



**SLAVERY AND ITS IMPACTS AS DEPICTED IN *THE  
INTERESTING NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF  
OLAUDAH EQUIANO***

**A FINAL PROJECT**

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Bachelor Degree Majoring  
American Cultural Studies in English Department  
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer states truthfully that this project is compiled by her without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, the writer ascertains that she does not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in references.

Semarang, April 2020

Lesna Ferawati Sitio

## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

*“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”*

**Matthew 21:2**

*“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”*

**C.S. Lewis**

*“Do what you can with all you have, wherever you are.”*

**Theodore Roosevelt**

*This project is dedicated to  
My beloved family and everyone  
who helped and supported me to accomplish this project.*

**APPROVAL**

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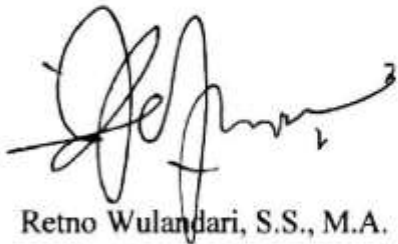
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title.....	i
Pronouncement .....	ii
Motto and Dedication.....	iii
Approval.....	iv
Validation.....	v
Acknowledgement.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	ix
Abstract.....	x
1. Introduction .....	1
2. Theoretical Framework .....	5
2.1 Discrimination.....	5
2.2 Slavery.....	6
2.2.1 Types of Slavery.....	7
3. Research Methods.....	9
3.1 Method of Research.....	9
3.2 Method of Approach.....	10
4. Discussion .....	11
4.1 Prejudice.....	11
4.2 Slavery.....	12
4.2.1 Types of Slavery.....	14
4.2.1.1 Debt Bondage.....	14
4.2.1.2 Serfdom.....	15
4.2.1.3 Human Trafficking.....	17
5. Conclusion.....	20
References	

## **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes an autobiography entitled *the Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* by Olaudah Equiano. The purpose of this study is to find out how discrimination and slavery occur to Blacks. Also, the writer will analyze the effects of slavery on the lives of slaves. In this study, the writer used the library research method to collect sources of information and data needed through books, journals, etc. The analysis found that the cause of slavery was prejudice. The difference between Blacks and Whites in many things made them into a gap. Slavery is experienced by Blacks. It causes adverse impacts on their lives, especially it can be seen from psychological impacts.

Keywords: Slavery, Prejudice, the Blacks, the Whites.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

America is a multiracial country. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, in 2013, the nation's multiracial population reached 9.3 million, equal to 3% of the nation's population. The four largest multiracial groups, in order of size, are those who report being White and Black (2.4 million), White and Asian (1.9 million), White and American Indian (1.8 million) and White and "some other race" (922,000). The four biggest multiracial groups are identical for each adult and child. Among multiracial adults, White and American Indian (1.3 million) is the largest group. Then observed by White and Asian (921,000) and White and Black (900,000). Those who are White and "a few other races" quantity 539,000. Among the racial groups in America, Whites are dominating in terms of its population. Such conditions of diversity allow for the emergence of social conflicts. Looking back, one of the social conflicts that quite imprint in history is the conflict between Whites and Blacks.

According to Juju Masunah (2011), the history of colonization in the United States has made the White humans known as the Euro-American population as the majority and the Blacks people as a minority. Because Whites assume that they dominate, they think that they have the most power compared to the minority. Due to that thought, the minority (Blacks) experienced slavery from Whites. Slavery then made a lot of losses, especially for Blacks.

During the slavery era, Whites are very powerful in Black's life. Slaves live under power and pressure by Whites, they are governed and treated arbitrarily. Slaves had to endure their suffering under the pressure of Whites. Slavery arises because of prejudice and injustice that must be experienced by Blacks. Prejudice is an irrational, inflexible attitude toward an entire category of people (Robertson, 1989:201). It describes that prejudice is a prejudgment or opinion from a particular group toward any racial or minority groups. Whites are too demanding that the appearance of Blacks should be like them. Besides, Blacks are also ostracized because, in terms of language knowledge, Blacks are still not fluent in speaking English.

This research is based on the content of a story in a book entitled *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equiano*. However, here the writer only focuses on descriptions about slavery, which are told in chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, and 9 of the book. It discusses slavery committed by Whites towards Blacks, which is based on discrimination in appearance and injustice of treatment accepted by Blacks. In accordance with the title raised by the author, it tells about a story that illustrates the lives of Black people during slavery. A Black African man named Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped and sold to slave traders when he was young. Arriving at the harbor, he was confused about what had happened to him and suspected that he had entered an evil place, and it was narrow, he saw many Black slaves chained and tortured with sad expressions and sorrow. At that moment, he imagined that he would be killed. He tried to break free but failed because he could not find a way out. The ship's load is very full, so there is very little fresh air. He

had to fight to survive and he saw that many of his friends had died. Then he was sold to Captain Pascal and sailed together through many wars. At that time, he studied and practiced so he could become an amateur navigator. Then, he was sold again to Robert King. After being sold from master to master, he found a master who could treat him well. He had the opportunity to go to school and work so he could earn money. Then, he bought his freedom with the money he earns. And he appointed to be commissary for the slaves.

There are several issues that will be discussed in this research, namely slavery, the factors of prejudice, types of slavery and also and the impacts of slavery on slaves' life. The impact referred to in this study is the impact that occurs to the slaves themselves, which specifically are their psychological impact, which is related to physical influences that they try to commit suicide because they live under pressure. Some even committed suicide because they felt unable to live an enslaved life. The impacts of slavery is very cruel and have a negative impact on the lives of slaves. Therefore, here the writer will discuss "Slavery and Its Impacts As Depicted in *the Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*".

There are several arguments about the story concept of the Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano), which tells about slavery towards Blacks, prejudice, and injustice in getting their rights. And the theories that will be used in the research analyze about things that encourage prejudice, slavery and its types, and the impacts of slavery on the slave's life.

## **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

- 1) To explain the acts of slavery experienced by Blacks
- 2) To identify how prejudice can be a factor in slavery
- 3) To explain the impacts of slavery on the lives of slaves.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Prejudice**

Prejudice can be defined as an irrational, inflexible attitude toward an entire category of people (Robertson, 1989:201). It describes that prejudice is a prejudgment or opinion from a particular group toward any racial or minority groups. Whereas based on Henry L. Tichler explains that prejudice is defined as an irrationally primarily based negative, or every so often positive, attitude closer to certain groups and their members. Prejudice is a subjective feeling, while discrimination is an overt action (2010:222).

Prejudice might affect everyone. At the individual level, racism is expressed as prejudice. People are “pre-judged” based on their racial characteristics. People are “pre-judged” based on their racial characteristics. People may have emotions of hatred without expressing them obviously.

One of the things that makes slavery happen is prejudice. The thoughts that come from within a party who think that they are better than another party. Like, the Whites think that their physical appearance is much better than the Blacks (differences in skin color, hair, eyes) and also they assume that they are much stronger than the Blacks. Whites are too demanding that the appearance of Blacks should be like them. Besides, Blacks are also ostracized because, in terms of language knowledge, Blacks are still not fluent in speaking English.

According to Mclemore, one of the things that can encourage prejudice is group identity. Children find out about the prejudice from the group they come from. The organization will shape the mind and behavior of children. They examine the ways of their group from what they see. “In this way, the organization’s preferences become their preferences, its standard, their standard, its belief, their belief, its enemy, their enemy” (1983:120).

In group identity, a group can bring out ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism can be defined as a judgmental feelings about other cultures according to the customs and values of their own (2010:53). They consider that their culture is better than others. And it often results in the oppression and domination of one group against another group.

Those can refer to the occurrence of prejudice in a society that has a negative impact on one group. Severe prejudice can encourage people to do bad things like slavery which can have a negative impact on others.

## **2.2 Slavery**

Slavery can broadly be described as the ownership, buying and selling of human beings for forced and unpaid labor. It is one of the things that everyone agrees is unethical. Slaves are master's property. The slaves are absolutely beneath their master's manage and do everything under the rules of his master. Their master has the proper to use the slaves as property (Matthew Kachur: 2006).



Williams represented slavery as “an economic institution” designed to resolve the “problem of labor” (1944: 5). He was later followed by several others, who represented slavery as a market. It also can be defined that slaves are the master’s property. The slaves are completely under their master’s control and work under their master’s great power.

Orlando Patterson (1982), states that slavery is one of the social problem that is quite severe, approaching the greatness of the slaves’ owner who is known as master and the weakness of the slaves. In slavery, we will see two points of view, the primary one is from the slave owner’s superiority, and also the second is from the slave’s inferiority.

They were ordered arbitrarily, told to work hard but did not give any salary. Slaves did not get their rights at all. They do not have the courage and freedom over their lives. In fact, because of slavery experienced by slaves, not a few of those who want to kill themselves because they can not stand and are unable to withstand the suffering of the White people.

### **2.2.1 Types of Slavery**

According to Patrick (2002), there are types of slavery that consist of debt bondage, Serfdom, human trafficking ;

1. Debt bondage is defined as as “the standing or condition arising from a pledge by an individual of his personal services or of these of an individual beneath his management as security for a debt, if the worth of these services

as fairly assessed isn't applied towards the liquidation of the individual the length and nature of those services don't seem to be severally restricted and defined.

According to Ann Jordan (2011), debt bondage is a practice similar to slavery because it includes a debt that can not be paid off in a reasonable time. The master who does in this criminal practice artificially inflates the amount of debt, regularly by way of adding exorbitant interest, and increasing the amount of time the so-referred to as debtor should work. The labor is not necessarily forced by way of violence or another way; instead, it's far enforced with the aid of the worker's pressured attractiveness of the duty to repay the synthetic debt.

The instance of debt bondage is whilst a worker has a debt that keeps to growth then he dies the business enterprise can upload funeral costs. Then the master needs and insists that the kid employee ought to work hard to pay the debt this is unjust. This cycle can keep from generation to the next generation. In this way, that is a 'slavery-like practice' because it turns into permanent and inherited by using the kids of workers. And to pay it off, they need to struggle hard.

2. Serfdom is defined as “the condition or standing of a tenant who is by law, custom or agreement absolute to live and labor toward land happiness to a different person and to render some determinate service to such other person, whether or not for reward or not, and isn't liberated to amendment his status.

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3. Human trafficking is defined as “the trade of humans for the aim of forced labor, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the marketer or others”.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

In collecting the data and information for this project, the writer uses two methods. The first method is method of research and the second is method of approach.

#### **3.1 Method of Research**

In obtaining the data and information related to and supporting topics raised in this research, the writer used library research. Hadi (1990) referred to as library research attributable to the information or materials required to complete the research originating from libraries within the variety of books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, journals, documents, magazines and so on. Using this technique, the writer collected data and information through books and other materials that are supportive of the writing process of this project. The writer identifies the source using the close reading method. According to Richard (2019), close reading could be a thoughtful, disciplined reading of a text. Additionally referred to as close analysis and explication de texte.

The writer used close reading method by reading a book to read the text clearly, get the contents of the story, dialogues, utterances, so that it can be analyzed by the writer. The book entitled *the Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* is the primary data source of the study. And the secondary data of this research is through sources such as books, journals, e-books, previous studies, articles and so on to support and complete the final project.

### **3.2 Method of Approach**

In this research, the writer uses the sociological approach to interpret the extrinsic elements illustrated in the story. The sociological approach examines the content of a literary work and looks at its views about society. It considers literature in its relationship with the society also as tells concerning status, education, and other social problem that occur in society. According to Wellek and Warren, literature represents life, and life is, huge live, a social reality, despite the fact that the nature and also the inner subjective world of individual have also been the item of literary imitation (1997: 94).

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Prejudice

Robertson states that, “prejudice is an irrational, inflexible attitude toward an entire category of people (1989:201).” It describes that prejudice is a prejudgment or opinion from the particular group toward any racial or minority groups. Equiano, the subject of this research, explained that he and the other slaves experienced prejudice from the Whites. The prejudice is reflected through the following sentence contained in the second chapter page 49.

“and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair and, the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to conform me in this belief. Indeed, such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment” (49).

Equiano said that there were differences in skin color between them slaves who were on board, hair differences, and language differences. Those differences can be a trigger for prejudice. It can be related to the theoretical framework said by Robertson (1989:201), namely prejudice is a prejudgment or opinion from the particular group toward any racial or minority groups. The Whites assume that their physical appearance is much better than the Blacks and also they think that they are much stronger than the Blacks.

The existence of two different parties creating a gap in one group because they know that they are different, so a sense of judgment arises from a party that

considers that they are better than the other party. Similarly, the Whites consider them better than the Blacks. If the Blacks want to be treated well, they must look like the Whites. And, they must be able to speak in English fluently.

## 4.2 Slavery

Slavery is defined as a condition where when Whites had Blacks as their property. The master becomes the owner while the weak become slaves. The slaves are absolutely beneath their master's manage and do everything under the rules of his master. Their master has the proper to use the slaves as property (Matthew Kachur: 2006).

The book explains that at that time there was slavery, which can be seen from the basic theoretical references used by the writer. In the story, there are acts of ownership, buying, and sale of people for forced and unpaid labor. Olaudah Equiano, a young boy was brought to shore and sold to a slave ship owner in Virginia, named Captain Pascal. And then given the name Gustavus Vassa. He works with Captain Pascal for free. Then, Gustavus Vassa was sold again to another person, Robert King.

This information can be seen from Gustavus Vassa's statement in the following quote:

“Captured by local raiders when he was about ten or eleven, Vassa was taken to the coast and sold slavers bound for the West Indies. He was shipped to Virginia, served as a slave there, and eventually become the property of Captain Pascal. This man gave him the name *Gustavus Vassa*” (37).

From the quotation above, Olaudah explained us that he was kidnapped to be a slave. Gustavus *Vassa* told how cruel Blacks are to White people. Slavery began when Gustavus *Vassa* arrived at a port and saw a slave ship waiting for its cargo, he wondered what would happen to him. He was surprised to be brought into the slave ship. His feelings were very mixed and frightened that he would soon be killed. Inside the ship, he saw the slaves chained gathered in the corner of the ship. They placed united in an exceeding ship deck and it had been too small for them. They were very sad and suffer.

In addition, the condition of the ship they were traveling in was very unclean and unhealthy. That ship deck has a hot climate and conjointly the smell of necessary tubs (toilet) that make loathsome smell appears inside the deck. Because the ship's load is very much, the ship becomes lack of fresh air. All slaves felt shortness of breath. Gustavus *Vassa* had to survive on the ship, and not a few people he found got sick and died because of it. Also, if the slaves created the slightest mistake, they would be viciously overwhelmed. Information that can be seen to explain that black slaves suffer slavery is to be proven by the statement of Olaudah in chapter 2 paragraph 1 page 53.

“Every circumstance I met with, served only to render my state more painful, and heightened my apprehensions, and my opinion of the cruelty of the Whites” (53).

Referring to the theoretical bases, the writer finds the practice of slavery on the sentences above, where Whites were very cruel to the Blacks slaves at the time and this is in line with the slavery theory according to Matthew Kachur where slaves



live under the control and rules of the master, so they are treated as they wish. Because the slaves are considered the property of the master.

In the case above, that African man explained that because of the inability of blacks to endure the suffering done by Whites, not a few Blacks want to die better than to survive in misery as a slave. The slavery they experienced was very inhumane and brutal.

#### **4.2.1 Types of Slavery**

The writer will explain the theory about the types of slavery from the view of Patrick Belser who divided the slavery theory into three namely debt bondage, serfdom, and human trafficking.

##### **4.2.1.1 Debt bondage**

One type of slavery based on Patrick's view is debt bondage. Debt bondage held by a weak party to the master. Because of the inability of the weak to keep their promises to pay debts to the master, they are used and made as slaves. They work for the master as collateral for paying off debts. Inevitably they have to do it because they are already in debt. But even so, this is considered unfair to apply even if the weak have debt. In the book of Olaudah Equiano, the writer did not find any debt bondage in the entire contents of the story because there were no supporting factors or aspects.

According to Ann Jordan (2011) in his journal, it was stated that the form of debt bondage is a cycle of debt bondage that cannot be paid by workers to the

master so they must work hard to pay off. Whereas in the the book of Olaudah Equiano, there is no narration that writes or reflects the existence of financial debt relations that make slaves work to masters.

#### **4.2.1.2 Serfdom**

The second type of slavery based on Patrick Belser is serfdom. Serfdom is a condition where slaves are told to work by force. The slaves worked under strict rules and inevitably had to run them. The slaves got discrimination acts from Whites. If the Blacks wanted to treated, as usual, their appearance must look like Whites. And they must understand English very well. Besides, Olaudah has to purchase his freedom meanwhile the Whites got their freedom freely.

From the following Vassa statement, there is evidence that serfdom experienced by slaves can be seen on page 54:

“.....although we begged and prayed for some as well as we could, but in vain; and some of my countrymen, being pressed by hunger, took an opportunity, when they thought no one saw them, of crying to get a little privately; but they were discovered, and the attempt procured them some very severe floggings” (54).

The writer sees that there is indeed serfdom. And this is in line with the theory of serfdom by Ann Jordan (2011), where slaves were employed forcefully and cruelly. Many Blacks were made as slaves by Whites. Blacks feel that there is no injustice in their lives. Slaves must work by force without receiving any compensation, including behavior, money, care and, so on. Even for food, they must be distinguished from which Whites may eat and even fish while onboard, while Blacks should not be allowed at all. There is a huge difference in the treatment of

both. The life gained by Blacks is very poor. They give their lives to serve as slaves to Whites.

From the serfdom, there is an impact that occurs in the social life of slaves, where the slaves did not have the freedom to interact as they pleased. They can not interact freely with their family, friends, and the environment around them because they are told to work in coercion and under pressure. Slaves must obey all orders and wishes of the Whites so that they are not brutally beaten and tortured.

Besides, slavery experienced by slaves also influenced their education. The slaves could not get the knowledge and education that was obtained by others because they had to work and do whatever was asked by the Whites. They have no spare time to study.

#### **4.2.1.3 Human Trafficking**

The third type of slavery based on Patrick Belser is human trafficking. Human trafficking is defined as “the trade of humans for the aim of forced labor, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the marketer or others (Patrick Belser: 2002). Human trafficking involves accomplishment, harboring or transporting their target into a condition of exploitation through the employment of violence, deception or coercion and compelled to figure against their can. In different words, trafficking could be a method of enslaving people, coercing them into a scenario with no reply, and exploiting them. Human trafficking is a fatal type

of slavery, where through this. the target or human being sold as a slave has no future that can be guaranteed any more.

In the story of *Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano)*, the writer found that in the story there was human trafficking at that time. It was explained that there were acts of buying and selling people, individual ownership by other individuals. A child named Olaudah Equiano, aged nine or ten years who is still innocent and knows nothing is taken to a port and will be made a slave to the master. He has been sold to a master who has a lot of money. Arriving at the port he did not know what had happened to him. He only could be surprised and frightened that he would soon be killed. The ship where he works is like a ship full of evil spirits.

The human trafficking issue can be found from the Vassa's statement which can be seen in page 37:

“Captured by local raiders when he was about ten or eleven, Vassa was taken to the coast and sold slavers bound for the West Indies. He was shipped to Virginia, served as a slave there, and eventually become the property of Captain Pascal. This man gave him the name *Gustavus Vassa*, which remained with him the rest of his life (37).

It showed clearly there was a human trafficking at that time. This is in accordance with Belser's theory where there is a sale of individuals to be employed by force under master control.

Gustavus Vassa also saw and met very many slaves on the ship he was aboard. Their lives seemed like there was no happiness anymore, it was like a world that was not expected by them. They did not get a decent place. Slaves were gathered in a very narrow space.

“The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast, was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board (49).

Referring to the theoretical base discussed, it can recognize that there is indeed human trafficking, individual ownership of other individuals. Many Blacks were sold and made as slaves by Whites. The slaves did not get their rights at all, did not get any salary, and also did not get good or proper treatment. They are only used as slaves.

From that human trafficking, many things happened to the psychological slaves. There are some characters who experience depression because they feel unable to bear the suffering done by Whites. Their lives are far from words worthy. Moreover, punches are very common for them every time they make a mistake. They were brutally tortured. In the story of Gustavus Vassa, he was terribly afraid as a result of he saw the condition of the ship that was very uncomfortable.

“When I looked round to the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of Black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow (49).

Then, as time went on several slaves suicide as a result of they will not handle the concern they felt. several of innocent Blacks killed and tortured by the Whites. Olaudah Equiano felt hopeless and wished to leap too to the water to finish his life, as a result of he felt useless. Fortunately, he presently completes that what he was doing was not getting to directly improve his life, he did not commit suicide.

“...I would jumped over the side, but I could not;....” (50).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The slavery in this story is shown through dialogues and the storyline of this autobiography. First, the writer analyzes the prejudice that causes slavery. Based on the Mclemore, a group identity can lead to prejudice. The differences held by the Whites and Blacks refers to the occurrence of slavery.

Then, the writer conducts this project by referring to Belser's theory, which in his view, slavery can be divided into three types namely debt bondage, serfdom, and human trafficking. And from this story, it can be concluded that two of the slavery types are proven. There are serfdom and human trafficking. There is no debt bondage in the story because basically there are no supporting aspects or evidence.

This story also shows the impacts of slavery. It can be proven from the situations illustrating that the slaves did not have educational opportunities as others, in this case, are the Whites. Also, many of them are depressed and decide to commit suicide because they feel unable to live enduring the pain of being a slave. Slaves would rather die than live as slaves.

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