



European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850

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OHIO UNIVERSITY PRESS
ATHENS, OHIO

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Satisfying the Demand for Laboring People, 1500–1850

EARLY IN JULY 1758, the British East India Company's Court of Directors in London wrote to officials at Bombay (Mumbai) after receiving reports that the financial problems plaguing Fort Marlborough, the company's factory at Bencoolen (Benkulen, Bengkulu) on the west coast of Sumatra, stemmed from a "want of labouring people." The directors noted that since company personnel at Madras (Chennai) were unable to procure slaves for their Sumatran outpost while English merchants based at Bombay had "an intercourse with Mozambique and Madagascar, and make the Coffrees a part of their traffick, we order that you purchase all the Slaves procurable, Men, Women, and Children, for our Settlement of Bencoolen, and convey them thither by the Cruizer we have ordered upon that Station, or by any other speedy method that may offer."¹

Only a few of the 500 slaves the directors authorized that July to be shipped to Bencoolen, either via Bombay or directly from Mozambique and Madagascar, apparently reached Sumatra. Those

who did so arrived in a less than expeditious manner; in March 1759, officials at Fort Marlborough pleaded again for slaves to be sent to them as soon as possible.² A slave census that November recorded the presence of 460 men, women, and children at the factory and its substations compared to the 458 enumerated in 1758.³ The following month, the fort acknowledged receiving 9 “very acceptable” Coffrees from Bombay who, while clearly welcomed, nevertheless remained far too few in number to meet the station’s need for slave laborers. The expectation of little further assistance from either Madras or Bombay finally prompted the factory’s managers to urge the company’s directors to send a ship directly to Madagascar to bring at least 200 men, 100 women, and as many boys as could be procured to the settlement.⁴ Bencoolen’s capture and brief occupation by French forces in 1760 during the Seven Years’ War ended any plans that may have been formulated to do so, but only temporarily. No later than April 1762, officials at the reoccupied settlement proposed bringing 1,200 to 1,500 Coffrees to the fort.⁵ Another request six months later to supply the fort with Malagasy slaves observed that “they are the only people We can depend upon for all kinds of Work” and that if sufficient numbers of them were employed as carpenters, bricklayers, and other craftsmen, “your Honours would sensibly feel the good effects in the amount of your Expences.”⁶

This and subsequent correspondence during 1763, 1764, and 1765 about shipping hundreds of slaves from Angola, the East African coast, and Madagascar to this outpost on the fringes of the company’s commercial empire not only illustrates that Europeans traded African slaves on a global scale during the mid-eighteenth century but also hints at the magnitude and some of the complexities of this pan-regional traffic in chattel labor. Historians of slavery, however, have largely ignored European slave trading in the Indian Ocean despite the existence of a small but expanding body of scholarship on this activity since the 1960s⁷ and a growing appreciation by some scholars that the modern African diaspora reached eastward across the Indian Ocean and northward to the Mediterranean as well as westward across the Atlantic.⁸ Recent surveys of slavery and slave trading in the Indian Ocean attest to a growing awareness of and sensitivity

to the complexities of forced migrant labor in this part of the world.⁹ In so doing, these works highlight the need to explore British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese slave trading within and beyond the confines of this oceanic basin in as much detail as possible and to situate this activity firmly in broader historical contexts. The necessity of doing so is underscored by the fact that European slave trading in the Indian Ocean and attempts to suppress it during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries resulted in an increasingly interconnected global movement of slave, convict, and indentured labor,¹⁰ the legacy of which continues to resonate in our own day and age.

SLAVE TRADING AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

The publication in 1969 of Philip Curtin's classic census of the Atlantic slave trade inaugurated a revolution in our understanding of how and why millions of enslaved men, women, and children were transported from Africa to the Americas on British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and other European or European colonial vessels.¹¹ As even a cursory survey of the now massive slavery bibliography begun by Joseph C. Miller more than thirty years ago reveals, succeeding decades have witnessed an explosion in our knowledge not only about these trades and the attendant African diaspora to the New World but also, as scholars have explored the dynamics and impact of this traffic in chattel labor with ever greater sophistication and insight, about slavery in sub-Saharan Africa.¹² A singular example of the fruits of this research is the transatlantic slave trade database compiled by David Eltis, David Richardson, Stephen D. Behrendt, Herbert S. Klein, and their many collaborators. This database, first published in 1999 as a CD-ROM, is now available online in an updated and revised version, which includes information on more than 35,000 transatlantic slaving voyages.¹³ This scholarship has contributed in turn to increasing interest in and understanding of the development of an Atlantic "world" that bound Western Europe, West and West Central Africa, and the Americas together in ever more complex and multifaceted social, economic, cultural, and political relationships between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴

While this work has added immeasurably to our understanding of slavery in Africa and the Americas and the African diaspora, an unfortunate consequence is what Edward Alpers has aptly characterized as the “tyranny of the Atlantic” in slavery studies.¹⁵ Preoccupied with reconstructing and analyzing the movement of millions of Africans across the Atlantic to the Americas, many historians of slavery have ignored European slave trading elsewhere in the world. Historians of the Indian Ocean and this oceanic basin’s major regions such as the Bay of Bengal have likewise paid little or no attention to the trafficking in chattel labor, especially by Europeans.¹⁶ A common denominator in these studies is a reluctance to acknowledge that transoceanic slave trading was of far greater antiquity in the Indian Ocean basin than it was in the Atlantic, and that the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trades continued to funnel hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans to the Middle East and India after the advent of the transatlantic trades in the sixteenth century.¹⁷ Even when these Indian Ocean trades are acknowledged, their role in linking together the different parts of this huge and culturally diverse and complex oceanic world has often been discounted.¹⁸

As the publication of important collections of essays in recent years attest,¹⁹ the “history of silence” that once surrounded slavery and slave trading in the Indian Ocean world is no longer nearly as deafening as it once was.²⁰ While there is much to commend about this scholarship, there are also several areas of concern within this developing historiography. First, much of the research on the transoceanic movement of chattel labor in the region has focused on the exportation of slaves from eastern Africa by Arab, Muslim, and Swahili merchants to Madagascar, the Middle East (especially the Arabian peninsula and Persian Gulf), and South Asia. While this work has contributed to a growing appreciation in some quarters that the African diaspora entailed the eastward and not just westward movement of millions of enslaved men, women, and children, its Africa-centric focus and an attendant preoccupation with the northwestern Indian Ocean constitute potential obstacles to developing a more comprehensive understanding of slave and other migrant labor systems within and beyond this oceanic basin.²¹ As studies

of slavery in South Africa and the Mascarene Islands of Mauritius and Réunion, demonstrate,²² Africa was not the only source of chattel labor in the Indian Ocean basin, and slaves flowed toward the continent as well as away from it. Hundreds of thousands of slaves were also exported from the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia into the wider Indian Ocean world, while the Persian Gulf was at least occasionally a source of slaves as well as a destination for African slaves and a transit point from which some of these bondmen and -women were reexported to India, the Mascarenes, Southeast Asia, and beyond.

A second area of concern reflects the fact that the movement of chattel labor from India and Southeast Asia into this oceanic world remains a subject of limited scholarly interest. Studies of slavery in India,²³ South Asian trade and commerce,²⁴ and Indian merchants who traded in the Indian Ocean²⁵ make little or no reference to slave exports from the subcontinent. Information on the exportation of slaves from Southeast Asia likewise remains frustratingly sketchy, despite the work of historians such as James Francis Warren and Anthony Reid and those who have followed in their pioneering footsteps.²⁶ Histories of the Portuguese empire in Asia²⁷ and the Dutch,²⁸ English,²⁹ and French³⁰ charter companies that operated in this part of the world are equally reticent about the extent to which these nascent multinational corporations traded in and made use of slave labor.

The fragmented and unbalanced state of our knowledge about European slave trading in the Indian Ocean is a third area of concern. A review of works published in English and French over the last forty-five years on Portuguese,³¹ Dutch,³² English,³³ and French³⁴ activity reveals the highly compartmentalized nature of these studies, which invariably focus on only one set of Europeans at a time. Unlike for the Atlantic,³⁵ no attempts have been made to examine the activities of European traders of different nationality within more comprehensive and integrated regional or Indian Ocean world frameworks. Such a review also reveals that we know little about English, French, and Portuguese slave traders in this part of the globe during the seventeenth century compared to their Dutch counterparts. During the eighteenth

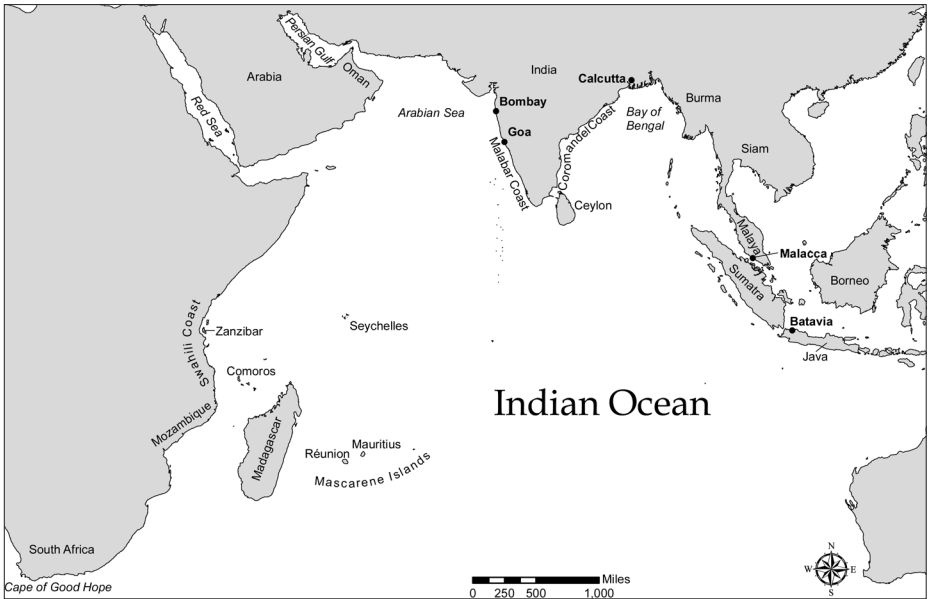
century, on the other hand, we know much more about French slave trading than we do about British, Dutch, and Portuguese activity, largely because of work on the Mascarene trade.³⁶ Much of our knowledge about European slave trading within the region during the nineteenth century may likewise be traced to what we know about the illegal trade to Mauritius and Réunion that flourished from 1811 to the early 1830s.³⁷

A final source of concern stems from a tendency to view the Indian Ocean as a self-contained unit of historical analysis. As discussions about the ways in which oceanic basins can serve as frameworks for historical analysis point out, viewing the Indian Ocean as a distinctive zone of biological, cultural, and economic interaction and integration can play a valuable role in bringing large-scale historical processes into sharper relief.³⁸ However, as a 2006 forum in the *William and Mary Quarterly* on conceptualizing the Atlantic world,³⁹ subsequent discussions about the viability of this concept,⁴⁰ and recent assessments of the conceptual problems (especially methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism) with traditional theories and interpretations of transnational labor migration by those working in the emerging field of global labor history⁴¹ indicate, defining the parameters of such a world only in geographical terms can also impede a fuller understanding of the ways in which different oceanic regions interacted with one another. Similar observations are equally applicable to the Indian Ocean, as studies of the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) multinational labor force, the politics and ideology of the early British East India Company state, the geography of color lines in Madras and New York, identity and authority in eighteenth-century British frontier areas, and transoceanic humanitarian and moral reform programs demonstrate.⁴²

These concerns, together with the insights provided by recent scholarship on the origins and development of European abolitionism⁴³ and forced labor networks in the Dutch East Indies,⁴⁴ highlight the need to situate European slave trading in the Indian Ocean in broader historical contexts. Doing so requires us to address some basic questions: What was the volume of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean world between 1500 and the mid-nineteenth century? What were the dynamics of this

traffic in chattel labor? In what ways and to what extent did the activities of British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese slave traders overlap or intersect, both within and beyond this region? What impact did their activities have on local or regional polities, societies, and economies? In what ways and to what extent was this activity linked to the development of other systems of free and forced migrant labor that developed within and beyond this oceanic world, especially during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?

This study is being undertaken with these questions in mind. In so doing, it is important to appreciate the difficulties of coming to grips with these issues, given the problems inherent in reconstructing the Indian Ocean slave trades,⁴⁵ not the least of which is the relative paucity of archival sources on slavery and slave trading in this part of the world compared to those that exist for the Atlantic. References to the East India Company's trafficking in slaves during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, are frequently brief and scattered widely throughout the company's extensive records.⁴⁶ Data on French slave trading in the Indian Ocean can be equally elusive, especially during the mid-eighteenth century.⁴⁷ While the work of scholars such as Rudy Bauss, José Capela, Pedro Machado, Thomas Vernet, and Markus Vink attests to the richness of the Dutch and Portuguese archival records,⁴⁸ these sources have yet to be explored as fully as they might be. Even when such information comes to light, disaggregating evidence of European agency in the purchase and shipment of slaves from that of indigenous slave traders who also supplied European settlements with chattel labor can be a frustrating exercise. Nevertheless, as work on VOC activity during the seventeenth century and the Mascarene trade during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries demonstrates, careful and perceptive examination of different sources in multiple archives can pay handsome dividends. In addition to shedding light on various aspects of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, such endeavors are directly relevant to discussions about how the Indian Ocean world and its relationships with other parts of the globe can or should be conceptualized.⁴⁹



Map 1. Indian Ocean

EUROPEAN SLAVE TRADING IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: AN OVERVIEW

Discerning the general outlines of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean, including determining its magnitude, is essential to providing the context within which various facets of this activity and their historical significance and impact can be discussed and assessed. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to purchase and transport slaves to destinations within the Indian Ocean basin. Mozambique supplied slaves to the various settlements that comprised the *Estado da Índia*, established between 1500 and 1515, and African slaves ultimately reached Portuguese establishments in East Asia such as Macau. How many Africans were caught up in this traffic is difficult to ascertain with any precision, but by most accounts on average only a couple of hundred slaves were exported from Mozambique to Portugal's Indian and East Asian possessions each year from the early sixteenth century to the mid-1830s.⁵⁰ Portuguese vessels reportedly carried "great numbers" of Mozambican slaves to India at the end of the sixteenth century, with the number of such exports declining during

the seventeenth century.⁵¹ Rudy Bauss argues that Mozambican exports to Portuguese settlements in India averaged 200 to 250 each year from the 1770s to 1830,⁵² while Pedro Machado puts the average number of such exports to Goa, Daman, and Diu at about 125 slaves each year during the same period.⁵³ Census data confirm the generally small scale of this trade during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; Goa housed 2,153 slaves in 1719, a number that declined to 1,410 by 1810.⁵⁴ Portuguese traders also trafficked in Indian and Southeast Asian slaves, playing a major role as the principal suppliers of South Indian, Burmese, Malayan, Javanese, and other Asian slaves to the Philippines during the union of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns (1580–1640).⁵⁵ Scattered reports indicate that individual cargoes of as many as 200 slaves were dispatched to Manila from ports such as Malacca (Melaka), while the total number of such exports probably averaged several hundred each year.⁵⁶ Portuguese ships likewise carried small numbers of Chinese slaves acquired at Macau westward to Goa and even, on occasion, to Mozambique.⁵⁷

The arrival of the Dutch early in the seventeenth century heralded greater European slave trading in the Indian Ocean basin. The VOC shipped African and Asian slaves to work as domestic servants, artisans, and laborers at their headquarters at Batavia (Jakarta), strategic commercial emporia such as Malacca, the plantations they established in the “spice islands” of eastern Indonesia, their stations in coastal Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and its settlement at the Cape of Good Hope.⁵⁸ The magnitude of this traffic is suggested in various ways: by the use of 4,000 African slaves to build the fortress at Colombo, Ceylon, during the late 1670s;⁵⁹ by the presence of some 66,350 slaves in the VOC’s various Indian Ocean establishments in 1687–88;⁶⁰ and by estimates that several hundred thousand, and perhaps as many as almost half a million, slaves were shipped to these settlements by Dutch, Chinese, and indigenous Asian traders during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶¹ Although Dutch establishments drew many of their slaves from the same subregional catchment area in which these establishments were located, the VOC also transported sizable numbers of slaves across the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean to meet the demand for such laborers in

its various settlements.⁶² Slaves of Malayan and Indonesian origin moved westward to Ceylon and South Africa, while Indian slaves reached Southeast Asia and South Africa and Ceylonese slaves were landed at the Cape of Good Hope.

The early seventeenth century also witnessed the advent of British slaving in the Indian Ocean. The first report of East India Company personnel actively trading slaves dates to 1622, six years before the first English slaving voyage across the Atlantic, when officials shipped 22 Indian slaves to Batavia.⁶³ Company ships traded at Madagascar, Mozambique, and the Comoros during the seventeenth century for slaves who ultimately reached Bantam (Banten), also in Java, as well as Batavia, Madras, and Bombay. The company likewise exported slaves from India; a 1683 report noted that “a great number of slaves yearly” had been shipped recently from Madras to unspecified destinations.⁶⁴ Supplying Bencoolen and its dependencies with chattel labor entailed transporting Malagasy and East African slaves, some of whom were apparently procured occasionally from Indian merchants in Muscat,⁶⁵ either directly across the Indian Ocean to Sumatra or via Bombay or Madras. Fort Marlborough’s slave population also included Malays, Siamese, and individuals from the island of Nias off Sumatra’s west coast.⁶⁶

French slave trading in the Indian Ocean stemmed in large measure from the Compagnie des Indes’s colonization of the Île de Bourbon (Réunion) in 1663 and the Île de France (Mauritius) in 1721 and the attendant need for labor on these two islands. Mauritius and Réunion housed 7,221 slaves of African, Indian, and Malagasy origin in 1735, a number that rose to 22,599 by 1757–58. The advent of royal rule in 1767 and the subsequent opening of the islands to free trade, first to French nationals in 1769 and then to all foreign nationals by 1787, had a dramatic impact on slaving interests throughout the western Indian Ocean. The Mascarene slave population, which numbered some 39,250 men, women, and children in 1765–66, rose to 71,197 in 1787–88 and swelled to almost 133,000 by 1807–8. The islands’ capture by a British expeditionary force in 1810 set the stage for the development of a clandestine trade that funneled another 107,000 or more enslaved Africans, Malagasies, and Southeast Asians to the Mascarenes before coming to an end in Mauritius by circa 1827 and in Réunion during the early 1830s.⁶⁷

As in the Americas, slaves performed a wide range of tasks in European Indian Ocean establishments. Slavery is usually described as largely an urban and domestic phenomenon in European settlements in India and Southeast Asia, where slaves worked as household servants, skilled craftsmen and artisans, and manual laborers who constructed and maintained fortifications, warehouses, and other structures in administrative centers and factories, loaded and unloaded ships, and processed export commodities such as pepper. In many, if not most, instances, slaves comprised more than one-half of these settlements' population.⁶⁸ Female slaves were also subject to sexual exploitation as concubines and prostitutes,⁶⁹ while it was not uncommon for male slaves to serve as soldiers in some establishments⁷⁰ and as sailors on European vessels. Slave labor was crucial to the clove and nutmeg plantations the VOC established in the Moluccas (Malukus) and to Mascarene estates that produced the foodstuffs and naval stores needed locally and by the hundreds of ships that called at Mauritius and Réunion each year during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Slave censuses and contemporary accounts of Mauritian life reveal the truly global extent of the catchment area that supplied European Indian Ocean establishments with chattel labor. Slaves from Madagascar, Mozambique, and the Swahili Coast, the most important sources of bondmen and -women in the Indian Ocean, came from a large number of ethnocultural populations. At least thirteen such groups on Madagascar furnished slaves to the Mascarenes, while those of Mozambican and East African origin were drawn from fourteen populations that can be identified with certainty, some of which were located as far away as modern Malawi and eastern Zambia.⁷¹ Slaves from West Africa (described as Bambaras, Guineans, and Wolofs), the Comoros, and Ethiopia also reached the islands, as did bondmen and -women from the Persian Gulf (Arabs, Persians), the Indian subcontinent (Bengalis, Goans, Lascars, Malabars, Orissans, Telegus), Malaya, the Indonesian archipelago (Balinese, Javanese, Makassarese, Niasans, Sumatrans, Timorese), and even China.⁷²

Although the details about how these men, women, and children were enslaved and transported often remain hidden from our view, it is clear that Europeans in the Indian Ocean, like their counterparts

in the Atlantic, tapped into already established slave-trading networks to secure their human cargoes. Such was the case in Madagascar and along the eastern African coast, where Swahili merchants were involved in slave-trading networks that linked northwestern Madagascar, the Comoros, and the Swahili Coast with the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf long before French and Omani traders began to make increasing demands on these networks during the second half of the eighteenth century.⁷³ Such was also the case in Southeast Asia, where Nias supplied slaves to the west coast of Sumatra for centuries before Europeans arrived on the scene,⁷⁴ Sumatra supplied slaves to Malacca,⁷⁵ and Java dispatched slaves to Malacca, Siam (Thailand), Pasai on Sumatra's north coast, and Brunei on the northwestern coast of Borneo.⁷⁶ Bali and neighboring islands exported an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 slaves between 1620 and 1830.⁷⁷ Other islands in the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos such as Alor, Buton, Manggarai, Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Timor shipped slaves to Makassar, from which they were reexported, together with slaves from Sulawesi, to major trading centers such as Aceh (Banda Aceh), Banjarmasin, Jambi, Palembang, and Sukadana and as far away as Ayudhya in Siam.⁷⁸

The men, women, and children purchased and transported by Europeans to destinations within the Indian Ocean basin, like those carried across the Atlantic to the Americas, were enslaved for various reasons and by various means.⁷⁹ Political strife and warfare produced many of the slaves shipped from India's Coromandel Coast by the Dutch during several of the export "booms" that occurred during the seventeenth century, while warfare and endemic raiding generated a steady supply of slaves from stateless societies in the Indonesian archipelago following the VOC's destruction of the powerful sultanate of Makassar in the late 1660s.⁸⁰ Famine, whether the product of natural forces such as drought or flooding or the by-product of political strife and warfare, forced many desperate Indian men and women to sell their children, if not themselves, into slavery in order to stay alive.⁸¹ Debt was the single most important factor behind enslavement in Southeast Asia.⁸² The particulars of socioeconomic life on Bali, coupled with limited opportunities to use slave labor on the island, generated as many as 1,200 men, women, and children for export from that island each year.⁸³

A combination of financial and demographic considerations underpinned the continuing demand for chattel labor in European Indian Ocean establishments. The unavailability or high cost of local free labor was one such factor. A 1762 plea to increase the number of Malagasy slaves at Bencoolen noted pointedly that the cost of maintaining these slaves was “far short” of what had to be paid to “Malay” workers for their services.⁸⁴ Three years later, officials at Fort Marlborough complained again that employing Malay laborers was “very expensive.”⁸⁵ High mortality rates because of disease, malnutrition, and overwork, coupled with low birth rates due partly to low adult female-to-adult male ratios among settlement slave populations, likewise spurred the demand for fresh supplies of chattel labor.⁸⁶ Disease could easily decimate not only a European establishment’s workforce and the surrounding countryside but also the slave cargoes intended to replenish such workforces. The discovery of smallpox among the Coffree slaves on board the *Neptune* when the ship arrived at Fort Marlborough from Bombay in July 1764, for instance, created considerable alarm because, the fort’s managers noted, this “distemper [is] the most dreaded and of the most fatal Consequence to the Malays, as it generally destroys two thirds of the Inhabitants whenever it rages amongst them.”⁸⁷ Data from the Mascarenes likewise illustrate the demographic factors that shaped the European demand for slaves in this part of the world. A number of smallpox epidemics devastated the Mauritian slave population during the mid- and late eighteenth century; the epidemic of 1756 reportedly killed one-half of all slaves on the island, while that of 1792 resulted in the death of an estimated 4,000 people out of a total population of 58,000.⁸⁸ Overall, disease, malnutrition, and ill-usage may have reduced the Mauritian slave population by an average of as much as 2.54 percent a year during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸⁹ Mortality rates among Mascarene-bound slave cargoes were also not inconsequential, averaging 12 percent from Madagascar and perhaps as high as 30 percent from Mozambique and the Swahili Coast during the late eighteenth century.⁹⁰

Supplying chattel labor to European establishments, even from nearby sources, could entail significant expense. In 1763, for example, Richard Wyatt was promised \$70 for each adult male slave and

\$50 for each adult female slave he delivered to Fort Marlborough from nearby Nias.⁹¹ Acquiring slaves from further afield often cost charter companies substantial sums. In 1765 the charge for transporting 245 men, women, and children to Fort Marlborough from Bombay on the *Neptune*, the *Amelia*, and the *Success* was put at \$110 per slave in addition to an average purchase price of \$40 per slave.⁹² The expense of mounting major slaving ventures meant that not infrequently slave shipments to European establishments were a corollary to the “country” trade, in which comparatively small numbers of bondmen and -women formed but one part of larger, more diverse cargoes carried from port to port.⁹³ Many of the Indian and Southeast Asian slaves who reached the Cape of Good Hope and the Mascarenes during the eighteenth century apparently arrived as part of such mixed cargoes.⁹⁴ The instructions given to the captain of *Le Chevalier d’Entrecasteaux*, sailing from Mauritius to Bengal in April 1789, are an illustrative case in point. In addition to acquiring 80 male and female slaves, Captain Alexis Joseph Bartro was directed to purchase substantial quantities of rice, assorted textiles, pottery water jugs, and other items.⁹⁵

If the country trade funneled many African, Indian, and Southeast Asian slaves to European establishments as part of larger, mixed cargoes, others were acquired during full-scale slaving expeditions. The VOC mounted sporadic expeditions to Madagascar to procure slaves for its colony at the Cape of Good Hope between the mid-seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, with thirty-three such expeditions taking place between 1654 and 1786.⁹⁶ The East India Company launched its first large-scale slaving expedition in 1684, when Robert Knox, the captain of the *Tonquin Merchant*, received instructions to purchase 250 slaves at Madagascar and deliver them to St. Helena.⁹⁷ Six years later, the Court of Directors informed Bencoolen that Knox would be bringing them a “good number” of Malagasy slaves on the same ship.⁹⁸ Other such expeditions followed during the eighteenth century. Much of the surviving documentation about these large-scale ventures to Madagascar and the East African, Coromandel, and Malabar coasts dates to the second half of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century. Sixty percent of the cargoes that carried perhaps as many as 115,200 slaves away from Mozambique and the Swahili Coast toward Mauritius

and Réunion between 1770 and 1810, for example, contained 200 to 400 or more slaves.⁹⁹ On occasion, French ships such as *Le Duc de la Vallière* left the East African coast for Mauritius with 600 or more slaves on board.¹⁰⁰ Mascarene-based slaving interests also exploited political turmoil in Malabar province and the famine that ravaged the Northern Circars during the early 1790s to organize major expeditions to India. In 1792, British authorities reported the presence of a French slaver at Calicut with a cargo of approximately 300 slaves¹⁰¹ and noted that three French vessels had recently sailed from the Coromandel Coast for the Mascarenes with perhaps as many as 1,200 slaves in their holds.¹⁰²

A review of published scholarship indicates that Europeans purchased and exported a minimum of 449,800 to 565,200 slaves from Mozambique, the Swahili Coast, Madagascar, India, Ceylon, and Southeast Asia to destinations within the Indian Ocean basin from 1500 to 1850 (table 1).¹⁰³ Given the fragmentary and often problematic nature of the data on which these figures are based, an estimate closer to 565,200 is undoubtedly a more accurate indication of the minimum number of slaves traded by Europeans within the Indian Ocean during this period. There is also good reason to believe that the volume of this traffic exceeded these figures by a significant margin. Indirect evidence to this effect comes from Indonesia, where Anthony Reid estimates that 1,000 slaves reached Batavia each year on average during the seventeenth century, with the number of such imports climbing to approximately 3,000 a year during the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁴ More recently, Markus Vink has argued that Dutch administrative centers, colonies, and factories needed to import 3,200 to 5,600 slaves a year during the late seventeenth century to maintain local slave populations, figures that, after allowing for an average mortality rate of 20 percent on the high seas, required the acquisition of 4,476 to 7,716 new slaves each year.¹⁰⁵ How many of the slaves who reached VOC establishments in Southeast Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did so under Dutch auspices rather than that of Chinese or indigenous Asian merchants is uncertain, but an estimate that the VOC, company employees engaging in private trade, and Batavian entrepreneurs imported about 50 percent of the slaves who arrived in Batavia may be broadly indicative of direct Dutch involvement in this traffic.¹⁰⁶

Table 1 European transoceanic slave shipments to Indian Ocean destinations, 1500–1850

<i>Europeans</i>	<i>Exported from</i>	<i>Destination</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>AAE^a</i>	<i>Total</i>
Portuguese	Mozambique	India	1500–1834	125–250	41,875–83,750
Dutch	Coromandel Coast	Batavia	1618–21	—	174
	Africa	Batavia or India	1621–24	—	2,175
	Coromandel Coast	Batavia	1622–48 ^b	—	6,776
	Bengal	Batavia	1623–25	—	<494
	Africa	Coromandel Coast	1623–25	—	2,527
	Arakan/Bengal	Batavia	1626–62	150–400	5,500–14,800
	Malabar Coast	Batavia	1627	—	750
	Bengal	Batavia	1633–44	—	2,780–2,880
	Arakan	Batavia	1637	—	361
	Madagascar	Mauritius	1641–47	—	502
	Arakan	Batavia	1643–47	1,000	5,000
	Madagascar	Cape of Good Hope	1652–99	—	1,069 ^c
	Arakan	Batavia	1653–c. 1665	150–250	1,950–3,250
	Bengal	Batavia	1654–64	—	3,678
	Malabar Coast	Batavia, Ceylon	1658–63	—	"large numbers"
	Coromandel Coast	Ceylon, Batavia	1659–67 ^d	—	9,839–11,839
Cochin (Malabar)	Batavia	1664–?	50–120	?	
Cochin (Malabar)	Ceylon	1664–?	80–120	?	
Ceylon	Cape of Good Hope	1677–1740	—	c. 250	
Ceylon	Batavia	1678–80	—	385	
India	Cape of Good Hope	1680–1731	—	165	
Indonesia	Cape of Good Hope	1680–1731	—	201	
Indonesia/India ^e	Cape of Good Hope	1680–1795	100–200	11,600–23,200	
Madagascar	Ceylon	1693	—	47	
Coromandel Coast	Ceylon	1694–96 ^e	—	3,859	

Dutch	Eastern Africa ^a	Cape of Good Hope	1700-99	—	c. 1,254 ^g
	Madagascar	Cape of Good Hope	1700-95	—	1,756 ^c
	Madagascar	Sumatra	1732	—	190
	Batavia	Ceylon	1761-66	—	510
	Mozambique	Cape of Good Hope	1795-1808	—	3,595
				Dutch subtotal	67,387-91,687+
British	India	Batavia	1622-23	—	22
	Mozambique	Surat?	1628	—	12-20
	Comoros/Madag.	Surat	1637-40	—	40
	Madagascar	Bantam	1641-46	—	9
	Guinea & Madras	Bantam	1661	—	23
	Madagascar	Cape of Good Hope	1664-1720	20?	1,100?
	Madras	Unknown	1683-87	—	"grt. no." (665+) ^h
	Madag./E. Africa	Bencoolen	1685-1713	<20	<580
	Madag./E. Africa	Bencoolen	1713-14	—	367
	Madagascar	Bencoolen	1719-39	—	243?
	Madagascar	Bombay	1737-40	—	417+
	Madagascar	Fort St. David	1749	—	140
	Madagascar	FSDJ & Bencoolen	1750-51	—	359
	Madagascar	Madras & Bencoolen	1751, 1761	—	275
	Madagascar	Bombay	1752	—	167
	Madagascar	Bencoolen	1764	—	86
	Madag./E. Africa	Sumatra	1764-65	—	393+
	India	Ceylon	1789	—	140-50
	Bombay/Goa	Ceylon	1803-4	—	258
	Mozambique	Ceylon	1804	—	402
				British subtotal	5,698-5,716+

continued on next page

Europeans	Exported from	Destination	Period	AAE ^a	Total
French	Eastern Africa	Mascarenes	1670–1769	—	10,677–11,468
	India	Mascarenes	1670–1769	—	4,994–5,327
	Madagascar	Mascarenes	1670–1769	—	35,314–37,931
	Eastern Africa	Mascarenes	1770–1810	—	99,614–115,189
	India	Mascarenes	1770–1810	—	14,755–15,739
	Madagascar	Mascarenes	1770–1810	—	46,203–53,427
	Eastern Africa	Mascarenes	1811–1848	—	75,767–88,835
	Madagascar	Mascarenes	1811–1848	—	43,808–51,365
	Southeast Asia	Mascarenes	1811–1848	—	3,804–4,759
				French subtotal	334,936–384,040
				Grand total	449,896–565,193

Notes:

^a Annual average exports.

^b Includes export “booms” of 1622–23 and 1645–46.

^c Slave imports from VOC-sponsored slave voyages.

^d Includes export “booms” of 1659–61 and 1673–77.

^e Export “boom.”

^f Mozambique, Swahili Coast, Zanzibar.

^g Private importations/purchases from homeward-bound fleets and other sources.

^h “Great number,” which includes 665 exports reported in 1687.

ⁱ Madagascar and eastern Africa.

^j Fort St. David (Tegnapatam, near Cuddalore).

Sources: James C. Armstrong and Nigel A. Worden, “The Slaves, 1652–1834,” in Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, eds., *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 112–20; Robert J. Young, “Slaves, Coolies and Bondsmen. A Study of Assisted Migration in Response to Emerging English Shipping Networks in the Indian Ocean, 1685–1776,” *Indian Ocean Review* 2, no. 3 (1989): 23–26; Rudy Bauss, “The Portuguese Slave Trade from Mozambique to Portuguese India and Macau and Comments on Timor, 1750–1850: New Evidence from the Archives,” *Cambões Center Quarterly* 6–7, nos. 1–2 (1997): 21; Suresha Chakravarti, “The Dutch East India Company and Slave Trade in Seventeenth-Century India: An Outline by Pieter van Dam, An Advocate of the Company,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 39, no. 2 (1997): 83–85; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Slaves and Tyrants: Dutch Tribulations in Seventeenth-Century Mirauk-U,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 1, no. 3 (1997): 221, 226, 246; James C. Armstrong, “Ceylon and the Slave Trade during the Dutch East India Company Period,” paper presented at the workshop “Slave Systems in Asia and the Indian Ocean: Their Structure and Change in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” Université d’Avignon, 18–20 May 2000; Markus Vink, “The World’s Oldest Trade,” *Dutch Slave and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century*, *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 140–45; Pedro Machado, “A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave Trade,” in Gwyn Campbell, ed., *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 20–21; Richard B. Allen, “The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery*, 41; Richard B. Allen, “Suppressing a Notorious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave Trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 66, no. 4 (2009): 873–94; Daniel Perret, “From Slave to King: The Role of South Asians in Maritime Southeast Asia (From the Late 13th to the Late 17th Century),” *Archipel* 82 (2011): 192.

EUROPEAN SLAVE TRADING IN PERSPECTIVE

The current state of our knowledge about European slave trading in the Indian Ocean makes assessing the impact of this activity on indigenous states and societies a complicated and potentially contentious exercise. The need for such assessments is nevertheless mandated by the fact that Europeans shipped hundreds of thousands of chattel laborers from Mozambique, the Swahili Coast, Madagascar, India, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, and the Indonesian archipelago across the length and breadth of the *Mare Indicum* from 1500 to 1850 to satisfy the demand for laborers in their factories, plantations, and other settlements. The need for such assessments is also dictated by the dynamic nature of this traffic. The 1660s, for instance, witnessed a shift in the center of Dutch slaving from India’s Malabar and Coromandel coasts to Southeast Asia,¹⁰⁷ while the eighteenth century saw a tripling, if not a fourfold increase, in the volume of European slave trading in the region compared to the seventeenth century (table 2), an increase due in large measure to French colonization of the Mascarenes and especially to the liberalization of trade to Mauritius and Réunion after 1769.

Table 2 Estimated minimum number of slaves traded by Europeans within the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850

<i>Europeans</i>	<i>1500–1599</i>	<i>1600–1699</i>	<i>1700–1799</i>	<i>1800–1850</i>	<i>Total</i>
Portuguese	12,500–25,000	12,500–25,000	12,500–25,000	4,375–8,750	41,875–83,750
Dutch	—	50,324–65,024	14,850–24,450	2,213	67,387–91,687
British	—	1,811–1,819	3,227–3,237	660	5,698–5,716
French	—	500	165,057–185,071	169,379–198,469	334,936–384,040
Total	12,500–25,000	65,135–92,343	195,634–237,758	176,627–210,092	449,896–565,193

Sources: See table 1.

The VOC is similarly credited with creating an increased demand for slaves in the Indonesian archipelago and an attendant upsurge in slave trading,¹⁰⁸ as well as with stimulating the replacement of slavery by other forms of bondage and fostering the replacement of “open” systems of slavery by ones marked by greater racial distinctiveness.¹⁰⁹ The archival record reveals that European slave trading at least occasionally elicited negative

reactions from local governments during the same century, as in 1688, when the exportation of slaves from Madras prompted the Mughal government to complain about “the loss of their children and servants spirited and stolen from them.” Madras’s governor, Elihu Yale, noted that the Dutch had likewise incurred Mughal displeasure for exporting slaves from Masulipatam (Machilipatam). To avoid further problems with local Mughal authorities, Yale and his council ordered that no person, “either Christian or other,” could buy or ship slaves from Madras or any adjacent port on pain of a fine of fifty pagodas for each slave purchased and exported.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, it is unclear whether this ban, which reportedly remained in place for five years, was ever enforced in any meaningful way.

Information about the impact that European slave trading had on indigenous societies, economies, and polities is equally scarce for much of the eighteenth century. Slaves were a major commodity in Makassar’s trade with Batavia, and the VOC’s demand for chattel laborers drew sizable numbers of slaves to Makassar from neighboring islands such as Flores for reexport to Java, especially during the 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s.¹¹¹ The dramatic expansion of the Mascarene trade after 1770 left its imprint on various parts of the region in ways that resonated well into the nineteenth century. During the early 1790s, East India Company officials in India and ultimately the Court of Directors in London expressed their concern that “the convenience of the Market at Mahé [site of a French factory], and the constant demand of the French for the supply of the Islands of Bourbon and Mauritius” had created a permanent traffic in chattel labor in their newly acquired territories along the Malabar Coast.¹¹² Unease about the threat this activity posed to their political and other interests in Malabar province, coupled with a strong sense of humanitarian disapprobation about the “nefarious traffic” in children being conducted in the province, prompted the directors in 1796 to formally approve the measures that had been taken to suppress this trade.¹¹³ British concern about the exportation of Indian slaves, and enslaved children in particular, from their territories by Dutch and especially French traders also figured prominently in attempts in 1774 to regulate slave trading

in Bengal and then, in 1789 and 1790, to ban the exportation of slaves altogether from the Calcutta and Madras presidencies. The extent to which these measures influenced the development of the abolitionist movement in Britain during the late eighteenth century or were a response to metropolitan abolitionist pressures remains to be determined.¹¹⁴

The impact of European slave trading is discernible elsewhere in the Indian Ocean as well. Gwyn Campbell and Pier Larson have discussed the important role that slave trading in the southwestern Indian Ocean, and the expansion of the Mascarene trade in particular, played in the rise of the Merina kingdom in highland Madagascar during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that kingdom's relations with Britain and France during the nineteenth century, and sociopolitical developments on the Grande Île during the same century.¹¹⁵ The Mascarene trade is also central to understanding a hitherto ignored diaspora of Malagasy-speaking peoples that may have entailed the largest movement of an African people in the Indian Ocean basin.¹¹⁶ Suppression of the illegal slave trade to Mauritius and Réunion during the 1820s played a major role in Omani development of the clove industry on Zanzibar and Pemba, an industry that, because it consumed additional hundreds of thousands of African slaves at a time when European powers had committed themselves to ending the African slave trades, encouraged ever greater British involvement along the East African coast during the mid- and late nineteenth century.¹¹⁷

Although the volume of European slave trading within the Indian Ocean basin pales in comparison to the estimated 12,521,000 Africans exported across the Atlantic between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries,¹¹⁸ the significance of this traffic cannot be assessed only in terms of the numbers of men, women, and children who were caught up in it. To do so would be to ignore the global dimensions of European slave trading, the fact that the volume of this worldwide trafficking in chattel labor swelled dramatically with the passage of time in both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, and the larger interactive contexts within which this activity occurred and of which it was an integral part.¹¹⁹ European ships carried slaves from West and West Central Africa not only to the New World but also to the Cape of Good Hope,

the Mascarenes, India, and the Indonesian archipelago. European vessels likewise carried large numbers of Malagasy, East African, and Indian slaves not only to British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese establishments throughout the Indian Ocean world but also to the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Americas (table 3), to East Asia, and to the Philippines from whence some were subsequently carried across the Pacific to Mexico.¹²⁰ In short, European slave trading in the Atlantic did not occur in isolation from that in the Indian Ocean—and vice versa.

Table 3 European slave exports from the western Indian Ocean to the Americas, 1624–1860

Country	<i>Embarkations</i>							
	1624–1700		1701–1800		1800–60		Total	
	<i>Known</i>	<i>Estimated</i>	<i>Known</i>	<i>Estimated</i>	<i>Known</i>	<i>Estimated</i>	<i>Known</i>	<i>Estimated</i>
Britain	8,262	18,924	6,182	12,739	—	—	14,444	31,663
France	—	—	39,526	42,852	5,672	10,532	45,198	53,384
Portugal/Brazil	1,064	9,292	9,678	9,544	277,466	329,349	288,208	348,185
Other ^a	2,656	3,499	3,409	5,795	32,101	100,142	38,166	109,436
Total	11,982	31,715	58,795	70,930	315,239	440,023	386,016	542,668

Note:

^aDenmark/Baltic states, Netherlands, Spain/Uruguay, USA.

Source: TSTD2.

Viewing European slave trading in the Indian Ocean from such a perspective provides important insights into the dynamics of the global movement of chattel labor from the sixteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. Markus Vink’s assessment of VOC activity during the seventeenth century is a striking case in point: “The volume of the total Dutch Indian Ocean slave trade was 15–30% of the Atlantic slave trade, slightly smaller than the trans-Saharan slave trade, and one- and-a-half to three times the size of the Swahili and Red Sea coast and the Dutch West India Company slave trades.”¹²¹ Viewing the Mascarene trade in similar terms is equally revealing. Adding the number of African, Indian, Malagasy, and Southeast Asian slaves exported to the Mascarenes from 1670 to early 1830s to those shipped across the Atlantic on French vessels increases

the total volume of the French slave trade between 1640 and 1848 by 28 to 29 percent over current estimates of 1.25 to 1.38 million.¹²² These figures reveal, moreover, that one-fifth of all French slave trading between the 1670s and early 1830s occurred in the Indian Ocean (table 4) and highlight the growing importance of the Mascarene trade to French slaving interests after 1770, a trend that points to the increasingly integrated movement of labor within and between the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The regional impact of this activity is equally noteworthy. British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese slave exports from Mozambique, the Swahili Coast, and Madagascar, when added to those by Arab, Muslim, and Swahili merchants to the Middle East and India, dramatically increase the volume of transoceanic exports from eastern Africa between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (table 5). These data not only speak to the role that Europeans played in this development, especially during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but also point to the need to reconsider the origins, structure, and dynamics of what has been described as a “southern” slave trading complex along the East African coast.¹²³

Table 4 French slave trading in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, 1670–1848

<i>Period</i>	<i>WWCA^a exports to Americas</i>	<i>EAM^b exports to Americas</i>	<i>EAM exports to Mascarenes^c</i>	<i>ISEA^d exports to Mascarenes</i>	<i>Estimated total French exports^e</i>	<i>% TFE from Indian Ocean^f</i>	<i>% TFE to Mascarenes^g</i>
1670– 1769	648,444	2,324	45,991– 49,399	4,994– 5,723	701,753– 705,890	7.6–8.1	7.3–7.8
1770– 1810	489,773	42,805	145,817– 168,616	14,755– 18,200	693,150– 719,394	29.3–31.9	23.2–26.0
1811– 48	184,694	8,245	119,575– 140,200	3,804– 4,057	316,327– 337,205	41.6–45.2	39.0–42.8
Total	1,322,911	53,383	311,383– 358,215	23,550– 27,980	1,711,230– 1,762,489	22.7–25.0	19.6–21.9

Notes:

^a Estimated total exports from West and West Central Africa to the Americas.

^b Estimated total exports from East Africa and Madagascar to the Americas.

^c Estimated exports from East Africa and Madagascar to the Mascarenes and Seychelles.

^d Estimated exports from India and Southeast Asia to the Mascarenes and Seychelles.

^e Trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean exports combined.

^f Percentage of total French slave exports originating in the Indian Ocean basin.

^g Percentage of total French slave exports destined to the Mascarenes.

Sources: TSTD2; Allen, “The Mascarene Slave-Trade,” 41.

Table 5 Transoceanic slave exports from eastern Africa, 1500–1873^a

<i>Period</i>	<i>AMS exports^b</i>	<i>Exports by Europeans^c</i>	<i>Total exports</i>	<i>% Total exports by Europeans</i>
1500–1600	100,000	12,500–25,000	112,500–125,000	11.1–20.0
1600–1700	100,000	33,000–65,000	133,000–165,000	24.8–39.4
1700–1800	400,000	237,000–433,000	637,000–833,000	37.2–52.0
1801–73	337,000	473,000–633,000	810,000–1,000,000	58.4–66.3
Total/Average	937,000	755,500–1,156,000	1,692,500–2,123,000	44.6–54.5

Notes:

^aBeyond the eastern Africa shore and immediately adjacent islands (e.g., Zanzibar, Pemba).

^b Estimated exports from eastern Africa by Arab, Muslim, and Swahili traders to Arabia, Persia, and India.

^c Estimated exports by Europeans from eastern Africa and Madagascar to the Americas, India, the Mascarenes, and Southeast Asia.

Sources: Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46,151; TSTD2; table 1.

The significance of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean becomes even more apparent when the total volume of this activity is calculated. Adding the minimum number of slaves estimated to have been traded by Europeans within this oceanic basin between 1500 and 1850 (449,896 to 565,193) to the number of documented/estimated East African and Malagasy exports to the Americas during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (386,016 to 542,668), together with an estimated 18,000 South and Southeast Asian slaves carried by the Portuguese to the Philippines between 1580 and 1640 and perhaps 100,000 to 150,000 shipped to Batavia under Dutch auspices from elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, suggests that Europeans were directly involved in trading at least 954,000 to 1,275,900 slaves within and beyond the Indian Ocean between 1500 and 1850. Once again, the incomplete and problematic evidence on which these figures rest suggests that a higher rather than a lower estimate is a more accurate indication of the minimum volume of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean during the 350 years in question. Future research will undoubtedly allow these figures to be further modified and refined.

TOWARD A FULLER UNDERSTANDING

That slavery and slave trading played a crucial role in shaping the Atlantic world from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century

is now a well established, if not seemingly self-evident, fact. That slavery and slave trading also played a significant role in the European colonial experience in the Indian Ocean is, by comparison, not nearly so well established, much less self-evident. However, as Rik Van Welie's comparison of slavery and slave trading in Holland's colonial empire reminds us, all Dutch establishments, whether in the Atlantic or Indian Ocean world, were dependent upon slave labor in varying degrees.¹²⁴ The same holds true for British, French, and Portuguese possessions.

Such a statement does not mean, of course, that the European experience with trading slaves was the same in both of these oceanic worlds. A number of significant differences can be readily discerned, the most obvious of which is the fact that the volume of the European trades in the Indian Ocean was much smaller than in the Atlantic. European slave trading in the *Mare Indicum* was also multidirectional, unlike in the Atlantic, where slaves basically flowed westward from Africa to the Americas. The Atlantic trades consumed mostly Africans, while those in the Indian Ocean drew in men, women, and children from a multitude of ethnic and cultural backgrounds in South and Southeast Asia as well as eastern and western Africa. Europeans never monopolized transoceanic slave trading in this oceanic basin the way they did in the Atlantic; Arab, Muslim, Swahili, Chinese, and other Asian traders remained active participants in this traffic throughout the period under consideration. In some instances, European slave trading in the Indian Ocean also appears to have been less subject to market fluctuations than in the Atlantic.¹²⁵

These differences reinforce the need to examine the various European slave trades in this part of the world in greater detail and to situate them more firmly in larger historical contexts. Chapter 2 begins the process of doing so by focusing on the activities of the East India Company from the first reports of its trading for slaves in the 1620s to the last known instance of British officials in the region purchasing slaves in 1804. As chapter 3 discusses, French slave trading was intimately bound up with the colonization of the Mascarenes and these islands' steadily increasing strategic and commercial importance during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Significant numbers of the slaves who

reached European establishments in the Indian Ocean were of Asian origin, and chapter 4 examines the exportation of slaves from India and Southeast Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As chapter 5 chronicles, abolition of the British and French slave trades early in the nineteenth century turned the Mascarenes into a center of illegal slave trading between 1811 and the early 1830s, the consequences of which reverberated far beyond the confines of this oceanic basin. The southwestern Indian Ocean was not, however, the only region in which the forces of abolitionism clashed with well-entrenched slaving interests. South Asia and parts of Southeast Asia were another such arena, and as chapter 6 details, developments in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century India and elsewhere in the East India Company's empire raise tantalizing questions about the role that events in the Indian Ocean played in the rise of European and especially British abolitionism, the implementation of imperial policies to suppress slave trading, and ultimately the emergence of other systems of forced and migrant labor that became hallmarks of social, economic, cultural, and political life not only in this oceanic world but also in the Atlantic and the Pacific.

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