known Owen was an inexperienced trader? Despite the motive for writing such negative accounts, it is clear that Owen’s experience lacked the major components of successful trade: trust and respect. The two stories of English traders, Bulfinche Lambe and Nicholas Owen, involved the system of debt and credit between African and European merchants. They both presented the consequences of Europeans running afoul of the delicate line of trade and trust.

European merchants were threatened by captivity during African warfare. An exceptional case occurred during the destructive Dahomian conquest of Whydah in 1727. The army killed and enslaved thousands of people in Whydah. The conquest had given Dahomey more control and better access to European trade by defeating the “middlemen” that stood in their way. In a letter from the Governor of the African Company, Abraham Duport, on November 12, 1727 at Whydah, Duport requested gunpowder from the merchants at Cabo Corso. Duport reasoned that the gunpowder was for his protection from African capture.

In my last I mentioned that the Enemy was comeing on this Country and they the[y] were on the Boarders of it…and I expect them here in a short Time (and not withstanding I am in Friendship with Dahome and [we] send frequent Messages of Friendship to one another) I confirme my want of Gun Powder for fear of a Surprize, for there is no trusting to any of their Collour as I have Experimented to my Wofull Experience.  

The letter alludes to Governor Duport’s previous capture in Whydah and his fear of being taken prisoner again during times of African warfare. Strangely, after Governor Duport mentioned his capture, he states his “withstanding friendship with Dahome” and frequent

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Note: Aplah is the name of a village on the Coast of Whydah
letters of friendship in which he asks his “friend” for weapons to protect from the possibility of another African seizure. How could Duport remain friends with the King who was responsible for his capture?

Duport’s story of captivity is mentioned in William Snelgrave’s book. Duport beckoned the soldiers into his home until the soldiers violently seized Duport, taking valuables from his pockets. Governor Duport was made prisoner, along with forty other Europeans at the Whydah fort. The men were carried in a hammock by the soldiers to the inland to meet with the King of Dahomey. Duport told Snelgrave that as soon as the Europeans arrived at the camp, they were separated “according to their Nations” and put under the care of African soldiers.\textsuperscript{80} The European prisoners complained of being badly accommodated and remained in captivity for days until they could meet with the King of Dahomey; “which when he did, he greatly complained of the Usage he had met with in all Respects. On this his majesty said he was very sorry for what had happen’d, for he had given Orders to his Captains, in case they met with success, to use the White men well.”\textsuperscript{81} Duport was shocked at the number of Europeans imprisoned. Duport also stated: “That in the Confusion of Things he [the king] had not regarded them so much as he ought; but for future, they should have better ‘Treatment’. ” Unfortunately the Europeans could not recover what was taken from them, but were released by the King without ransom within a few days. Duport added that the “principle gentlemen” amongst the prisoners were presented with slaves, as well as a promise from King Dahomey that he would “make trade flourish and have a particular Regard for their interests.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{80} Snelgrave, 16.
\textsuperscript{81} Snelgrave, 16-18.
\textsuperscript{82} Snelgrave, 18.
Governor Duport’s captivity was clearly a mistake by King of Dahomey’s orders during the Dahomian conquest of Whydah in 1727. Duport and the King found it within their best interests to remain civil despite the violent seizure. The King of Dahomey respected the Europeans and apologized for the trouble the Europeans had endured. The king attempted to rekindle trust in business with Europeans. He provided Europeans with slaves in exchange for their troubles, which proved the king did not want to break business ties with Europeans. His promise to “make trade flourish” only proved his desire to create a better relationship.

Duport’s letter of correspondence to the traders at Cabo Corso insinuated a relationship with the King of Dahomey. Unlike Bulfinch Lambe and Owen who were held captive, the accidental captivity of Duport created a stronger business partnership. If it were not for the detainment of Duport and other Europeans, they would not have been able to physically meet with the King.

Time in captivity meant days without making a profit in trade. The excessive ransom fees to African captors were unpredicted expenditures. In addition, European debt repayment was usually not in a timely fashion. Factors such as ship malfunctions, financial troubles, illnesses and communication delays sometimes postponed payments. Therefore, the establishment of business trust was important in order to achieve mutual understanding and avoid captivity.

The previous stories of captivity did not physically involve violence. However, the following example presents a more dangerous scenario that took the life of an English trader. In 1720, the British ship Hannover made three important stops along the Winward Coast, Gold Coast and Old Calabar. In total, 134 Africans were purchased and
transported to the ship to be sold in the West Indies. In addition to slaves, 11,400 yams, two tons of rice, and 75 chests of corn were purchased as well. British surgeon Alexander Horsburgh recorded the amount of goods purchased and sold, the distribution of comey to specific African merchants and other transactions.  

The details of Hannover’s voyage were recorded by Horsburgh in logbooks. A ledger for the payments to African traders and notables were one of the first to be recorded in Old Calabar history. Roughly twenty-two African businessmen received different payments and port fees from the British traders. The distribution and amounts of comey payments also helped modern scholars to identify the political and economic hierarchies in Old Calabar. Historically, Old Calabar was important due to its “regional market center and nexus of overseas trade”. It was home to six principal Efik lineage groups that resided in a village compound of its own unique economy of middlemen traders and powerful merchant families.

Horsburgh remained on the Hannover to supervise while a chief mate and three armed sailors went ashore. The four men became involved in a scuffle with Effik men that ended tragically. One of the European sailors was killed by an Efiat man, while the other two traders were held captive. Alexander Horsburgh was responsible for delivering goods worth about £60, which was more than the three men’s yearly combined salary, to pay the ransom. Evidence showed that Horsburgh also paid other non-Efia traders in addition to the ransom. In a logbook entry of the British Brigantine Hannover dated from May 28 to July 1st 1720, Alexander Horsburgh recorded:

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84 Behrendt and Graham, 40.
Paid for the Ransom of the Chief Mate and two more of the sailor, who contrary to express repeated order Went ashoar at Tom Shott’s in the mouth of Callabar River May 18 and were seized by the Negroes, who Murdered one of them Directly, there being four in all who went ashoar armed out of the boat, at that place perhaps with a Design to take the whole Continent of Africa.  

From the entry, we can only imagine the scenario that had occurred. The three men were ordered not to go ashore in the Calabar River, yet they proceeded to disobey orders. Armed with European weapons, the merchants were seen as a threat to the Efik traders of Calabar and were immediately engaged in a violent confrontation that left one English merchant dead. The other two English merchants were held captive and relied on Horsburgh to deliver ransom money. The exact reasons for the quarrel are unknown. Perhaps the African traders believed the armed Europeans were a threat to the village with “a Design to take the whole Continent of Africa”. The soldiers may have flaunted their weapons or exchanged harsh words with the African merchants. Somehow, the line of respect had been crossed.

The murder of a trader and captivity of the remaining Englishmen proved that the Hannover’s merchants were not trusted businessmen according to the Efik traders. Despite the logbook record of numerous comey payments for goods received, the Englishmen’s physical actions did not establish business credence during trade. Evidence from the Hannover proves that trust was more involved than paying comey and port fees. There was a level of respectful conduct when trading with Africans and the Hannover is a good example of when the lines of respect and physical trust were crossed.

On the same day, Horsburgh later writes on behalf of the ransom payment:

All of these Comies marked with a Cross page 3 ought to be charged to this Acct: they being men of no trade in Callabar, but I was obliged to Comie them in order

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85 Behrendt and Graham, 40.
86 Behrendt and Graham, 40.
to get the white men again, otherwise I would not have given any of them so much as one Copper barr. And Indeed a great Deal of the trader’s Comies ought also to be charged here: being I should not have given any of them so much by 20 Coppers or 10 Coppers as I had if it had not been on the Acct.

In total, 808 copper bars was ransom for the three men held captive. It should be noted that the payments were given to “men of no trade in Callabar” meaning they were not the routine traders that Horsburgh was accustomed to doing business with. To provide a comparison as to how much this cost, a typical comey payment averaged about 50 Copper bars to merchants with whom enslaved Africans were purchased, typically Efik traders and notables. Therefore, 808 bars was an excessive amount of ransom and it infringed on the Englishmen’s profit. In total, the ransom payments accounted for at least 15 percent of the total expenses at Old Calabar which could have purchased at least 15 slaves and 2,000 yams at the time.

In regards to ransom, Horsburgh stated, “I was obliged to Comie them in order to get the white men again, otherwise I would not have given any of them so much as one Copper bar.” One cannot avoid the animosity Horsburgh felt toward the African traders of Calabar. Efik port fees were inflated at least 10 to 20 coppers more than other trading coasts, adding to the outrageousness. Therefore, the question remains: why did Horsburgh and company continue to trade with the Efik men of Calabar if they were not receiving the fairest price? It is possible that the Englishmen did not face European competition at Old Calabar and therefore did not want to trade elsewhere.

The previous case studies of the Hannover, Owen, and Lambe support the notion that various forms of trust (physical and political) existed between African and European traders. However, it was the delivery of payment and establishment of credit that played

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87 Behrendt and Graham, 60.
88 Behrendt and Graham, 60.
an important role in the mercantile business. The method of credit between Europeans and Africans was one that relied heavily on trust. Typically, Europeans provided goods to local merchants in exchange for them to purchase slaves from the interior. Europeans also obtained slaves and promised the payment in goods at a later time.\textsuperscript{89} For most, the failure to resolve their payments and promises in a timely fashion led to conflict. Sometimes conflict caused African merchants to hold European traders captive or to deny their trading rights along the coast.

Evidence of credit is briefly mentioned in correspondences between English traders in Ophra, the major coastal market for Allada, to the Royal African Company in London. For example, the first letter written by merchant William Cross in Arda (Allada) dated February 1680, provides evidence that an agreement of credit was previously established: “the Phidolgoes Practice, his huff being denied credit. Forced to comply with him & he payeth when Capt Bell arrived there. Wants goods to purchase Negroes which was supplied.”\textsuperscript{90} It is assumed from Cross’s letter that the English payments made in goods were given to the African Phidalgo before slaves were distributed to them. Credit was also extended in the opposite direction, as European merchants received the slaves first, then paid African merchants at a later date.

In a letter written by John Mildmay in Ophra on October 13, 1680 to the RAC, Mildmay requested goods to be sent to the King of Ardah:

If your Honours would be please to send a Handsome Present to the King of Arda there is a great probability of recovering your old Debts from him & some of the

A Phidalgo was an African chief.
Chief Captains. But it will require some considerable charge. A Present fitt for the King would be a Silver laced Hat, a piece of Silk with purple and other vermilion flowers, a case of Pistolls with holsters, two iron blunderbusses, & a piece or two of Damaske (silk cloth).\textsuperscript{91}

In the letter, Mildmay tried to convince the RAC to send worthy gifts to the King of Ardah because he hoped to receive payment for the debts incurred by the King. It is unknown if the goods were delivered to the King of Ardah at the time. The letter leaves unanswered questions: Why would the English merchants grant gifts to the King if he owed the Europeans money or goods? Would the African King eventually pay the Europeans or were the gifts used by the English as a ploy to remind him of forgotten debts? Correspondence to the RAC was probably not reliable during its time and receiving a shipment of goods from London, or elsewhere along the coast, required time. Therefore, debt repayment was not always satisfied in a timely fashion and could lead to impatient merchants on both sides.

The captivity of Bulfinch Lambe and Nicholas Owen, the accidental detainment of Europeans by King of Dahomey, and the violent murder of a crew member of the slave ship \textit{Hannover} present specific instances of a betrayal of business and physical trust. However, trust was broken and established equally on both sides. After analyzing examples, it becomes evident that Africans and Europeans were \textit{reliant} on each other for the slave trade to remain successful. Both European and African merchants were capable of becoming shrewd businessmen, but it was a system of checks and balances that sustained a level of trust between them. For example, if a European took monetary advantage of African merchants by not paying for goods, necessary action was taken to ensure that Europeans would not cross the line again. Actions such as captivity proved

\textsuperscript{91} Law, 17.
successful. Typically, African merchants used monetary tactics to delegate trade by taking European traders captive, issuing large ransom fees, and increasing the prices of their taxes and slave prices. Each tactic was meant to cost the Europeans’ time and money.

Conclusion

Before the arrival of Europeans, the African setting offered many opportunities for internal trade. Internal African warfare enslaved many, supplying captives and criminals to merchants. The African hierarchy also contributed to the slave trade success. The most committed participants of slavery included the wealthiest, most powerful merchants and kings. They owned slaves and had the privilege of selling because of their important status. According to Paul Lovejoy, wealthy merchants and kings along the coast determined slave prices and negotiated money-objects in exchange for slaves.92

The arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century enabled the Africans to embark on a successful external trade. The rise of the external slave trade reshaped Africa’s economy and political sectors. Economically, Africa became dependent on imported goods such as military wares, money-objects like textiles and cowries, and luxury items such as fine cloths, mirrors, liquors, and beads to name a few. However, over the course of the slave trade, European goods were no longer desired by African merchants due their mass circulation and the increase in slave prices. Around the 1780s, towards the last 30 years of the legal slave trade, gold became the only means of purchasing a slave because there was little interest in European items. Historian Herbert Klein believes the changing tastes of African merchants reflected a complex market and changing African economy

that resulted in Europeans extending an exhausting effort to introduce new items to trade.93

In many ways, cunning business by African merchants made the African-European relationship of trust even more crucial to slave trade success. For instance, West African coastal elites exploited Europeans’ desire to set sail as fast as possible. The trade tactics such as selling only a few slaves at a time forced Europeans to remain along the coast for months and to purchase their amenities, like food, on the coast from local African merchants. Therefore, goods were constantly being traded or sold when the slave supply was low.

The examples surveyed throughout this paper support the notion that trade was largely profitable for African merchants due to the processes of credit, custom fees, anchorage taxes, transport services, and sometimes ransom fees in addition to slave prices. Both Africans and Europeans wanted to maximize profits during the slave trade and a delicate “dance” between two different cultures ensued. Rituals, customs, and gift-giving laid the groundwork for trust. When performed correctly, the good faith established between two businessmen promised physical protection and most often ensured profitable transactions. However, when the lines of trust were crossed, excessive fees led to debts, captivity, and sometimes physical threats which halted trade or ended the commercial relationship altogether.

Internal African warfare, European competition, and commercial rivalry were obstacles as well. African armies circulated throughout the coast in order to enslave others in war or engaged in slave-raiding. The mass destruction of warfare devastated villages and European factories. European traders were innocent bystanders in warfare.

93 Klein, 114.
Perhaps traders were more successful when they were employed under large government trading companies like the Royal African Company and Dutch India Company. The large companies instituted a support system along the coast. They were advantageous to African trade because they were able to supply ransom fees, payments, supplies, and money-objects in times of need. In theory, the more successful commercial connections a European company or merchant could establish along the African coast, the more slaves and profits received. However, after assessing the commercial endeavors, procedures, hierarchies, and political orders of major ports in West Africa from the 1600 to 1800s, I have found that trust forged the slave trade’s success.
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