

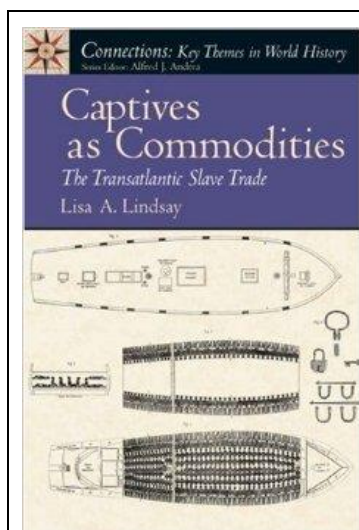


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antídoto ao banho mediático de todos os dias, propagando exclusivamente uma imagem negativa do Islão. No contexto presente em que o espectro do islamismo, por muitos erroneamente equacionado com o Islão, *Khadija. A Mulher de Maomé* poderá ter um papel positivo nesse combate de ideias.

Eva-Maria von Kemnitz



**RASHEED J. ATWATER,**  
***CAPTIVES AS COMMODITIES: THE***  
***TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE (2008),***  
**L. A. LINDSAY**

Lisa A. Lindsay's *Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade* gives answers to two questions: Why did Europeans buy slaves? And why did Africans sell slaves? Through the course of the first two chapters of her book she answers the first questions for the most part accurately, and then answers the second question with debatable and inaccurate



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statements. The goal of this review is to critically address the author's record of events, especially her description of the African influence on the slave trade.

Lindsay claims that Europeans bought slaves because; "neither most Europeans nor any other significantly large group of people in the early modern world saw slavery as especially objectionable" (p. 23). She later gives her second reason for Europeans to enslave Africans when she stated that "they [Europeans] began to deal in African slaves obviously, only after they could do so (p. 23)". When making this claim the author must have obviously overlooked the year 1485, when Diogo Cão came back to the Kongo kingdom and took four nobles from Mpinda, at the mouth of the Congo River to Portugal (Vansina). She has also ignored Walter Rodney and his work *West Africa and the Atlantic Slave-Trade* where he clearly stated that "at first the victims of the slave-trade were taken from among the people of the waterside; but as the years went by, it was found necessary to travel further and further inland to obtain the number of slaves required by the Europeans" (Rodney, 1967, p. 4).

My disagreement with Lindsay is not to say that all Africans were kidnapped by Europeans nor is it to deny the collaboration between Africans and Europeans during the slave trade. My disagreement is with her stating that they bought African slaves because slavery was not especially objectionable. Although she is right about the way slavery was a regular practice in the modern world as a result of war, regulated by laws that protected those thus enslaved, trading, that is, the act of buying and selling human beings as if they were merchandise, was a totally dehumanizing new practice introduced in Africa by Europeans (Rodney, 1967, 1972; Karenga, 2002; Davidson, 1961, 1977; Asante, 2007).

Likewise, when she claims that they bought them only after they could do so, she totally ignores the historical evidence of the kidnappings and raidings that took place before the "cooperative" trade.



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The two answers given by Lindsay are too simplistic to explain the true motivation behind European's interest in the slave trade. Although she later goes into more detail on the importance of having enslaved Africans when she explained the reasons that led to the extinction of contractual indentured servitude, Lindsay overlooks historical facts in favor of personal interpretations. She writes: "the increasing difficulty of recruiting and managing European indentured servants (...) and the servants they did have organized rebellions against the cruel work regimes imposed on them. Under such circumstances, planters began to accept the coast of African slaves as necessary to ensure a stable workforce." (p. 32). Here Lindsay explains one of the real motives why Europeans bought and took African slaves, not just because they were allowed to, but also because they were cheap and necessary to ensure a "stable workforce" under the coercion of the brutal system of chattel slavery particular to the modern world.

The second question she answered was by far the most controversial. When asked why Africans sold slaves to Europeans she simply answered by saying that "African leaders and merchants who entered the slave trade did so voluntarily, on their own terms ... European slave dealers acquired slaves through peaceful trade that was regulated by African governments." (p. 57) Here Lindsey makes two claims that are contrary to fact. If in many instances Africans took part in the slave trade it certainly was not on their own terms and coercion and/or trickery was often the means through which European slave traders gained access to large number of enslaved Africans (Rodney, 1967, 1972; Karenga, 2002). The author seems to be oblivious of historical evidence here as well by failing to recognize the disruption caused by Europeans on African nations, modes of production, and social organizations through the use and introduction, trade/exchange of guns by captives, and the promotion of internal warfare (Rodney, 1967; Karenga, 2002; Davidson, 1961, 1977; Asante, 2007). If the slave trade was only on African terms then the Africans who were in their prime would not have been taken, the European merchants would have bought slaves in groups instead of one



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by one like the Africans insisted, Europeans would have bought sick slaves, Europeans would have bought older slaves, and Europeans would have offered African traders a present before doing business (Rodney, 1967, p.15). Also the term peaceful in most regards means undisturbed; raids and kidnappings are not only disturbing, but they are not peaceful.

On the other hand, African Governments did regulate slavery in their territories. For this reason, when they first started exchanging slaves with European traders they were unaware of the dehumanizing fate that was befalling enslaved Africans at the mercy of the European system (Equiano, 1999). But the cannons on the European fortifications where enslaved Africans were held captive, and the conditions of their captivity show that this was not a peaceful regulation. If some manipulated and corrupted African governments found themselves in position to profit from the benefits brought to them by exchanging slaves for guns, many others did not acquiesce to corruption and repudiated the imposition of laws to favor slave trade. For instance, due to the slave trade, punishment for crimes like adultery changed from paying a fine to being sold into slavery (Rodney, 1967, p.10).

Lindsay's assertions are historically ill grounded and cannot be considered sound scholarship. Lindsay is trying to paint a picture of cooperative trade between Africa and Europe especially when she writes that "Africans' position of strength vis-à-vis Europeans in the early years means that they were not forced to sell slaves" (p. 56). By making these claims Lindsay is completely ignoring the dynamics of the gun cycle, which created the situation where "African rulers found themselves selling slaves to get guns to catch slaves to buy more guns" (Rodney, 1967, p. 21). Still according to Rodney (1967), when Africans realized that they could make a profit exchanging guns for captives, warfare broke out and a hysteria and paranoia of being captured was created (p.9). This gun cycle is far from being a cooperative enterprise.

To make her point, Lindsay goes on to say that Benin benefited from the slave trade by expanding their territories without any critical appraisal of its devastating consequences



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over the African continent that after three plus centuries of slave trade, followed by European colonial and imperial domination, and the 'scramble for Africa' left it in a weak state from which Africa is still recovering today (Rodney, 1967, p. 21). There is no historical truth in denying that the slave trade in general hurt Africa's economy including Benin by creating areas of chaos, losing workers, buyers, and sellers and that instead it improved the continent's economy. Another common distortion of facts is also used by the author when she claims that "Kongo (...) elites desired European imports, but they had little of interest to sell to Portuguese other than slaves" (p. 61). Once again the author seems to be unaware of the realities of the Kongo Kingdom. Through her explanation she failed to mention how important ivory was to European and Kongo traders, the disappointment of Kongo kings when they saw Europeans not providing their side of trade agreements, the destruction of the regimento that regulated Kongo and European relationships, how much Alfonso refused to sell slaves, and how he finally led a 30-year war against the Portuguese. (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014; Vansina, n.d.; Karenga, 2002)

*Captives as Commodities* shows the slave trade through a liberal Eurocentric viewpoint. The central theme runs around the merits and benefits that resulted from slave trade: Europeans financed, and created a global market for African slavery; they used the African elite as an accomplice; Africans equally participated and profit from it. Historical evidence of chaos, disruption and evil are missed.

The author does a great job in her statistics and calculations of how many slaves were taken and where they were placed, but she makes a mistake by not taking a serious historical approach to examine the African participation in the European slave trade.

There are so many misjudgments about Africans involvement in the European slave trade that one can only conclude that the author did not deeply look at Africa's participation in it. The book and these two chapters in particular show that Lindsay examined African history only as an extension to European history and not on its own merits.



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