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## Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean

**Vijayalakshmi Teelock and Abdul Sheriff**

The specificities of the Indian Ocean slave trade and slavery have been highlighted in the numerous works of historians of the Indian Ocean such as Ned Alpers, Abdul Sheriff, Richard Allen and Hubert Gerbeau, and are being recognised even by scholars of the Atlantic region. Within the Indian Ocean, however, the specificities of individual countries need to be highlighted and contrasted with each other. Some Indian Ocean countries, such as Zanzibar and Madagascar, were both importers and exporters of slaves, while others without indigenous populations, like Mauritius and Reunion, were solely importers of slave labour. Before embarking on a comparative study of the transition of these slave societies to freedom, it is necessary to have an understanding of the historical context of the establishment of slavery and the peopling of the islands through the slave trade. This is the focus of this chapter.

### **Mauritius: The Colonial Slave Trade and Slavery**

According to latest figures available from Richard Allen and Thomas Vernet, the numbers of slaves exported from the Indian Ocean by Europeans far exceed previous estimates.

**Table 2.1:** Export of slaves from the Indian Ocean

	1670-1769	1770-1810	1811-1848	Total
Madagascar	35,314-37,931	46,203-53,427	43,808-51,365	125,325-142,723
Eastern Africa	10,677-11,468	99,614-115,189	75,767-88,835	186,058-215,492
India	14,755-15,739		4,994-5,327	6,469-21,066
SE Asia		3,804-4,759		3,804-4,759

Of the total estimated by Allen<sup>1</sup> to date, the French slave trade is still by far the most substantial in the Indian Ocean.

**Table 2.2:** European slaving nations in the Indian Ocean

British total	10,525 - 12,539 slaves
Portuguese total	41,875 - 83,750 slaves
Dutch total	43,965 - 66,465 slaves
French total	334,936 - 384,040 slaves

*Source:* Richard Allen, 'Satisfying the "Want for Labouring People": European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 21, No.1, 2010, p. 45-73.

It is impossible to calculate the number of slaves who never reached the coast or captivity in the depot, given lack of information. Shell has estimated that another 20 per cent or so should be added to the total of slaves exported during colonial slavery.

It is also not possible, for the time being, to give separate figures of the number arriving in Mauritius alone; figures are given for the Mascarenes as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Brief history of the slave trade to the Mascarenes in the eighteenth century***

The French East India Company was directly involved in the slave trade for many years until it relinquished its rights to private traders. With the proximity of India, Indian textiles were used rather than French textiles, another factor which distinguishes the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades. There were three main destinations for the slaves: Louisiana, St. Domingue and the Mascarenes.

French slave trading in the South West Indian Ocean was started in Madagascar to supply Bourbon Island (Reunion), colonised earlier in 1664. The slaves engaged in agriculture and the women among them married, or cohabited, with French men due to the shortage of French women. Indian prisoners were also landed there. On 20 September 1715, when Guillaume Dufresne D'Arset took possession of Ile de France (Mauritius) in the name of the King, slavery and the slave trade were already established in neighbouring Bourbon. It started in earnest in Isle de France after the island was ceded to the FEIC on 2 April 1721.<sup>3</sup> Mauritius, until 1735, was subservient to Réunion. From 1721 to 1767, however, although the FEIC controlled the island, the French Government was increasingly present through Royal Commissaries, Directors of the FEIC nominated by the King, and the Syndics chosen by the Assembly of Shareholders. In 1727, Mauritius was given the right to trade directly with Madagascar, without going through Réunion, to build ports, warehouses and houses. With the arrival of Governor Dumas, according to Filliot, trade increased.

The period between 1735 and 1746 is crucial for the establishment of the slave trade, since Governor Labourdonnais chose Mauritius, rather than Réunion, as his base of operations to expand French influence in the Indian Ocean. Vast

infrastructural works were envisaged to transform Port Louis into a capital, port, warehousing and commercial centre. Labour from France, Madagascar, Mozambique, West Africa and India was tapped.

Although the focus of historians has been on the French East India Company, the French Government was very much involved, directly and indirectly, in the slave trade from the beginning. In the Indian Ocean, they turned a blind eye to the hostilities occurring between different European powers in Europe. Thus, despite official hostilities between France and Portugal, officials of both countries engaged in an extremely lucrative trade which included slaves in the Indian Ocean. This had been the case since the period of Labourdonnais.

When the Revolutionary Government took over, despite the ban on the slave trade in France, slave trading continued fraudulently in the Indian Ocean. Corsairs were particularly active in continuing this illicit trade and huge profits are believed to have been made, in contrast to the Atlantic Ocean.

The establishment of the Napoleonic regime in 1803 led to the reinforcement of slavery and the resumption of legal slave trade in Mauritius. But even before that, on 20 May 1802, slave trade was permitted again on the grounds that cultivation and prosperity were suffering.<sup>4</sup> On 20 June 1802, the Colonial Assembly (set up under the Revolutionary Government) of Isle de France legalised the slave trade; the same decision was taken by the Colonial Assembly of Bourbon Island on 28 September.<sup>5</sup> This period was marked by a fierce revival of the French slave trade activities in Mozambique. In 1810 when the British took over, the Act suppressing the slave trade was supposed to take effect, but this went unheeded by both the local government and the slave traders. It was not until the 1820s that the slave trade dwindled when planters themselves wished to present a better image of themselves with the British Parliament in order to benefit from better tariffs on sugar, and voluntarily abandoned the slave trade.

### ***Cultural transitions in the slave trade***

To understand the cultural background of the slaves and their descendants, it is important to be aware of the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural compositions of slaves arriving in Mauritius. In the eighteenth century, the majority of the slaves came from Guinea and the West African coast; Mozambique which included the whole of the East African coast, Ethiopia, Egypt, from the Cape of Good Hope to Port of Suez; Madagascar and India from the Malabar Coast and east of Cape Cormorin.<sup>6</sup>

The slave registration returns, produced nearly a century later between 1826 and 1835 show roughly the same categorisations being used. However, new categories were included which reflected changes in Mauritian slave society: the category 'Créole', i.e., slaves born locally was added. It is from these registration

returns that one can see the multiple ethnicities present in Mauritius during slavery and the cultural ‘mix’ that had evolved from interaction in the Indian Ocean as a whole.

In the 1826 returns, ‘countries of origin’ are listed. The most populous group was the ‘Créole de Maurice’ which by 1826, had been estimated by Shell to constitute roughly a third of the population that was locally born. Next came the ‘Mozambique’ group as shown earlier encompassing as in 1765, all those from the Eastern Africa coast and the mainland. The third largest group were the ‘Malgache’, or Malagasy group, comprising all the different groups in Madagascar, including a certain number of Mozambicans exported to Madagascar and re-exported to Mauritius. In much smaller numbers were the ‘Créoles’ from Rodrigues, Bourbon, Seychelles, Goa, Providence and Six Islands. These were slaves born on these islands and who are also listed in the registration returns as the islands were administered by Mauritius or had been transferred to Mauritius.

A smaller group consisted of Indian slaves from the Malabar Coast and Cochin. From South East Asia could be found a few Malays, some of whom had been introduced illegally into the country after the act of abolition of the Slave Trade had been passed. Finally, from the various islands and African mainland were a very varied group of slaves listed as being from Diégo Garcia, Anjouan, ‘Arabs’ and ‘Arabs’ from Mozambique. Little is known about this last group. A few slaves still remained from West Africa known as Guinea and Yoloff slaves, and a suburb of Port Louis, the capital city of Mauritius, still bears the name of Camp Yoloff. One slave was listed as being from Rio de Janeiro.

A rough compilation derived from Richard Allen’s work shows the following:

**Table 2.3:** Country of origin of slaves exported

Year	Country of origin	Percentage (%) of slaves
1670-1769	Madagascar	70
	Mozambique/Swahili coast	19
	South Asia	9
	West Africa	2
1770-1810	Mozambique/Swahili coast	60
	Madagascar	31
	South Asia	9
1811-1848	Mozambique/Swahili coast	59
	Madagascar	38
	Southeast Asia	3

It is clear that, at different times, different sources of slaves were tapped, thus influencing the cultural composition and cultural evolution of the island.

- **‘Mozambique’**

Trade with Mozambique started with Réunion Island and continued later with Mauritius. Count Ericeira recommended to the Capitaine-General of Mozambique to provide all facilities for the French slave trade with Mozambique. In 1721, two French ships, the *Duchesse de Noailles* and *L’Indien*, went to Mozambique.

Almost 13 years later, in 1733, the next ship, the *Vierge de Grâce*, went to Mozambique. It took 356 slaves on board, but only 147 arrived alive at Réunion. In 1735, Labourdonnais recommended that a trading station should be established on the west coast of Madagascar to carry out the slave trade with Mozambique and with the Portuguese. After the departure of Labourdonnais, trade slumped somewhat. But by 1753, more and more slaves were required for Mauritius. Negotiations with Portugal were recommended so that trade in Mozambique could take place and establishments were proposed.<sup>7</sup> The definition of what was a Mozambique appears at this time, as “noir Mozambique qui comprendra toute la côte orientale d’Afrique d’Abyssinie d’Égypte, depuis le Cap de Bonne Espérance jusqu’au port Suez”.<sup>8</sup>

Although Portuguese laws did not allow foreign ships in Portuguese ports, these laws were circumvented whenever necessary. The Portuguese needed foodstuffs from Mauritius and turned a blind eye, if necessary. The French also went to Ibo (Kerimba Island) which was not under Portuguese administration and also in Inhambane in the south. They traded almost exclusively with the Yao, while later in the nineteenth century, it was the Mataca kingdom that took over the trade.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the fact that much of this was illegal, trading figures are sketchy. It would seem that some 1,300-1,400 slaves a year were brought to the Mascarenes. By 1758, the French controlled the European slave trade of the whole coast from Mombasa to Kilwa, up to Ibo.<sup>10</sup>

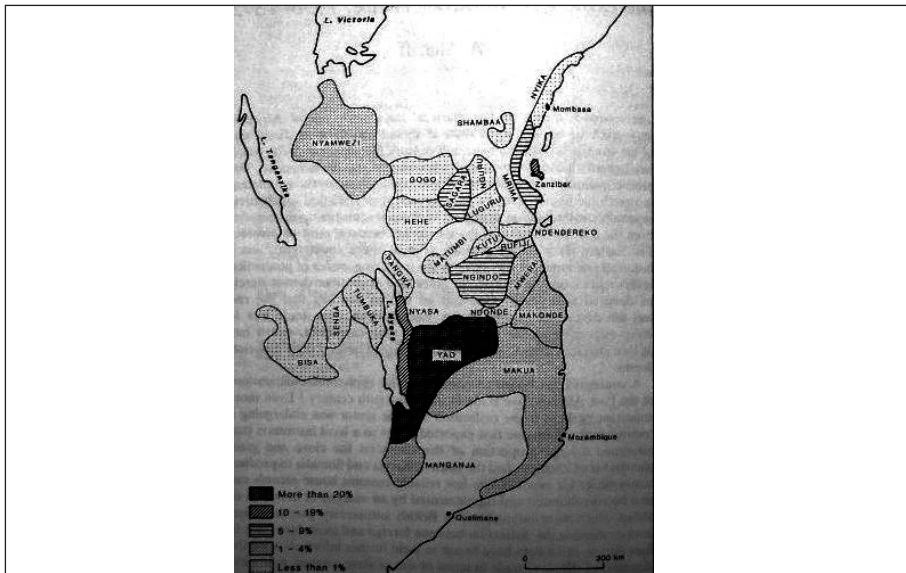
- **Swahili coast**

East Africa is considered separately here from ‘Mozambique’ simply to show that, although the ports were located in what is East Africa today, the actual origins were diverse, as slaves were brought from the hinterland that stretched right into the interior going as far as Malawi and Mozambique. Thus, the journal of the *Espérance*, although marking slaves as coming from Zanzibar, lists one Makonde slave having died of smallpox.<sup>11</sup> When the French Government took over Mauritius in 1766, a new era in the slave trade ensued. Eastern Africa was highly sought after by the French. But until the 1750s, there do not appear to have been many slaves shipped out to the Mascarenes from the Swahili coast, although they had been shipped to Oman before then.

Jean-Vincent Morice can be said to have inaugurated the slave trade with East Africa.<sup>12</sup> He negotiated and signed a 100-year treaty with the sultan of Kilwa, Sultan Hassan bin Ibrahim al-Kilwi al-Shirazi,<sup>13</sup> to supply him with 1,000 slaves a year. The French also wanted to give exclusive rights to the Portuguese to trade in slaves to the Mascarenes, on condition that French traders were given similar rights in Portuguese trading posts such as Kerimba, Mozambique and others.<sup>14</sup>

In 1770, the slave trade with Eastern Africa increased, and five times more slaves were brought from Mozambique than from Madagascar. Between 1785 and 1790, approximately 1,500 slaves left for the Mascarenes each year. In 1793, corsairs raided the Mozambican coast. According to Filliot, the need for new slaves arose because of the increased rate of manumissions. Under French laws, a slave could be manumitted by either self-purchase, by a will or by the owner as a reward. On 4 February 1794, the slave trade was suspended, but corsairs and planters collaborated to circumvent the ban. Early in October 1796, some 100 men, led by French corsairs, attacked the town of Ibo and, two days later, Kerimba Island, and two French ships attacked Lorenzo Marques and burnt the fortress. They expelled the Portuguese from Delagoa Bay and competed with the British and Portuguese for the ivory trade. Napoleonic wars disrupted the trade. An annual average of 9,000 slaves in the late 1780s declined to just over 2,300 in 1794.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century, it was a 'free for all' period with corsairs, Americans and Brazilians competing.

There are similarities with the origins of slaves brought to Zanzibar from the mainland. Amongst these were also slaves brought to Mauritius. There were thirty-two African tribes, such as the Zaramo, Yao, Nyasa, Gindo, Nyema, Nyamwezi, Makua, Mchania, Mrima, Mgogo, Mwera Karani, Manamnji, etc., who provided slaves, of whom the Zaramo, Yao, Nyasa, Gindo, Nyema, and Nyamwezi supplied most slaves to Zanzibar and Mauritius.



**Figure 2.3:** Map of Eastern Africa showing proportion of slaves from different tribes freed in Zanzibar in 1860s

Source: W. G. Clarence-Smith, *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade*, (London: Cass), 1989, p. 132).

- **‘West Africa’**

In contrast to the Atlantic, West African slaves were few in Mauritius due to heavy mortality and higher costs. The FEIC had two main trading posts in West Africa: Ouidah in Benin (formerly Dahomey) and Gorée in Senegal. In Gorée, a fort had been built where French traders, their slaves and goods were ‘secure’.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the ships listed by LeLan, the C4 series in the French National Archives mention another ship, the *Fleury*, which was to bring slaves from Senegal.<sup>17</sup> In 1728, the *Méduse* went to Ouidah to purchase some 400 slaves. Several other ships made the voyage to West Africa, among which were: the *Vierge de Grâce*, the *Diane*, the *Duc de Noailles* and the *Badine*. In 1729, two other ships went to Ouidah and Senegal but because of the high death rate, this source of slaves was discontinued. By 1731, the FEIC had a monopoly of the slave trade in Madagascar, and thus banned the trade with India and Senegal. Between 1739 and 1744, under Governor Labourdonnais, some 100 slaves were brought. In 1750, the *Hercule*, the *Chevalier Main*, and *Bristols* brought 789 slaves, out of the 1,090 who embarked from Gorée. This represented a 28% death rate. The last ship to bring in slaves from West Africa was possibly the *Duc de Choiseul*. The location where they lived is found in archival maps of Camp Yolloff and Camp Bambara in Mauritius.

- **‘India’**

Indian slaves are not known in the Atlantic Ocean slave trade, and this is another major difference with the Atlantic as it challenges traditional perceptions of ‘black’ slavery. Chinese slaves from South East Asia were also brought. The year 1728 witnessed the arrival of the first Indian slaves in Mauritius under French rule. The number of Indian slaves increased when private individuals were also permitted to bring in slaves from India. Labourdonnais introduced 70 slaves for his personal use. In 1750, the desire was still there to bring in slaves from India, as well as other areas for the Company.<sup>18</sup> Apart from Pondicherry and Bengal, Goa was also tapped for slaves.<sup>19</sup>

Allen has estimated that between 19,750 and 23,900 slaves arrived from India to the Mascarenes, but for Mauritius alone, the figures are not available.<sup>20</sup> Further research is needed on Asian slaves arriving not only from India, but also from South East Asia. However by the time of the 1847 census, no ex-slave reported having been born in India, thus signifying that there were few if any from the latter part of the eighteenth century.

- **‘Madagascar’**

From the French East India Company’s point of view, Madagascar was ideal as a source of slaves for the Mascarenes, since it was cheaper than procuring slaves from India or West Africa. It also had the monopoly of trade with Madagascar,

except for a brief period between 1742 and 1746, when private traders were allowed to trade. The colonists, for their part, found that proximity with Madagascar tempted Malagasy slaves to maroon more often. It was, therefore, not advisable to send them to work in the port, as they could easily steal vessels and escape to Madagascar.

The closest and safest part of Madagascar to Mauritius was Antongil Bay and later Foulpointe. Their hinterland supplied large numbers of slaves. In 1733, the Company did try to replicate its activities in Senegal by building a permanent trading post in Antongil Bay at Nosy Mangabé, but it failed. From 1750, Foulpointe became more important. Antongil, Tamatave, Fénériver, Mananara, Engontsy and l'île Sainte-Marie were secondary posts. Although Fort Dauphin was the healthiest port, there were few slaves in the hinterland, so the Company used this port more for other trade in rice and salted meat. Many slaves were brought from East Africa originally and resold to French traders on the East coast of Madagascar.

This trade continued right up to 1822. Toussaint's figures of some 20,000 slaves being brought in illegally to the Mascarenes from Madagascar has been revised recently by Larson who estimates a much higher figure of 60,000 slaves. Illegal trade continued also from the Seychelles. For Mauritius alone, it is believed now that from 1800 to 1810, some 3,500 slaves imported is closer to the reality, and from 1810 to 1820, over 6,000 slaves were brought. However, further research is required on this issue.

- **Slavery**

The economic importance of the slave trade and of slavery must be underlined as far as an understanding of the history of the Mauritian economy is concerned and to understand post-emancipation outcomes. Both the slave trade and slavery started as part of the search by the French to find labour for the numerous activities to be undertaken. The slave trade was engaged in the hope of bringing substantial profits. As stated by the Truth and Justice Commission report of November 2011, 'without the establishment of a slave society and economy, there would have been no Isle de France in the eighteenth century and no sugar industry in nineteenth century British Mauritius'. It must be stated, however, that non-slave labour was also sought but not in great numbers. The orphanages of Paris were tapped to bring in young apprentices to be trained in workshops in the Company headquarters located in Port Louis, and free Malagasy and Indian skilled artisans were brought in small numbers also in skilled trades and occupations.

The bulk of labour employed in the revenue-bearing sectors of the economy as well as in domestic homes, however, was supplied by slave labour from 1720s to the 1830s. As also stated by the TJC report, 'the fortunes of many today were built on the prosperity of those who traded and used slave labour in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.'



Slavery became established when distinctions appeared between the French and their Malagasy and Indian servants. In 1674, an Ordinance of Jacob de la Haye Article 20 ordered that there would be no marriages between French and *négresses* or between *noirs* and white women. The term 'slave' also appears for the first time in Bourbon.<sup>21</sup> It is there that slavery, as it is understood in Mauritius, became established with maroon hunts, separate Parish Registers and domestic servants being treated as property.<sup>22</sup>

Slave labour was seen as the most reliable source of labour, although a certain amount of free labour was also brought in, in the form of French *engagés*, and skilled Malagasy and Indian workers and artisans. Labourdonnais personally took charge of acquiring slaves for the island and undertook the massive construction projects in Mauritius: roads, houses, the port, a naval base, the Botanic Gardens etc. The whole infrastructure of Port Louis, the capital, in the eighteenth century could be said to have been built mainly by slaves, but it must be recognised, also by French *engagés* and free skilled people from various parts of the world. The first colonists were not keen on engaging in construction work, and so a large number of slaves were brought from India, Madagascar, West Africa and Mozambique to furnish the labour power required.

But there always seemed to be a chronic shortage of labour. The census of 1766 revealed that of the 67,389 *arpents*<sup>23</sup> (27, 234 ha) of land granted, 3,708 (1,499 ha) were uncultivated due to the absence of slaves.

In addition, the Company also owned slaves who worked in various capacities. When the King took over the island in 1765, the slaves belonging to the Company were ceded to the King. In 1769, out of a total of 1,228 slaves, there were: 162 Malagasies, 436 Guineans, 345 Creoles, 254 Mozambicans, 25 Indians, 2 Creoles from Bourbon, 1 from Pondicherry and 3 from Macao. They were divided into 662 men, 271 women, 139 boys, 126 girls, 21 young male children and 9 female infants.<sup>24</sup>

Despite an increasing amount of interest among researchers on the history of slavery and the slave trade in Mauritius in recent years, no demographic study of the slave population or an assessment of the data available has been carried out. Historians and other researchers have used whatever statistics they could find or were easily at hand, and these have been used indiscriminately. The most widely used compilation of statistics has been that of Baron d'Unienville's *Statistique de l'île Maurice* published in 1838. Not only are the slave data contained in it estimates, but the published version of his work is believed to be full of mistakes. The manuscript version of his work lies in the Public Record Office and has yet to be compared with the published version. With the exception of Richard Allen and Barker who have been cautious in their use of d'Unienville's figures, most researchers seem to have adopted them as a reliable and accurate set of data. The slave registration returns compiled under British rule are the most complete

sources of statistical data available to date. In the first official registration of 1815, the illegal slaves appear in the form of hundreds of young males born overseas and without parents. There were 51,452 male slaves and 28,594 female slaves in Mauritius at this time.

In 1826 the figures for the slave population were 66,656 slaves.

**Table 2.4:** Ethnic Origin of Slaves

<b>Ethnic origin</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Creoles	17,371	17,461
Mozambican	15,444	3,713
Malagasy	8,271	4,396
Total	41,086	25,570

Despite the numerous errors, particularly in ages and marks of imported slaves, the 1826 registration is considered the most complete yet and carried out with more care than ever before.

### *The Impact of Sugar Expansion on Slavery*

By 1832, there were 2,605 slave-owners in Mauritius. Out of these, 1,192 owners owned four or fewer slaves and had a total of 2,372 slaves. These small slave-holding units were composed for the most part of the owner's family and a number of slave families. A 'medium'-sized unit had between 20 and 99 slaves, while a large slave holding unit, 100 or more slaves. 'Medium'-sized estates can be further categorised into sugar producing and others. The sugar producers on average owned over 49 slaves.

Sugar was increasingly grown from 1815 on large slave-holding units and principally in the three northern and western districts of the island: Pamplemousses, Rivière du Rempart and Flacq. The transformation of society and economy engendered by sugar expansion also had its effects on the slaves: reorganisation brought significant changes, for example in the spatial and occupational distribution of rural slaves in the districts and estates. The slave population became concentrated in the northernmost and western districts of Pamplemousses (15.6 %), Rivière du Rempart (12.7 %) and Flacq (14 %), i.e., the 'sugar' districts. Between 1825 and 1830, the slave population increased by over 3,700 slaves in Pamplemousses, Rivière du Rempart and Flacq while a substantial decrease took place in Savanne and in Plaines Wilhems. The abolition of the slave trade and the slowing down of illegal trade had led to an increasing number of slaves over the age of 45 years and an increasing proportion of locally-born slaves. According to the Commission of Eastern Enquiry (CEE), there were over 7,000 children in the districts alone, i.e., one-seventh of the total rural population and some 2,000 aged slaves over 60 years old.

Age was perhaps the most crucial factor in deciding occupational stratification: the ages preferred were from 15 to 39 years as slaves were at their most productive. Gender was especially important on sugar estates. Field work, especially the physically strenuous tasks of clearing, hoeing, planting and harvesting were tasks believed to be best carried out by men. But with the dearth of field hands, slave women in Mauritius were used in activities traditionally carried out by men such as clearing, hoeing and planting. According to the CEE, in 1826, deaths on large plantations exceeded births because of 'immoral intercourse, severe labour, insufficient food and comforts'.<sup>25</sup> By 1832, the census reveals continued persistent high mortality figures on most estates.

In the 1830s, there was thus little improvement in the provision of food and health care of slaves. The hurricanes destroyed straw huts regularly every year, and slaves were often left without any shelter for days on end.<sup>26</sup> However, an improvement had occurred because slaves were now vaccinated. During the period under French rule, diseases and infections such as smallpox, fevers, plague and leprosy depopulated the slave population.<sup>27</sup> The evidence from the Protector of Slaves showed the trauma that slaves underwent during the period of sugar expansion. By the 1830s, the use of steam engines and water mills had increased greatly. More field and mill slaves were thus needed. Far from saving slave labour, technological change actually created a demand for more and more labour as an increase in agricultural output was expected. It was estimated that the labour input required for preparing the land, digging holes and planting, was higher than cane cutting to a proportion of eight to one.<sup>28</sup>

## **Zanzibar: The Slave Trade and Slavery**

### *The Slave Trade*

The islands of Zanzibar lie less than 40 miles from the East African coast, and have enjoyed close social, economic, and at times even political relations with the Swahili coast across the narrow channel for at least two millennia of recorded history, and maybe even longer as archaeological evidence has begun to reveal. Moreover, Zanzibar and the rest of the Swahili coast have been part of the Muslim world for at least one millennium, and now Zanzibar is overwhelmingly Muslim. During this long millennium, evidence for slave trade can be traced in historical records from as early as the seventh century when Zanj slaves from the East African coast begin to appear in the annals of the Middle East, but from existing records it appears that there were probably only two major periods when slavery as a system of production was in operation.

The first was in the tenth century when a large number of Zanj from the East African coast and elsewhere in Africa, but also slaves from India and central Asia, were imported in large numbers to the Persian Gulf. An oppressive and highly

exploitative system of slavery was set up within an overall tributary mode of production in southern Iraq. It led to the famous Zanj Rebellion during which the rebels set up their state and controlled the Basra region for 14 years.<sup>29</sup>

The second period that we are more immediately concerned developed from the eighteenth century and was connected with the transformation of Oman following the expulsion of the Portuguese from Muscat in 1650. It led to the growing importance of commerce in the political economy of Oman, and investment of commercial profit in date production based on slave labour. Slaves were exported from the Swahili coast northwards to Arabia and the Persian Gulf to supply labour for the date plantations and pearl diving in the Persian Gulf, as well as to meet the demand for domestic slaves that accompanied these developments.

This trade has been widely exaggerated by the British abolitionists in the nineteenth century and the colonial and post-colonial historians in the twentieth century without considering the potential for absorption of such large number of slaves by the economy and society in the deserts of Arabia. The only clue to the dimension of the slave trade in the eighteenth century comes from an Omani chronicle that states that Imam Saif b. Sultan (1692-1711), who had expelled the Portuguese from the East African coast in 1699, owned 1,700 slaves and one-third of all the date-palms in Oman. We can therefore hazard a guess that the slave populations on the date plantations in Oman may have been in the region of 5,000, although the numbers may have increased as the economy of Oman flourished in the mid-eighteenth century. Slaves were also ubiquitous among the dhow sailors and pearl divers of the Persian Gulf – an early nineteenth century detailed survey suggests that they constituted a third of the 27,000 to 30,000 pearl divers. Moreover, a smaller number of slaves was absorbed in the Sultan's army, and in 1802, it included 1,100 African slaves.<sup>30</sup> These developments also created a demand for domestic slaves for which it is difficult to estimate a global figure.

The most detailed estimates by British officials in the Persian Gulf in the early nineteenth century give a figure of between 1,400 and 1,700 slaves imported into the major Omani ports of Sur and Muscat, of whom three quarters were from the Swahili coast and the rest from Ethiopia. Some of these slaves were transhipped to the Persian Gulf which seems to have imported a much smaller number of slaves directly from the African coast – only one dhow carried 12 slaves directly from the Swahili coast. In 1841 the British kept a register of all dhows passing to the northern end of the Gulf, and they counted 1,217 slaves, almost equally divided between males and females. Based on these figures, Martin and Ryan estimated an annual average of only 2,500 for the period 1770 to 1829, and Austen has revised his figures down to 2,250 per annum for the period 1700 to 1815.<sup>31</sup>

The northern slave trade which had developed within the pre-capitalist mode of production had a fairly limited potential for expansion. On the other hand, from the eighteenth century eastern Africa was being drawn into the vortex of the Atlantic

system of slavery that was encroaching into the south-western Indian Ocean. From the 1730s there was a growing demand for slaves in the previously uninhabited Mascarenes islands of Mauritius and Réunion that was initially met largely by Madagascar and intermittently by Mozambique and the Swahili coast. From the last third of that century, the market expanded to meet the growing demand for African slaves for the emerging sugar plantation economy and other infrastructural activities in those islands. In 1775, the French slave trader, Morice, inaugurated the southern branch of the slave trade of the Swahili coast on a large scale by making two voyages to Zanzibar, taking a total of 1,625 slaves. The following year he shifted his trade to the source at the major slave port of Kilwa, which was described as 'the entrepot for the slave trade for all the coast of Zanzibar'. He bought 700 slaves, and signed a treaty with the Sultan of Kilwa to supply 1,000 slaves a year. In 1784 Joseph Crassons de Medeuil listed 14 voyages that carried a total of 4,193 slaves over a period of 28 months, giving an average of nearly 2,000 slaves per annum.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, the slave sector of the economy of the Swahili coast during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century consisted largely of an export of about 2,250-2,500 slaves to the north, and perhaps an equal number going to the south. However, the intensifying Anglo-French warfare during the Napoleonic period began to disrupt this lucrative branch of trade of the Swahili coast, culminating in the capture of Mauritius by the British in 1810, and the prohibition of slave trade to the south by the Moresby Treaty of 1822. Only five vessels traded at Kilwa and Zanzibar in 1803-4 compared with at least eleven in 1788. James Prior commented in 1811 that 'the number of slaves formerly exported amounted to many thousands, but at present the demand is confined to the Arabs, who do not take many'.<sup>33</sup> The crisis resulting from the loss of the southern market forced Zanzibar and the Swahili coast to internalise the use of slave labour, thus giving a tremendous boost to the creation of a slave economy and society on the Swahili coast that consumed even more slaves by the 1860s than they were exported half a century earlier.<sup>34</sup>

Cloves were initially introduced to Mauritius during the eighteenth century, smuggled there from Dutch-controlled Indonesia. However, Mauritius is located along the thoroughfare of hurricanes, and therefore the perennial could not thrive there, and was replaced by sugar. With the disruption of the slave trade on the Swahili coast, an enterprising Arab, who had previously been trading in slaves to the Mascarenes, probably in partnership with some French slave traders, introduced cloves from Mauritius in c. 1810. He planted them on his plantations at Mtoni and Kizimbani, and by the 1820s, small quantities of cloves had begun to reach the Bombay market from the East African coast. Because the Dutch were still exercising a monopoly over the spice, prices were very high. This led to what a French visitor in the 1840s described as a 'clove mania', clearing the coconut and other trees for cloves. By the end of the same decade production from Zanzibar had peaked, and overproduction led to a precipitous decline in the price of cloves and stagnation until the 1870s. The clove had been introduced to the smaller island of Pemba

which was even more suitable, but the fall in prices and stagnation postponed the emergence of that island as the larger producer until after the hurricane of 1872.

This expansion of the clove economy was steered by Sultan Seyyid Said who visited Zanzibar in 1828, and immediately recognised the potential for his East African dominion. He is said to have compelled his subjects to plant a certain proportion of clove to coconut trees. The ruling dynasty and the Omani ruling class undoubtedly dominated the clove economy at that time, but they were soon joined by the indigenous Shirazi ruler, the Mwinyi Mkuu and other Swahili landowners. Even some of the Indian merchants had begun by the 1840s to pay 'their tribute to the mania', acquiring through foreclosures clove plantations worked by slaves. The source of capital for these plantations in many cases was trade that was flourishing at Zanzibar at that time, in which Arab, Swahili and Indian traders were involved, including the caravan trade into the interior which was the source of wealth of such people as Tipu Tip who reportedly owned seven plantations and 10,000 slaves by the end of the nineteenth century.

Unlike Mauritius, cloves were introduced to an island that was already long settled by the indigenous Shirazi population who were predominantly Muslim, and therefore could not be legally enslaved under Islamic law. Moreover, as peasants, they preferred to work on their own communal land to produce their subsistence rather than work on the clove plantations as workers, retreating to less fertile areas when their lands were encroached upon by the expanding clove plantations. Therefore, the clove economy was almost entirely dependent on slave labour imported from the mainland. Contemporary sources are replete with some wild guesses about the slave population of Zanzibar at various times on which some modern scholars have tried to construct hypothetical curves based on untenable assumptions (e.g. Martin & Ryan 1977). However, Albrand's and Burgess's first-hand accounts suggest a slave population of 15,000 and 17,000 in 1819 and 1839 respectively when the 'clove mania' was just getting underway. By the time the clove had peaked in the late 1840s, Putnam and Loarer give figures of 60,000 and 100,000 where it may have stagnated because of a drastic fall in the price of cloves. Customs house figures for the 1860s suggest that, by that time, about 12,000 of the nearly 20,000 slaves passing through Zanzibar were retained for local production and services, which seems to be realistic in view of the high mortality and low reproduction among slaves, estimated at about 10 per cent.<sup>35</sup>

The hurricane which hit Zanzibar in 1872 and totally destroyed the clove plantations of Unguja, followed by the 1873 treaty which prohibited all slave trade by sea, began to transform the clove economy of Zanzibar. Much of the replanting of cloves thereafter occurred in the more fertile Pemba, and many of the landowners shifted their slaves there. It is in this context that the list of slaves owned in Pemba compiled by an Arab official of the British Consulate, Sulaiman b. Saleh, should be seen. The detailed but partial estimate by this official in 1875 gives the number of slaves owned in Pemba just after the hurricane and the prohibition of all slave trade

at 28,057, which he suspected to be half the total number; although his estimates may be exaggerated because he was doing the estimate secretly at the behest of the British Consul charged with the stoppage of the slave trade.<sup>36</sup>

The growth of the slave trade during the nineteenth century was due, therefore, not to any expansion in the demand for slaves in the desiccated coasts of Arabia, but to a fundamental transformation of the slave economy from one that had depended on the export of slaves, to one that retained slave labour within East Africa to produce agricultural commodities for export, especially cloves on Zanzibar, and oil-producing grains on the coast of Kenya, for export to the East and the West. In fact, British efforts to prohibit the export of slaves to the south by the Moresby Treaty of 1822, and to the north by the Hammerton Treaty of 1845, ironically, contributed to the localisation of the slave economy along the East African coast. This had a much greater potential for expansion since slaves were a vital means of production. It developed its own momentum once it was connected to the more vibrant industrial economies of Europe, more than making up for the losses in the export markets for slaves in the Mascarenes.

### *Slavery*

Unfortunately, the registers of the emancipated slaves of 1897 have not yet been found in the Zanzibar Archives to give a more reliable overall picture of the characteristics of the slave population in Zanzibar. The annual reports of the Slave Commissioners give an overall number of slaves who were freed between 1897 and 1907. Surprisingly, only 11,837 were emancipated out of a figure of between 60,000 and 100,000 who may have been there at the height of the clove economy before the hurricane of 1872.<sup>37</sup> Part of the reason may have been the cut-off of the supply of slaves from the mainland after the prohibition of the slave trade by the 1873 treaty. This was a full quarter century before official emancipation during which the number may have been depleted by high mortality and low reproduction among slaves without being replaced. Part of the reason also is the manumission of 3,776 slaves by Muslim owners between 1897 and 1901, apart from others who may not have been reported, who preferred rewards in the afterworld rather than worldly compensation from the hand of the British, as Saada Wahab shows in her study, to which we shall return.

As regards the profile of the slave population, the emancipation figures fortunately give a gender breakdown, showing 47 per cent were male and 53 per cent were female. A larger proportion of women may come as a surprise to those familiar with the Atlantic slave trade where there was a heavy preponderance of able-bodied men. However, since emancipation came nearly a quarter of a century after the prohibition of the slave trade, the larger female proportion may also to some extent be due to the longevity of women common in many populations. It may also be explained by the larger proportion of domestic slaves in the Unguja island of Zanzibar, although they also included male domestic slaves, and women

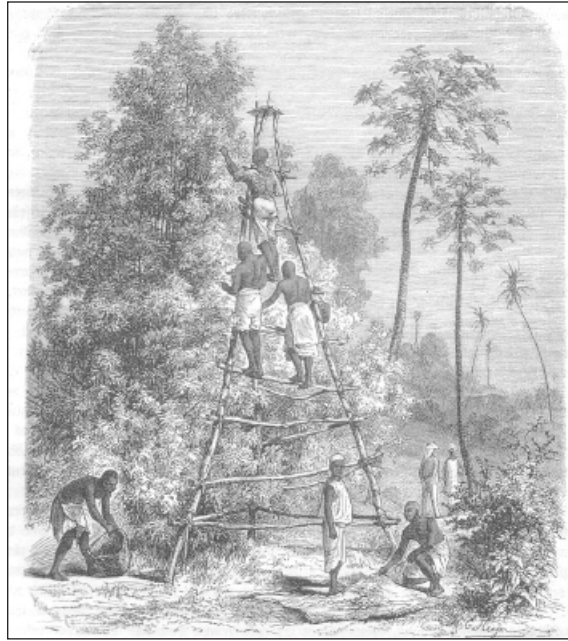
may have been used to a larger extent even on the plantations where they could help in picking cloves from the lower branches and separating the cloves from the stems. Other evidence from captured slave dhows show a surprisingly larger number of children, as much as 30 per cent, because the owners preferred to socialise younger children at an early age especially for domestic work.<sup>38</sup>

For further elaboration of the characteristics of the slave population, we are fortunate to have a register of about 1,620 slaves who were held illegally by Indians that were considered British subjects by British Consul Charles Rigby, and were thus freed by him in the 1860s. However, since Indians in Zanzibar were primarily urban-based merchants and traders who used their slaves mostly to transport goods, and only a few seem to have had any plantations, it may not be representative of the total slave population. Among the Indian-owned slaves, a vast majority of the owners (82 per cent) held less than 9 slaves, probably mostly as domestics, while 18 per cent held between 10 and 69 slaves who may have been used for transportation of goods, and only one owner, the foremost merchant and customs master, who had 446 slaves. He was one of the few who employed them on his plantations as well as for his commercial activities in the town. Among the emancipated slaves, only 16 per cent were over the age of 40. The largest category of slaves, who constituted 61 per cent of all the emancipated slaves, were between the ages of 20 and 39, and were almost equally balanced in terms sex. On the other hand, 22 per cent were children under the age of 19, but in this category males predominated (56 per cent) over females. Among the last class, particularly notable is the class of *wazalia* (locally born) who constituted 13 per cent of the emancipated slave population. Commenting on the fertility of slave women, Rigby had claimed that fewer than five per cent of the adult females bore children because they were liable to be deprived of their offspring. However, statistics show that of the 124 children of both sexes under the age of 10, 104 were born in Zanzibar, showing that slaves were able to reproduce themselves, and some were in their forties.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the similarities and differences between the two islands in terms of composition of the slave population and their owners as well as the emerging structure of the economy based essentially on slave labour. Culturally, it is clear both islands had very different orientations as Mauritius was ruled by a French administration intent on 'civilising' its slave and non-white free population by integrating them into the Catholic faith, the only religion allowed in Mauritius at the time. In Zanzibar, the British could not displace the religions and cultures they found there, and so were forced to accommodate them. The varying ethnic and cultural organisation of society found in each island operated in equally varying ways during the transition to freedom, and influenced emancipation outcomes for ex-slaves and their former owners.





**Photo 2.1:** Clove picking

*Source:* Zanzibar National Archives



**Photo 2.2:** Female slaves and their overseer

*Source:* Zanzibar National Archives

## Notes

1. Richard Allen, 'Satisfying the "Want for Labouring People": European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 21, No.1, 2010, p.45-73.
2. These figures have not been disaggregated by historians as yet, although the Truth and Justice Commission has started this process. However, there are local censuses which can give an indication of how many slaves there were on the island.
3. Filliot, Volume 2, p. 40.
4. See Filliot, volume 2, p.84 and Eric Saugera, '*La traite des noirs en trente questions.*' Document downloaded from, <http://hgc.ac-creteil.fr>. Editions Geste. 2003, p. 34
5. Hubert Gerbeau, 'L'Océan Indien n'est pas L'Atlantique. La Traite illégale à Bourbon au XIXe siècle.' Un article publié dans *Outre-mer*, No 336-337, Décembre 2002, Paris, p. 79-108 par Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, pp.1-282).
6. COL-C4-7-2 1751-1753 Corr. Gén. David, de Lozier Bouvet, 1753 Mémoire concernant les îles de France et de Bourbon, Distinction par classes de noirs, tarifs pour chaque espèce.
7. COL-C4-7-2 1751-1753 Corr. Gén. David, de Lozier Bouvet, 1753 M. Projet de L'abbé de la Tour.
8. COL-C4 -7 Mémoire concernant les îles de France et Bourbon 1753.
9. Benigna Zimba, *The slave trade to Mauritius and the Mascarenes 1780s to the 1870s*, Truth and Justice Commission Report, Vol 4: Part VI Slave trade and Slavery.
10. M. Jackson-Haight, *European Powers and South-East Africa...*, 1796-1856, London, 1942, p.108.
11. T. Vernet, *La première traite française à Zanzibar...l'Espérance 1774-1775*, 2011, p.518.
12. Vernet, *La première traite*, p. 478.
13. G.S.P Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island*, Clarendon Press, 1965, p.71.
14. COL-C4-15 1763-1765 Corr gén. Desforges Boucher Mémoire sur la position actuelle des établissements français.
15. Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar*, London, Currey, 1987, p.46.
16. Le Lan, p.3. For more information on the French slave trade with West Africa, see Philippe Haudrère and G. Le Bouëdec, *Les Compagnies des Indes*, Collection Ouest-France, 2001 and Patrick Villiers, 'Les établissements français et les débuts de la station navale française sur les côtes occidentales d'Afrique de 1755 à 1792' in *A la découverte de l'Afrique noire par les marins français (XV° - XIX° siècle)*, Rochefort et la mer, Vol. 12, Publications à l'Université Francophone d'Été-Jonzac, 1998.
17. COL-C4-3 1738-1739 Correspondances générales M. de la Bourdonnais, gouverneur 1739 M. de Cossigny, ingénieur.
18. COL-C4-6 1749-1750 Corr. Gén. David, 1750, Réflexions anonymes pour l'intérêt de la Compagnie des Indes.
19. COL-C4-6 1749-1750 Corr. Gén. David, 1750, Réflexions.
20. R. Allen, 'The Constant Demand of the French', *Journal of African History*, 2008.
21. Filliot, Tome II, p.29.
22. Filliot, Tome II, p. 33.
23. One hectare is equivalent to 2.47 *arpents*, an old French measure still in use in Mauritius.

24. MNA : OA 109 (1769), dossier 4, ff 32.
25. PRO: CO 167/118, Colebrooke and Blair to Lord Howick, 17 December 1828.
26. PRO: CO 167/16, Report of Dr. Burke to Kelso, 13 July 1813.
27. PRO: CO 167/16, Dr. Burke to Farquhar, 15 October 1813.
28. F. Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico*, 1984.
29. Alexandre Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Century*, Princeton, Marcus Wiener, 1999.
30. Sheriff, 1987, pp. 18-20, 37-8.
31. Sheriff, 1987, p. 35-40, also quoting Martin & Ryan and Austen.
32. Sheriff, 1987, p. 43-4.
33. Freeman-Grenville, *East African Coast*, p. 210.
34. Sheriff, 1987, pp. 48-60.
35. Sheriff, 1987, p. 60.
36. ZNA: AA 12/4, Reports on Slaves & Slave Owners in Pemba & Mombasa.
37. A. Sheriff, 'Localisation and social composition of the East African slave trade, 1858-873', in W. G. Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade*, London, Cass, 1989, p.144.
38. Sheriff, 1987, pp.139, 144.
39. Sheriff, 1987, p.140.

