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Ending the history of silence: reconstructing European Slave trading in the Indian Ocean

Richard B. Allen [1]

Abstract: Thirty-eight years ago, Hubert Gerbeau discussed the problems that contributed to the “history of silence” surrounding slave trading in the Indian Ocean. While the publication of an expanding body of scholarship since the late 1980s demonstrates that this silence is not as deafening as it once was, our knowledge and understanding of this traffic in chattel labor remains far from complete. This article discusses the problems surrounding attempts to reconstruct European slave trading in the Indian Ocean between 1500 and 1850. Recently created inventories of British East India Company slaving voyages during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and of French, Portuguese, and other voyages involving the Mascarene Islands of Mauritius and Réunion between 1670 and the 1830s not only shed light on the nature and dynamics of British and French slave trading in the Indian Ocean, but also highlight topics and issues that future research on European slave trading within and beyond this oceanic world will need to address.

Keywords: slave trade, Indian Ocean, slaving voyage inventories

Encerrando a história do silêncio: reconstruindo o tráfico europeu de escravos no Oceano Índico

Resumo: Há trinta e oito anos atrás, Hubert Gerbeau discutiu os problemas que contribuía para a “história do silêncio” em torno do tráfico de escravos no Oceano Índico. Enquanto a publicação de um corpo crescente de trabalhos acadêmicos desde os anos 1980s demonstra que esse silêncio não é tão ensurdecedor quanto já foi, o nosso conhecimento e compreensão desse tráfico permanece muito longe de estar completo. Este artigo discute os problemas de tentativas para se reconstruir o tráfico europeu de escravos no Oceano Índico entre 1500 e 1850. Inventários recentemente compostos de viagens escravistas da Companhia Britânica da Índia Oriental durante os séculos XVII e XVIII e de viagens francesas, portuguesas e de outras nacionalidades envolvendo as Ilhas Mascarenhas de Maurício e Reunião entre 1670 e 1830 não apenas jogam luz sobre a natureza e dinâmica do tráfico britânico e francês no Oceano Índico, como também destacam tópicos e questões que futuras pesquisas sobre o tráfico europeu dentro e além deste mundo oceânico precisarão abordar.

Palavras-chave: tráfico de escravos, Oceano Índico, inventários de viagens escravistas

Thirty-eight years ago, Hubert Gerbeau discussed the problems – the difficulties of conceptualizing the Indian Ocean, the pervasive Atlantic-centrism in slavery studies, and the relative dearth of archival and other documentary sources – that contributed to what he aptly characterized as the “history of silence” surrounding slave trading in the Indian Ocean (Gerbeau, 1979, p. 184-207; Alpers, 1997, p. 62-81). Gerbeau was not the first scholar to call for historians to pay greater attention to slave trading in this oceanic world. Eight years earlier, Joseph E. Harris had argued that students of the African diaspora needed to look eastwards toward Asia and not just westwards across the Atlantic as they sought to reconstruct the movement, lives, and legacy of the millions of enslaved men, women, and children exported from sub-Saharan Africa over the centuries (Harris, 1971; Harris, 2003, p. 157-68). While the publication of an expanding body of scholarship since the late 1980s demonstrates that our knowledge about slave trading in the Indian Ocean world is greater than it once was (Clarence-Smith, 1989; Campbell, 2004; Campbell, 2005a; Harms, Freamon, and Blight, 2013; Médard, Derat, Vernet, and Ballarin, 2013), even a cursory survey of the massive bibliography of slavery begun by Joseph C. Miller more than 30 years ago reveals how little we still know about this activity and its impact compared to the Atlantic world.² Histories of the Indian Ocean, for example, pay little, if any, attention to slave trading as they discuss the ways in which peoples in this oceanic world have interacted with one another or with residents of the Atlantic or Pacific worlds (Auber, 1955; Toussaint, 1966; Toussaint, 1974; Chaudhuri, 1985; McPherson, 1993; Hall, 1996; Barendse, 2002; Pearson, 2003; Kearney, 2004; Bose, 2006; Beaujard, 2012; Alpers, 2014). Histories of the African diaspora likewise remain largely, if not exclusively, Atlantic-centric in their focus (Thornton, 1998; Gomez, 2005; Manning, 2009).

As the discussions at a recent workshop in Amsterdam attest,³ reconstructing slave trading in the Indian Ocean remains problematic not only for the reasons that Gerbeau outlined, but also because of a historiographical penchant for geographically, chronologically, and topically compartmentalized studies that obscure the complex patterns of interaction that are central to understanding the global traffic in chattel labor that existed between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. To encourage historians to transcend this “tyranny of the particular” and situate their research in more fully developed regional and pan-regional contexts, this paper reviews efforts to reconstruct the history of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean. Doing so entails acknowledging, as Gerbeau has noted, that the “Indian Ocean is not the Atlantic” and that the precepts and methodologies that shape slavery studies in the *Mare Indicum* can and do differ, sometimes substantially, from

² Accessible online at < <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/bibliographyofslavery>>. Annual updates are also published in the journal *Slavery and Abolition*.

³ International workshop on “Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago Worlds (16th to 19th Century): New Research, Results, and Comparisons”, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, 10-11 November 2016.

those that govern such studies in the Atlantic (Gerbeau, 2002, p. 79-108). The creation of two inventories, one of British East India Company slaving voyages during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to supply company establishments in the South Atlantic, India, and Southeast Asia with chattel labor, and the other of French and other voyages involving the Mascarene Islands of Mauritius and Réunion between 1670 and the early 1830s attest as much. In so doing, these inventories also highlight topics and issues that future research on the global European traffic in chattel labor between 1500 and 1850 will need to explore.⁴

Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean: An Overview

Long-distance slave trading has been an integral component of life in the Indian Ocean world for millennia. The Horn of Africa, encompassing modern Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, supplied slaves to ancient Egypt. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, probably written during the first century CE by a Greco-Roman or Greco-Egyptian merchant, lists slaves among the commodities traded at ports along the northwestern Indian Ocean littoral (Casson, 1989, p. 69, 73, 81). The development of extensive Muslim merchant networks in the western Indian Ocean after the seventh century CE facilitated the trans-oceanic traffic in slaves from eastern Africa and the Horn to the Middle East, including Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and India (Hunwick and Powell, 2002; Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2003; Chatterjee and Eaton, 2006; Hopper, 2015; Reilly, 2015). The content of the limited sources at our disposal make it impossible to ascertain the number of African slave exports to the Middle East and South Asia by Arab, Muslim, and Swahili merchants with any precision. Current estimates put the number of such exports at 1.000 a year between 800 and 1700, some 4.000 a year during the eighteenth century, and 3.700 a year between 1800 and 1873 (Lovejoy, 2012, p. 27, 46, 151; Vernet, 2009, p. 37-76). Although regional slave trading networks existed in South and Southeast Asia long before Europeans arrived in the Indian Ocean in 1498, determining the number of slaves trafficked by Indian, Chinese, and other Asian merchants within and beyond these regions is even more problematic than it is for the western Indian Ocean (Loeb, 1972, p. 129; Reid, 1983, p. 170; Bigalke, 1983, p. 343-44; Thomaz, 1998, p. 361; Reid, 1999, p. 210; Levi, 2002, p. 277-88; Hopkins, 2008, p. 629-71). The possible volume of some of these trades after 1600 is suggested by estimates that Bali and neighboring islands such as Lombok and Sumbawa supplied regional networks in the Indonesian archipelago with 100.000 to 150.000 slaves between 1620 and 1830 (Vink, 2003a, p. 144; Hägerdal, 2010, p. 21), and that Indian, Chinese, and other indigenous traders

⁴ The following discussion draws extensively on (Allen, 2014).

supplied Dutch-controlled Batavia (Jakarta) with 100.000 to 150.000 and perhaps as many as 250.000 slaves during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Raben, 2008, p. 135).

The establishment of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* between 1500 and 1515 heralded the beginnings of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean. Portuguese ships carried slaves from Mozambique to their settlements in India such as Daman, Diu, and Goa, and ultimately as far as Macau in China and Nagasaki in Japan. The volume of this traffic remains unknown, but by most accounts an average of some 200 slaves left Mozambique for Portuguese possessions in India and East Asia each year from the early sixteenth century to the mid-1830s (Bauss, 1997, p. 21; Pearson, 1998, p. 161; Machado, 2004, p. 20-21).⁵ Portuguese traders likewise carried several hundred South Indian, Burmese, Malayan, Javanese, and other Asian slaves to the Philippines during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially during the union of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns (1580-1640), from whence some were shipped across the Pacific to Mexico (Seijas, 2014, p. 59),⁶ while small numbers of Chinese slaves from Macau reached Goa and even Mozambique (Boxer, 1968, p. 223-225, 238).

The arrival of the Dutch early in the seventeenth century gave rise to greater European involvement in the Indian Ocean slave trades. The Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC) shipped African, Indian, and Asian slaves to Batavia, commercial emporia such as Malacca (Melaka), its spice plantations in the Moluccas (Malukus) in eastern Indonesia, and its settlements in coastal Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the Cape of Good Hope (Taylor, 1983, p. 16-18; Armstrong and Worden, 1989, p. 116-117; Shell, 1994, p. 44; Vink, 2003a, p. 160-63; Winn, 2010, p. 365-89). The scale of this activity is suggested in various ways: by the presence of 2.199 and 4.112 slaves in the Banda Islands in 1638 and 1794, respectively (Winn, 2010, p. 371); by the use of 4.000 African slaves to build the fortress at Colombo, Ceylon during the late 1670s (Jayasuriya, 2006, p. 217); by the presence of 66.350 slaves in the VOC's various Indian Ocean establishments in 1687-88 (Vink, 2003a, p. 166); by projections that Dutch establishments needed to import 3.200 to 5.600 slaves a year during the late seventeenth century to maintain local slave populations;⁷ and by estimates that the VOC, company employees engaging in private trade, and Batavian entrepreneurs imported 50 percent of the 200.000 to 300.000 and perhaps as many as 500.000 slaves who reached Dutch settlements in Southeast Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Van Welie, 2008, p. 72; Raben, 2008, p. 135).

The early seventeenth century also witnessed the beginning of British slave trading in the Indian Ocean. East India Company personnel actively trafficked slaves no later than

⁵ The volume of this trade is also suggested by census data which reveal that Goa housed 2.153 slaves in 1719 and 1.410 slaves in 1810.

⁶ On African slaves in the Philippines, see (Loyré, 1988, p. 9-18; Scott, 1991, p. 27-35; Girard, 2000, p. 67-74).

⁷ Vink argues that an average mortality rate of 20 percent on the high seas required 4.476 to 7.716 new slaves to be purchased each year. See (Vink, 2003, <http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/vink.html>).

1622 when officials at Masulipatam (Machilipatam) on India's Coromandel Coast shipped 22 Indian slaves to Batavia (Foster, 1908, p. 85, 105, 174, 227). British ships transported Malagasy, Mozambican, and Comorian slaves to company settlements such as Bantam (Banten) in Java, Bencoolen (Benkulen, Bengkulu) on Sumatra's west coast, Bombay (Mumbai), Fort St. David (Tegnapatam), and Madras (Chennai) in India, and its colony of St. Helena in the South Atlantic during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. The company also exported slaves from India; a 1683 report noted that "a great number of slaves yearly" had been shipped recently from Madras to unspecified destinations (Basu, 1930, p. 22). The arrival of 149 Angolan slaves at Bencoolen in 1765 highlights the global extent of the company's involvement in this traffic, while the presence of Indian, "Malay," Niasan, and Siamese slaves at the factory, often acquired from independent Asian and European traders who called at the settlement, confirms the company's ability to tap regional networks for chattel laborers (Allen, 2014, p. 27-62).⁸

French slave trading was closely associated with the *Compagnie des Indes*' colonization of the Ile de Bourbon (Réunion) in 1663 and the Ile de France (Mauritius) in 1721. The Mascarenes housed more than 7.200 slaves of West African, Indian, and Malagasy origin in 1735, a number that rose to almost 22.600 by 1757-58, to 39.250 in 1765-66, and to nearly 71.200 in 1787-88, before peaking at almost 133.000 by 1807-08. The islands' capture by a British expeditionary force in 1810 and their subsequent subjection to the 1807 parliamentary act prohibiting British subjects from trading slaves set the stage for the development of a clandestine trade that resulted in the exportation of an estimated 123.400 to 145.000 East African, Malagasy, and Southeast Asian slaves to Mauritius, Réunion, and the Seychelles between 1811 and the early 1830s (Allen, 2014, p. 141-78). Overall, an estimated 336.000 to 388.000 slaves were exported to the islands between 1670 and 1848 (Allen, 2004, p. 44).

When viewed in their totality, the data currently at our disposal indicate that Europeans were involved directly or indirectly in trading a minimum of 567.900 to 733.200 slaves between 1500 and 1850 within an oceanic world that stretched from eastern Africa and Madagascar to the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos. Adding these figures to the number of documented/estimated East African and Malagasy exports to the Americas during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (386.000/542.700, respectively) suggests that Europeans traded at least 953.900 to 1.275.900 slaves within and beyond the Indian Ocean world during this 350-year period (Allen, 2014, p. 24).

These figures obviously pale in comparison to the estimated 11.978.300 to 12.135.000 slaves exported from West and West Central Africa across the Atlantic to the Americas between 1500 and the mid-1860s. To assess this Indian Ocean traffic's significance only in

⁸ The descriptor "Malay" referred not only to persons of Malayan origin, but also from elsewhere in Southeast Asia as well as India or the Maldives (Gerbeau, 1978, p. 160-64).

terms of the number of men, women, and children it consumed is, however, to ignore the global dimensions of this activity. Markus Vink has argued that the Dutch Indian Ocean slave trade during the seventeenth century was only slightly smaller in volume than the trans-Saharan slave trade, was one-and-a-half to three times the size of the Swahili, Red Sea, and Dutch West India Company trades, and equaled 15-30 percent of the trans-Atlantic trade (Vink, 2003a, p. 168). Viewing the Mascarene trade in similar terms is equally informative. Adding the number of exports to the Mascarenes to French trans-Atlantic exports increases the total volume of the French slave trade between 1640 and 1848 by 28-29 percent.⁹ These figures also reveal that one-fifth of all French slave trading between the 1670s and early 1830s occurred in the Indian Ocean and that the Mascarenes consumed 39-43 percent of all slaves carried on French ships between 1811 and 1848 (Allen, 2014, p. 23). European slavers likewise figured prominently in the dramatic increase in trans-oceanic exports from eastern Africa after 1700, accounting for 37-52 percent of all such exports during the eighteenth century and 58-63 percent of all such exports between 1801 and 1873 (Allen, 2016a).

Reconstructing European Slave Trading

Compared to the Atlantic, European slave trading in the Indian Ocean has remained a subject of limited scholarly interest. Auguste Toussaint largely ignored this activity in his extensive work on French trade, commerce, and privateering in the Indian Ocean during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The one exception is his *La route des îles* (1967) in which he reported the existence of 515 slaving voyages associated with the Mascarenes between 1773 and 1810. Unfortunately, he did not list the ships/voyages in question and limited his analysis of the data available to him to compiling six brief tables on the tonnage of the vessels involved, the size of their human cargoes, and slave mortality en route to the islands (Toussaint, 1967, p. 350-57, 449-54). In 1974, J.-M. Filliot published the first overview of the Mascarene trade, a study that revealed that the islands drew slaves from a global catchment area but did not attempt to determine the number of slaving voyages to the islands (Filliot, 1974).

Beginning in the late 1970s, a number of American, French, and Portuguese historians shed greater, albeit often indirect, light on European slave trading in the *Mare Indicum*. Foremost among these was Jean Mettas who sought to compile a comprehensive inventory of slaving voyages from Bordeaux, Lorient, Marseille, Nantes, St. Mâlo and other French ports, an inventory that included ventures into the Indian Ocean (Mettas, 1978; Mettas, 1984). James Armstrong subsequently revealed the existence of 33 VOC-sponsored slaving

⁹ Calculated on the basis of information in (Geggus, 2001, p. 121; *Voyages*, <http://www.slavevoyages.org>).

expeditions to Madagascar between 1654 and 1786 (Armstrong, 1983-84, p. 211-233). Éric Saugera's study of Bordeaux as a slaving port, José Capela's work on slave exports from Mozambique, and Kerry Ward's research on forced labor networks in the Dutch East Indies has further expanded our understanding of European slave trading in this oceanic world (Saugera, 1995; Capela, 2002; Ward, 2009). So has an expanding body of scholarly articles. Studies based on surviving log books, for example, have yielded more detailed information about how slaves were acquired, especially along the Malagasy coast, living conditions and mortality rates on European slave ships plying the Indian Ocean, and slave shipboard insurrections (Westra and Armstrong, 2006; Alexander, 2007, p. 84-111; Bialuschewski, 2011, p. 87-101; Vernet, 2011, p. 477-521; Thiébaud, 2015).

Despite this scholarship, many aspects of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean remain hidden from view. A particularly serious lacuna is the absence of a comprehensive slaving voyage inventory comparable to the *Voyages* database for the Atlantic compiled by David Eltis, David Richardson, Stephen D. Behrendt, Herbert S. Klein, and their many collaborators.¹⁰ This database, which now includes information on more than 35,000 trans-Atlantic voyages between 1514 and 1866, has, in turn, encouraged ever greater interest in the development of an "Atlantic world" that bound Western Europe, West and West Central Africa, and the Americas together in ever more complex social, economic, cultural, and political relationships between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹

Laying the foundations for a comparable database for the Indian Ocean has concentrated so far on identifying British East India Company (EIC) slaving voyages between 1622 and 1772, and those involving the Mascarenes between 1718 and the early 1830s. As a survey of the multi-volume works by William Foster, Ethel Bruce Sainsbury, and Sir Charles Fawcett on the company's factories in India reveals, references to EIC slave trading during the seventeenth century tend to be brief, sometimes opaque, and scattered widely throughout the company's extensive archives (Foster, 1906-27; Sainsbury, 1907-38; Fawcett, 1936-55). While evidence is more abundant during the first half of the eighteenth century, references to this activity are also widely dispersed, tend to focus on Bencoolen and St. Helena to the exclusion of the company's other Indian Ocean establishments, and largely disappear after *circa* 1772.

Evidence of slaving voyages involving the Mascarenes can be equally elusive, especially before the early 1770s. The thousands of *déclarations d'arrivée* in the Mauritius National Archives constitute the single most important source of information about the Mascarene trade. However, these formal statements by ship captains to admiralty and other officials following their arrival at Port Louis are often problematic, beginning with the fact that they exist only for the period from 1772 to 1810. Not all captains, especially those who sailed to

¹⁰ See (Eltis and Richardson, 2008) and other works cited further below.

¹¹ On conceptualizing the Atlantic world, see (Games, 2006, p. 741-57).

Madagascar during the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s, made such *déclarations* following their return to the colony. The content of these statements also varies substantially. *Déclarations* made during the 1770s and 1780s tend to be more detailed than those made during the first decade of the nineteenth century, but this detail frequently consists of reports about weather conditions and damage to the vessel that captains wanted recorded for insurance or legal purposes. Many captains said little or nothing about the origin, size, or composition of their human cargoes. Information about the vessels that participated in the illegal slave trade to the islands between 1811 and the early 1830s is even more meager. While vice-admiralty courts at Cape Town and Mauritius condemned 66 captured slavers between 1808 and 1825, details about these voyages remain sparse (Allen, 2014, p. 164-165). The same holds true for the 212-216 confirmed or probable slave cargoes destined to or reaching Réunion on at least 89 vessels between 1818 and the early 1830s (Gerbeau, 2005, p. 1311-12).¹²

Despite these limitations, the general parameters and some of the defining features of British and French slave trading in the Indian Ocean can now be discerned. The EIC's archives reveal 70 confirmed or probable slaving voyages under company auspices between 1622 and 1772 that carried at least 3.300 slaves to company establishments, 80 percent of whom came from Madagascar.¹³ The company also transferred slaves between its possessions in Borneo, India, Java, Malaya, the South Atlantic, and Sumatra; at least 77 confirmed or probable transfers involving more than 1.040 men, women, and children occurred between 1639 and 1787. Low mortality rates were a striking feature of many EIC slaving voyages; available data point to an average mortality rate of only 3.7 percent on company-sponsored voyages between 1735 and 1765 compared to 18 percent on British slavers crossing the Atlantic during the same period. Overall, the company probably traded at least 10.000 and perhaps as many as 15.000 to 20.000 slaves during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with much of this activity concentrated between the 1690s and the mid-1760s (Allen, 2014, p. 38, 47, 52-54, 58).

The intensity of the Mascarene trade is revealed by evidence of 837 confirmed, probable, or possible voyages to the islands between 1718 and 1809 by American, French, Omani, Portuguese, Spanish and other European vessels laden with human cargoes of West African, Malagasy, Mozambican, Swahili Coast, Indian, and Southeast Asian origin (Allen, 2014, p. 68-69, 74-75).¹⁴ The pan-regional scope of this trade is further illustrated by the identification of another 115 or more Mascarene-based slaving voyages to the Cape of Good Hope, India, and the Americas, mostly between 1770 and 1809, and the fact that at least 282 of the

¹² According to Serge Daget, 94 vessels participated in the illegal trade to Réunion between 1815 and 1831, 54 of which were based at the island (Daget, 1996, p. 336).

¹³ The remaining slaves were of Angolan, Comorian, Indian, and Indonesian origin.

¹⁴ Research currently being conducted on slaving expeditions to Madagascar before 1770 indicates that this figure will need to be revised upward by at least 392 voyages. See (Thiébaud, 2016). My thanks to the author for permission to cite his paper.

voyages associated with the islands involved ships based in French ports. While the demographic structure of the cargoes destined for the islands matched that of trans-Atlantic cargoes, average mortality rates en route to the islands, especially from Mozambique and the Swahili Coast, were substantially higher than in the Atlantic. The slave trade with Madagascar was intimately bound up with the exportation of the large quantities of rice and cattle needed to sustain the islands' population (Allen, 2014, p. 68-69, 77, 81-82, 85, 97).¹⁵

The Impact of European Slave Trading

The current state of our knowledge makes it difficult to assess the impact of this activity in anything but rather general terms. Its most obvious consequence was to transform a largely regional and unidirectional (i.e., from eastern Africa to the Middle East and India) traffic into one that was multi-directional and pan-regional. Although VOC settlements drew many of their slaves from the same regions in which these establishments were located,¹⁶ the company also shipped significant numbers of slaves beyond these catchment areas to satisfy the demand for chattel labor throughout its far flung commercial empire. Slaves from Southeast Asia moved westwards to Ceylon and South Africa, Indian slaves reached Southeast Asia and South Africa, and Ceylonese slaves landed at the Cape of Good Hope (Koolhof and Ross, 2005, p. 281-308; Tieken, 2013, p. 113-22; Worden, 2016, p. 389-408). While Madagascar, Mozambique, and the Swahili Coast supplied a substantial majority of the slaves who arrived in the Mascarenes, the islands also housed chattel laborers from the Comoros, Ethiopia, the Persian Gulf, India (Bengal, Goa, the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, Orissa), Southeast Asia (Bali, Java, Makassar, Malaya, Nias, Sumatra, Timor), and China (Gerbeau, 1980, p. 169-97; Carter, 1988, p. 233-47; Carter, 2005, p. 257-71). The diverse origins of Mascarene slaves is further illustrated by an 1817 slave census which reveals that at least 13 ethno-cultural groups in Madagascar supplied Mauritius with chattel laborers, while those of eastern African origin came from 14 populations that can be identified with certainty, some of which were located as far away as modern Malawi and eastern Zambia (Allen 2014, p. 11).¹⁷

The impact of this European traffic on indigenous states and societies varied. The replacement of relatively "open" with more restrictive "closed" systems of slavery in Southeast Asia has been traced to the VOC's demand for chattel labor (Reid, 1983, p. 156, 175). European demand also encouraged the expansion of regional slave trading networks and the development

¹⁵ On Madagascar's importance as a source of provisions, see (Hooper, 2017).

¹⁶ Markus Vink identifies three major regional catchment areas: Madagascar and the East African coast, the Indian subcontinent (the Arakanese-Bengali, Coromandel, and Malabar coasts), and the Indonesian archipelago (Vink, 2003a, p. 140-145).

¹⁷ This census includes many other African and Malagasy ethnonyms, the modern equivalent of which remains uncertain.

of larger, more centralized slave markets (Arasaratnam, 1995, p. 197-199). The impact of this activity on local political economies is best illustrated by the changing fortunes of the Arakanese state of Mrauk-U during the seventeenth century. The demand for rice and slaves in the VOC's Indonesian possessions spurred the kingdom's revival during the 1620s, while its decline after the mid-1660s coincided with the company's destruction of the Makassar sultanate between 1666 and 1669 and its subsequent ability to procure these commodities from closer sources of supply (Charney, 1998, p. 185-219).¹⁸ Dutch and Spanish demand for chattel labor in the urban areas under their control likewise led to substantial increases in slaving in the Moluccas during the seventeenth century (Andaya, 1991, p. 83). Similar pressures reinforced the institution of slavery on Timor and encouraged Asian traders to carry increasing numbers of slaves from islands such as Flores and Sumba during the eighteenth century to Makassar from whence they were re-exported to Java (Hägerdal, 2010, p. 24, 26; Knaap and Sutherland, 2004, p. 116-119, 123, 143). The dramatic expansion of the Mascarene trade after 1770 played an important role in the rise of the Merina kingdom in highland Madagascar during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and that state's subsequent relations with Britain and France (Larson, 2000; Campbell, 2005b). The Mascarene trade also figures prominently in the hitherto ignored diaspora of Malagasy-speaking peoples during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a diaspora that not only may have entailed the largest movement of an African people in the Indian Ocean basin, but also challenges traditional assumptions about the dynamics of creolization in pre- and post-emancipation colonial slave societies (Larson, 2007, p. 457-479; Larson, 2009).

Beginning in the mid-1780s, the Indian Ocean became an arena in which British and other European abolitionists sought to abolish both slave trading and the institution of slavery itself (Campbell, 2005a; Harms, Freamon and Blight, 2013). Growing concern in British India after 1785 about slave trading, and the exportation of children in particular, culminated in proclamations on 22 July 1789 and 8 March 1790 banning slave exports from the Calcutta and Madras presidencies, respectively. This desire to suppress the exportation of slaves from the subcontinent was matched by a growing interest in abolishing slavery in the company's Indian Ocean possessions. As early as March 1786, Acting Governor-General John Macpherson and his council proposed emancipating company slaves at Bencoolen capable of supporting themselves. Three years later, Governor-General Lord Cornwallis informed the company's directors in London that he was considering a plan to abolish slavery throughout their Indian possessions (Allen, 2014, p. 183-190).

Although these early abolitionist endeavors met with only limited success and/or proved to be abortive, they highlight the Indian Ocean's importance as an arena in which British

¹⁸ On the VOC's impact on other Southeast Asian slave trading networks, see (Raben, 2008, p. 133-135).

abolitionists clashed with slaving interests at exactly the same time (1788-1792) that they almost succeeded in prohibiting British slave trading in the Atlantic. These endeavors raise important questions about the ways and extent to which such undertakings influenced abolitionist activities and policies not only in Britain, but also elsewhere in the British Empire during the early nineteenth century. In 1800, for example, the EIC's directors instructed the governor of St. Helena to initiate what proved to be a short-lived plan to emancipate the island's slaves. Five years later, the lieutenant-governor of Penang called for slavery to be abolished at that settlement, a proposal that met with the directors' approbation. The passage of Act X of 1811, which banned the importation of foreign slaves into British territories in India, likewise met with their approval. As the archival record attests, slavery and slave trading in the subcontinent remained subjects of concern in both India and Britain during the 1810s, 1820s, and 1830s, concern that eventually culminated in the passage of Act V of 1843 which formally abolished slavery as a legal institution in India (Major, 2012; Allen, 2014, p. 183-193).

The southwestern Indian Ocean also witnessed considerable abolitionist activity as British officials sought to stamp out the illicit trade to the Mascarenes that flourished from 1811 into the early 1830s. Between 1811 and 1825, colonial and vice admiralty courts in Mauritius condemned 48 captured slavers from which 4.612 African men, women, and children had been rescued. In 1817 and 1820, Mauritian governor Robert Farquhar negotiated treaties with the Merina monarch, Radama I, to ban slave exports from those areas of Madagascar under his control. Two years later, Farquhar was the driving force behind the so-called Moresby Treaty with Seyyid Said, the sultan of Oman, which prohibited the sale of slaves to Europeans at Zanzibar and other Omani possessions along the East African coast. The impact of these treaties reverberated for decades. The 1820 treaty with Radama, for example, is credited with prompting him to adopt a program of autarky that not only shaped Anglo-Merina and Franco-Merina relations into the 1860s, but also spurred the kingdom's ever greater reliance on an indigenous system of forced labour (*fanompoana*) that ultimately helped to undermine the Merina state and facilitate the French conquest of the island in 1895-96 (Campbell, 1987, p. 400). The Moresby Treaty persuaded Seyyid to develop the clove industry on Zanzibar (Beachey, 1976a, p. 22; Sheriff, 1987, p. XIX, 50; Scarr, 1998, p. 132), an industry which, because it soon consumed thousands of slaves each year, spurred ever greater British efforts to eradicate slave trading along the East African coast (Gray, 1957; Graham, 1967; Lloyd, 1968; Beachey, 1976b).

Future Research

Although the general parameters of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean are now discernible, our knowledge about of this trans-oceanic traffic in chattel labor remains far from

complete. A review of existing scholarship highlights five topics and issues that future research will need to address, beginning with the need to reconstruct the activities of Portuguese, Dutch, and other European slave traders in greater detail than has hitherto been the case. Central to any such undertaking must be the systematic identification of individual slaving voyages, including those by private traders who operated independently of the *Estado da Índia*, the VOC, the EIC, and the Compagnie des Indes (Mbeki and Van Rossum, 2016), the creation of inventories of these voyages, and the establishment of an integrated slaving voyage database for the Indian Ocean comparable to the *Voyages* database for the Atlantic. The necessity of doing so is underscored by the identification, to date, of more than 1,650 confirmed, probable, and possible European slaving voyages within the Indian Ocean basin, a number that future research will undoubtedly increase substantially.

Such endeavors must include reconstructing how British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese slave trading networks in the *Mare Indicum* were linked not only with one another and indigenous slave trading complexes, but also with other free and forced migrant labor systems within and beyond this oceanic basin (Allen, 2014, p. 3). Archival sources and published scholarship hint at the ubiquity and intensity of these interactions. EIC personnel in mid-seventeenth-century Madras, for example, sold Indian children to the Dutch factory at Pulicat, the same venue where French merchants bargained more than a century later for slaves destined for the Mascarenes (Love, 1913, v. 1, p. 128-149; Allen, 2014, p. 115, 186-187). British and French traders purchased slaves from the Portuguese at Goa and Mozambique, while Gujarati merchants based in Mozambique participated in the Mascarene trade between the 1780s and *circa* 1806-07 (Souza, 1989, p. 119-30; Machado, 2014, p. 208, 233-235; Allen, 2014, p. 99-100). British ships may have been largely responsible for transporting the thousands of Bengali slaves who reached the Dutch-controlled Cape of Good Hope (Worden, 1985, p. 48). The commercial relations that developed between the Mascarenes and the Río de la Plata between 1796 and 1806 included trading slaves (Studer, 1958; Cooney, 1986, p. 34-45; Borucki, 2011, p. 81-107; Tardieu, 2010). The need to explore the development of comparable links between Brazil and the southwestern Indian Ocean during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is best illustrated by the Rio de Janeiro-based *Africana do Rio*'s carrying slaves from Mozambique to Mauritius in 1805 (Capela, 2002; Russell-Wood, 2001, p. 191-211).

A third area of concern is the need to pay closer attention to the ways in which certain ports facilitated long-distance slave trading by functioning as centers that provided slave traders with financial and other services, by serving as important “refreshment” stops for slave ships, their crews, and human cargoes, and by operating as transshipment points between local and regional slave trading networks. Recent research highlights Cape Town's hitherto underappreciated role as a commercial center for slave traders operating in the southwestern Indian Ocean and as a major point where Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trading networks

intersected.¹⁹ Port Louis functioned not only as the commercial heart of the Mascarene trade, but also as a refreshment stop for slavers bound to the Americas and a base from which slaving ventures to Mozambique and the Swahili Coast and thence to the Caribbean were mounted (Allen, 2014, p. 9. 68-69, 84-100). While Malacca and Makassar served as major entrepôts for the collection and redistribution of slaves in the eastern Indian Ocean, the full extent of their involvement in these traders remains to be ascertained (Manguin, 1983, p. 209-25; Thomaz, 1998, 357-386; Knaap, 2006, p. 482-508; Knaap and Sutherland, 2004, p. 116-119, 123, 143).

What we know about the dynamics of slave trading in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century southwestern Indian Ocean underscores the need to explore the economic dimensions of this activity in greater detail. Available information about slave prices, the mechanics of slave trading along the Malagasy and Swahili coasts, and slave exports to the Mascarenes suggest that Malagasy, Mozambican, and East African traders may have realized 3.645.000 to 5.733.000 piastres (\$) from the sale of slaves shipped to the islands between 1770 and 1810, at least \$1.276.000 to \$2.007.000 of which may have been paid in coin, while the illegal trade to the islands generated another \$2.152.000 to \$3.926.000 in sales between 1811 and the early 1830s, at least \$753.500 to \$1.374.000 of which was paid in specie (Allen, 2016b). These figures are generally in line with estimates that French slavers paid as much as \$1.500.000 in coin to Portuguese and Gujarati merchants in Mozambique during the 1790s, and that perhaps as much as \$2.900.000 in specie circulated in the region from 1811 to 1831. Arguments that this influx of silver coinage facilitated Gujarati bankers' ability to discount the bills of exchange that were crucial to commercial activity in the western Indian Ocean attests to the slave trade's potential impact on local and regional political economies (Machado, 2014, p. 241). So do reports that the loss of revenue that resulted from attempts to suppress the illegal trade to the Mascarenes spurred Radama I's decision to adopt autarky and Seyyid Said's decision to develop the clove industry on Zanzibar.

Last, but far from least, the evidentiary constraints that are a characteristic feature of Indian Ocean slavery studies highlight the need to adopt new approaches to studying these trades (Allen, 2018). The recent attempt to delve more deeply into the origins of Bencoolen's slaves by analyzing their personal names is indicative of the kind of innovative research methodology that is required (Vernet and Beaujard, 2014). Historical archaeological research and analysis likewise promise to shed light on aspects of the slave experience about which documentary sources are often silent. Excavations near Shimoni on the southern Kenyan coast have yielded information about how slaves along the Swahili Coast were held for export during the nineteenth century, while those on St. Helena have provided new

¹⁹ Michael Reidy's *Ocean of Suffering: Trans-Indian Ocean Slave Trade Database, 1654 to 1860*, Amazon Digital Services, 2015, includes information on more than 800 slave ships that passed the Cape of Good Hope between 1654 and 1860. See also (Harries, 2016, p. 409-427).

insights into the lives of “Liberated Africans” taken from slave ships captured by the Royal Navy (Kiriama, 2005, p. 157-69; Pearson, Jeffs, Witkin, and MacQuarrie, 2011; MacQuarrie and Pearson, 2016, p. 45-72). Excavation of the wreck of *Le Coureur*, a notorious slaver that landed six illegal cargoes, each containing 150 to 200 slaves, on Mauritius during 1819 and 1820 (Metwalli, Bigourdan, and Van Arnim, 2007, p. 74-81; Van Arnim, 2015, p. 40-45), and, more recently, of the wreck of the Portuguese slaver *São José-Paquete de Africa* near Cape Town²⁰ afford opportunities to examine the day-to-day dynamics of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean in greater detail and compare this activity with that in the Atlantic. Isotopic analysis of skeletal remains from South Africa has provided additional insights into slave mobility patterns in the Indian Ocean (Cox and Sealy, 1997, p. 207-24; Kootker et al., 2016), while DNA analysis of such remains from the Le Morne cemetery in Mauritius is contributing to a new understanding about emancipated slave and/or free colored life on the island during the early nineteenth century (Appleby et al., 2014, p. 737-46; Seetah, 2015, p. 233-253). In so doing, these approaches demonstrate that coming to grips with slave trading in the Indian Ocean requires us to embrace the intriguing complexities that are an integral part of the human experience in this oceanic world.

²⁰ E.g., <http://digitaljournal.com/science/sunken-18th-century-slave-ship-found-off-cape-town>.

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