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Abolitionism and “New Systems of Slavery” in the Indian Ocean During the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

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In April 1827, the captain of the Dutch brig *Swift* retained Mahomet, a native of Surabaya on the north coast of Java, to recruit workers from the countryside around the city. Mahomet, who already knew the brig's captain, soon secured the services of a number of men and women by giving them 20 rupees as two months' advance wages and telling them that they would be going to work in Singapore or Batavia. After the ship left Surabaya, however, these workers learned that they were actually bound for the French-controlled Ile de Bourbon (Réunion) in the southwestern Indian Ocean, a discovery which led them to demand that they be returned to Java. Their demands fell on deaf ears, however, and the four men, four women and one child who survived the *Swift's* subsequent wreck at Rodrigues, the easternmost of the Mas-

carene Islands and a dependency of the British colony of Mauritius some 350 miles away, ended up in Mauritius where their ultimate fate remains unknown.¹

The story of the *Swift's* passengers highlights some of the problems inherent in assessing the status of migrant laborers in the Indian Ocean basin during the early and mid-nineteenth century. Prominent among these are the difficulties of distinguishing 'free' from 'un-free' labor during an era that witnessed not only the formal demise of the British and French slave trades and the abolition of slavery in Britain and France's colonial empires, but also the development of a purported 'new system of slavery' that led to the migration of millions of indentured African, Asian and other non-European laborers throughout the colonial plantation world and beyond during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ambiguities surrounding the status of the men and women on board the *Swift* are a case in point. On the one hand, these individuals apparently knew what they were doing when they agreed to work as wage laborers in Singapore or Batavia and did so of their own accord without undue compulsion. On the other hand, the fact that they were deliberately deceived about their real destination (a slave plantation colony in the Mascarenes thousands of miles from Java or Singapore) and their demands to be returned to Java were ignored are consistent with the deceptive and coercive practices often used to secure the services of contract laborers in the nineteenth-century colonial world. The fact that the *Swift* sailed at a time when French ships were actively

Abbreviations: CO – Colonial Office records, The National Archives, Kew; MGI – Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius; OIOC – Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London; PP – British Parliament Sessional Papers; PRO - Domestic records of the Public Record Office, gifts, deposits, notes and transcripts, The National Archives, Kew.

¹ CO 415/9/A.221 – Documents relating to the Dutch Brig *Swift* which was wrecked at Rodrigues in Aug^t 1827 with Malays on board. Twelve 'Malay' men and two women on board the ship drowned when it was wrecked.

transporting illegal cargoes of slaves from the Indonesian archipelago to Réunion,² when British-flagged vessels could occasionally be found carrying slaves near the Seychelles (a Mauritian dependency),³ and when Dutch and English vessels frequented Diego Garcia (another Mauritian dependency) with ‘Malays’ of uncertain legal status on board⁴ underscores the difficulties of assessing the impact that the formal abolition of slave trading and then the institution of slavery had on migrant labor systems in the Indian Ocean basin. So does the fact that Mahomet’s statement about his activities was among the documents submitted to the Commission of Eastern Enquiry during its investigation into the illegal slave trade to Mauritius which flourished between 1811 and *circa* 1827.⁵

The origins of this indentured labor system date to the mid- and late 1820s when the first unsuccessful attempts were made to employ free contract Chinese and Indian workers on Mauritius and Réunion.⁶ Mauritius has long been acknowledged as the crucial test case for the

² CO 415/1, pp. 15, 17 – W.M.G. Colebrooke and W. Blair to Earl Bathurst, 25 October 1826; CO 415/7/A.164 – Memorandum from Captain Ackland for Mr. Finnis [written after 13 September 1826]. On the illegal slave trade to Réunion, see: Hubert Gerbeau, ‘Quelques aspects de la traite illégale des esclaves à l’île Bourbon au XIX^e siècle,’ in *Mouvements de populations dans l’Océan Indien* (Paris, 1979), 273-308; Marina Carter and Hubert Gerbeau, ‘Covert Slaves and Coveted Coolies in the Early 19th Century Mascareignes,’ *Slavery and Abolition* 9 (1988), 194-208; Serge Daget, ‘Révolution ajournée: Bourbon et la traite illégale française, 1815-1832,’ in Claude Wanquet and Benoît Jullien, eds., *Révolution française et Océan Indien: Prémices, paroxysmes, héritages et déviations* (Paris, 1996), 333-46; Hubert Gerbeau, ‘L’Océan Indien n’est pas l’Atlantique: La traite illégale à Bourbon au XIX^e siècle,’ *Outre-mers, Revue d’histoire* 89, n^o 336-37 (2002), 79-108; Héroïse Finch, ‘Comprendre la traite illégale d’esclaves pendant l’occupation Britannique de La Réunion à travers les archives britanniques,’ in Laurent Médéa, Lucette Labache and Françoise Vergès, eds., *Identité et société réunionnaise: Nouvelles perspectives et nouvelles approches* (Paris, 2005), 67-88.

³ OIOC: F/4/1331/52588, p. 70 – Statement of the Master of the Brig “Hebe”/as related to by the Captain of the Pecheur Schooner at Mahé, 20 October 1830.

⁴ CO 415/1, p. 27 – W.M.G. Colebrooke and W. Blair to Earl Bathurst, 21 November 1826.

⁵ Richard B. Allen, ‘Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings: The Illegal Slave Trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles during the Early Nineteenth Century,’ *Journal of African History* 42 (2001), 91-116.

⁶ Huguette Ly-Tio-Fane, *Lured Away: The Life History of Indian Cane Workers in Mauritius* (Moka, Mauritius, 1984), 14-17; David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge, 1995), 60; Marina Carter and James Ng, *Forging the Rainbow: Labour Immigrants in British Mauritius* (Mauritius, 1997), 4-5; Jacques

use of free contractual or indentured labor in the colonial plantation world following British slave emancipation in 1834,⁷ and the arrival of 75 privately recruited Indian workers on the island in 1834 is commonly viewed as marking the advent of the modern system of migrant contract labor. The success of the Mauritian experiment with indentured labor led to more than two million Africans, Chinese, Indians, Japanese, Javanese and Melanesians leaving their homes to work on plantations and in other enterprises in the Caribbean (British Guiana, Cuba, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Martinique, Surinam, Tobago, Trinidad), eastern and southern Africa (Kenya, Natal, Transvaal, Uganda), southern and southeast Asia (Burma, Ceylon, Malaya), the southwestern Indian Ocean (Mayotte, Nosy Bé, Réunion), Austronesia (New Caledonia, Queensland), the central and southern Pacific (Fiji, Hawai'i, Tahiti), and Central and South America (Mexico, Peru) between the mid-1830s and the 1920s. Indentured labor also became an important component of regional political economies in India, especially in Assam and adjacent areas, during this same period.⁸

Nineteenth-century British abolitionists first advanced the argument that the deception and coercion used to recruit indentured laborers and the exploitation and oppression to which they were subject during their indentures made these men and women little more than victims of a 'new system of slavery.' The experience of the first indentured Indians in Mauritius gave

Weber, 'L'émigration indienne à La Réunion: "Contraire à la morale" ou "utile à l'humanité"? (1829-1860),' in Edmond Maestri, ed., *Esclavage et abolitions dans l'océan indien 1723-1860* (Paris, 2002), 309-10.

⁷ I.M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854* (London, 1953), 85.

⁸ Rana P. Behal and Prabhu P. Mohapatra, 'Tea and Money Versus Human Life: The Rise and Fall of the Indenture System in the Assam Tea Plantations, 1840-1908,' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19, 3-4 (1992), 142-72; Ranajit Das Gupta, 'Plantation Labour in Colonial India,' in E. Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass, eds., *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia* (London, 1992), 173-98; Keya Dasgupta, 'Plantation Labour in the Brahmaputra Valley: Regional Enclaves in a Colonial Context,' in Gwyn Campbell, ed., *Abolition and Its Aftermath in Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia* (London, 2005), 169-79.

substance to these suspicions, and the public outcry in both Britain and India about their mistreatment led to the suspension of the so-called 'coolie' trade to the island in 1838.⁹ When Indian emigration to the island resumed late in 1842, it did so under governmental supervision to limit further abuse of these workers. Hugh Tinker echoed these abolitionist sentiments in his classic 1974 study on the exportation of Indian labor after British slave emancipation,¹⁰ a work that continues to influence studies of the indentured experience.¹¹ The Tinkerian paradigm has not been without its critics, however; several scholars have argued that characterizing indentured labor systems in these terms is at least something of a misnomer.¹²

At the heart of this historiography is a preoccupation with assessing whether indentured laborers were really 'free' or 'unfree' and ascertaining the extent to which they exercised control over their own lives and destinies.¹³ The nature and dynamics of labor control figure prom-

⁹ See the reports of the commissions of inquiry based in Mauritius (PP 1840 XXXVII [58], 18-35, 45-68, and PP 1840 XXXVII [331], 12-94, 107-83), and in Calcutta (PP 1841 XVI [45], 4-12) on early indentured immigrant living and working conditions.

¹⁰ Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London, 1974; 2nd ed., London, 1993). Earlier studies include C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838-1949* (Delhi, 1951); Cumpston, *Indians Overseas*; Panchanan Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour, 1834-1900* (Delhi, 1970).

¹¹ E.g., Maureen Tayal, 'Indian Indentured Labor in Natal, 1890-1911,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14 (1977), 519-47; M.D. North-Coombes, 'From Slavery to Indenture: Forced Labour in the Political Economy of Mauritius, 1834-1867,' in Kay Saunders, ed., *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920* (London, 1984), 78-125; Ravindra K. Jain, 'South Indian Labour in Malaya, 1840-1920,' in Saunders, *Indentured Labour*, 158-82; Behal and Mohapatra, 'Tea and Money Versus Human Life'; P. Ramasamy, 'Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya,' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19, 3-4 (1992), 87-105.

¹² Bridget Brereton, 'The Other Crossing: Asian Migrants in the Caribbean. A Review Essay,' *Journal of Caribbean History* 28, 1 (1994), 99-122; Marina Carter, *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834-1874* (Delhi, 1995), 1-6; Northrup, *Indentured Labor*, 154.

¹³ E.g., Paul E. Baak, 'About Enslaved Ex-slaves, Uncaptured Contract Coolies and Unfreed Freedmen: Some Notes about "Free" and "Unfree" Labour in the Context of Plantation Development in Southwest India, Early Sixteenth Century—Mid 1990s,' *Modern Asian Studies* 33, 1 (1999), 121-57; Richard B. Allen, 'Maroonage and Its Legacy in Mauritius and in the Colonial Plantation World,' *Revue Outre-Mers, Revue d'histoire* 89, n° 336-337 (2002), 131-52. For the debate about the definition and meaning of 'free' labour in the modern era, see: Robert Miles, *Capitalism and Unfree Labour: Anomaly or Necessity?* (London, 1987); Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern, 1997); Stanley L. Engerman, ed., *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom, and Free Labor* (Stanford, 1999).

inently in these assessments which also tend to focus on the legal and quasi-legal dimensions of workers' lives.¹⁴ While this approach has shed substantial light on aspects of the indentured experience, it has also limited our understanding of these migrant labor systems and their role in shaping the contours of the modern global economy in a number of ways.¹⁵ One consequence is widespread acceptance of the notion that indentured workers were little more than the hapless and helpless victims of unscrupulous labor recruiters, plantation owners and colonial officials.¹⁶ Another consequence is a failure to examine other important aspects of the indentured experience more fully, such as the place and activities of women in these systems,¹⁷ the role of gender in shaping local socio-economic relations,¹⁸ and the extent to which indentured workers exercised agency on their own behalf. A review of studies of these laborers in Australasia,¹⁹ the Caribbean,²⁰ South Africa,²¹ the South Pacific²² and Southeast Asia²³ highlights

¹⁴ Cf. Douglas Hay and Paul Craven, eds., *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562-1955* (Chapel Hill, 2004); A.L. Beier and Paul Ocozbek, eds., *Cast Away: Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective* (Ohio University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Richard B. Allen, 'The Intellectual Complacency of Contemporary Plantation Studies,' *The Historian* 57, 3 (1995), 582-86.

¹⁶ Exceptions include Marina Carter, *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834-1874* (Delhi, 1995); Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁷ A notable exception is Marina Carter, *Lakshmi's Legacy: The Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius* (Moka, Mauritius, 1994). See also Shobhita Jain and Rhoda Reddock, eds., *Women Plantation Workers* (Oxford, 1998).

¹⁸ Exceptions include Margaret Jolly, 'The Forgotten Women: A History of Migrant Labour and Gender Relations in Vanuatu,' *Oceania* 58, 2 (1987), 119-39; Patricia Mohammed, 'Writing Gender into History: The Negotiation of Gender Relations among Indian Men and Women in Post-Indenture Trinidad Society, 1917-47,' in Verene A. Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey, eds., *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (London, 1995), 20-47; Verene A. Shepherd, 'Gender, Migration and Settlement: The Indentureship and Post-indentureship Experience of Indian Females in Jamaica, 1845-1943,' in Shepherd, Brereton and Bailey, *Engendering History*, 233-57.

¹⁹ Cf. Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Melanesian Labor and the Development of the Queensland Sugar Industry,' *Research in Economic History* 7 (1982), 327-61; Adrian Graves, *Cane and Labour: The Political Economy of the Queensland Sugar Industry* (Edinburgh, 1993); Dorothy Shineberg, *The People Trade: Pacific Island Laborers and New Caledonia, 1865-1930* (Honolulu, 1999).

²⁰ Cf. Alan H. Adamson, *Sugar Without Slaves: The Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838-1904* (New Haven, 1972); Jay R. Mandle, *The Plantation Economy: Population and Economic Change in Guyana, 1838-1960* (Philadelphia, 1973); Monica Schuler, *Alas, Alas, Kongo: A Social History of Indentured African Immigration into Jamaica,*

an attendant failure to view the indentured experience in individual colonies in larger global and comparative contexts.²⁴ Lastly, few attempts have been made to explore structural or other connections between pre- and post-emancipation labor systems in the colonial plantation world. Studies of British slave plantation colonies, for example, usually end with the abolition of slavery in 1834 (or occasionally the collapse of the ‘apprenticeship’ system in 1838), while those that deal with post-emancipation labor systems in these colonies pay little or no attention to the slave regimes that preceded them. Discussions of conceptual and interpretative issues surrounding indentured labor also reflect this propensity to draw a sharp dividing line between the pre- and post-emancipation eras in the colonial plantation world.²⁵

Recent scholarship on migrant labor in the Indian Ocean underscores the need to explore connections between pre- and post-emancipation labor systems more fully. Mauritian

1841-1865 (Baltimore, 1980); Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore, 1993); K.O. Laurence, *A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana, 1875-1917* (New York, 1994); Rosemarijn Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery: A Social History of British Indian and Javanese Laborers in Suriname* (Gainesville, 1998); Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 1998).

²¹ Cf. Tayal, ‘Indian Indentured Labor in Natal’; Peter Richardson, ‘Coolies, Peasants, and Proletarians: The Origins of Chinese Indentured Labour in South Africa, 1904-1907,’ in Shula Marks and Peter Richardson, eds., *International Labour Migration: Historical Perspectives* (Hounslow, 1984), 167-85.

²² Cf. K.L. Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants* (Melbourne, 1962); Adrian C. Mayer, *Indians in Fiji* (London, 1971); Brij V. Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra, 1983).

²³ Cf. Ravindra K. Jain, *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya*, (New Haven, 1970); Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Delhi, 1989).

²⁴ Richard B. Allen, ‘Indentured Labor and the Need for Historical Context,’ *The Historian* 63, 2 (2001), 390-94. A noteworthy exception is Brij V. Lal, Doug Munro, and Edward D. Beechert, eds., *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation* (Honolulu, 1993).

²⁵ Colin Newbury, ‘Labour Migration in the Imperial Phase: An Essay in Interpretation,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 3 (1974-75), 234-56; Shula Marks and Peter Richardson, ‘Introduction,’ in Marks and Richardson, *International Labour Migration*, 1-18; E. Van Den Boogaart and P.C. Emmer, ‘Colonialism and Migration: An Overview,’ in Pieter C. Emmer, ed., *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery* (Dordrecht, 1986), 3-15; Doug Munro, ‘The Pacific Islands Labour Trade: Approaches, Methodologies, Debates,’ *Slavery and Abolition* 14, 2 (1993), 87-108; Doug Munro, ‘The Labor Trade in Melanesians to Queensland: An Historiographic Essay,’ *Journal of Social History* 28, 3 (1995), 609-27; Verene A. Shepherd, ‘The “Other Middle Passage?” Nineteenth-Century Bonded Labour Migration and the Legacy of the Slavery Debate in the British-Colonized Caribbean,’ in Verene A. Shepherd, ed., *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora* (New York, 2002), 343-75.

archival sources verify the existence of the kind of structural links between slave systems in India and the exportation of Indian indentured labor first proposed by Benedicte Hjejle more than 40 years ago. In her seminal article on slavery and agricultural bondage in southern India, Hjejle argued that the recruitment of some Indian indentured workers cannot be understood without reference to indigenous systems of slavery, and that a significant number of the migrant workers who reached Ceylon between 1843 and 1873 came from among the ranks of South India's praedial slave population.²⁶ The registers which recorded the arrival of indentured Indians in Mauritius confirm that the laborers who arrived on the island from southern India during the late 1830s included individuals of 'slave' caste status.²⁷ Unfortunately, it is unclear how many such individuals reached the island during or after the mid-1830s or may have been among the indentured immigrants who reached other plantation colonies during the nineteenth century. Comparable structural links are a hallmark of the *engagé* system which entailed the recruitment of ostensibly liberated slaves and free contractual laborers along the East African coast and in Madagascar to work on the French-controlled islands of Mayotte in the Comoros, Nosy-Bé off Madagascar's northwest coast, and Réunion following France's abolition of slavery in 1848. This system is widely regarded as nothing more than the old slave trade in new garb.²⁸

²⁶ Benedicte Hjejle, 'Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India in the Nineteenth Century,' *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 15 (1967), 106.

²⁷ MGI: PE 1. The men in question included some belonging to the Palin caste.

²⁸ François Renault, *Libération d'esclaves et nouvelle servitude: Les rachats de captives africains pour le compte des colonies françaises après l'abolition de l'esclavage* (Paris, 1976); Huguette Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo, 'Aperçu d'une immigration forcée: L'importation d'africains libérés aux Mascareignes et aux Seychelles, 1840-1880,' in *Minorités et gens de mer en Océan Indien, XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, IHPOM Études et Documents No. 12 (Aix-en-Provence, 1979), 73-84; Jean Martin, *Comores: Quatre îles entre pirates et planteurs* (Paris, 1983), vol. 1, 215-25, 252-61; Hubert Gerbeau, 'Engagees and Coolies in Réunion Island: Slavery's Masks and Freedom's Constraints,' in P.C. Emmer, ed., *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery* (Dordrecht, 1986), 209-36; José Capela and Eduardo Medeiros, 'La traite au départ du Mozambique vers les îles françaises de l'Océan Indien – 1720-1904,' in U. Bissoondoyal and S.B.C. Servansing, eds., *Slavery in South West Indian Ocean* (Moka, Mauritius, 1989, esp. 266-71;

We currently know very little about the details of indentured labor recruitment in India before 1842 when governmental regulation of this system began. However, information about servile agricultural labor in early nineteenth-century southern India, the exportation of slaves from the subcontinent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the indigenous migrant labor systems that supplied indentured Indian workers to Mauritius before 1838 provide additional, if often indirect, evidence of structural links between the slave and indentured labor trades in the Indian Ocean. An official inquiry during 1819 into slavery in the Madras Presidency, for example, reported that masters in some areas in southern India had a relatively free hand in disposing of their servile dependents if they chose to do so. Such was the case in Trichinopoly where the district's collector, C.M. Lushington, reported that while 'Pullers' (probably Pulayas²⁹) were usually sold with the land they worked, they were also frequently sold independently of the land in question,³⁰ which invariably raises questions about exactly how Vyavry, aged 28 and a 'Puller' by caste, reached Mauritius in 1838.³¹ Lushington also noted the 'indiscriminate' sale of men, women and children in Malabar, an observation seconded by that district's collector who reported that local slaves were frequently transferred from one owner to another by sale, mortgage or hire.³² These regions were well known to slavers operat-

Sudel Fuma, 'La traite des esclaves dans le bassin du sud-ouest de l'Océan Indien et la France après 1848,' in Ignace Rakoto, ed., *La route des esclaves: Système servile et traite dans l'est malgache* (Paris, 2000), 247-61; Yves Combeau, Prosper Eve, Sudel Fuma and Edmond Maestri, eds., *Histoire de La Réunion: De la colonie à la région* (La Réunion, 2001), 77-90; Jehanne-Emmanuelle Monnier, *Esclaves de la canne à sucre: Engagés et planteurs à Nossi-Bé, Madagascar, 1850-1880* (Paris, 2006).

²⁹ See K. Saradhamoni, *Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala* (New Delhi, 1980).

³⁰ OIOC: F/4/919/25850, p. 134 – C.M. Lushington to A.D. Campbell, 1 July 1819.

³¹ MGI: PE 1, No. 2415.

³² OIOC: F/4/919/25850, p. 174 – J. Vaughan to Board of Revenue, 20 July 1819. On slavery in southern India, see: Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1965), especially 34-48; K.K.N. Kurup, 'Slavery in 18th Century Malabar,' *Revue historique de Pondichéry* 11 (1973), 56-60; Sebastian Joseph, 'Slave Labour of Malabar in the Colonial Context,' in Sabyasachi

ing along the Indian coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The movement of slaves from Malabar to the French comptoir at Mahé and the Dutch factory at Cochin, for example, became the subject of considerable concern to British authorities immediately following their acquisition of the province in 1792.³³ Official consternation about the Malabar slave trade, and the kidnapping, enslavement and sale of children in particular, resurfaced no later than 1812 when British authorities considered how they might bring an end to 'the nefarious traffic in Slaves which has prevailed on the Malabar Coast.'³⁴

The large number of slaves exported by Europeans from India during the latter part of the eighteenth century likewise point to this trade establishing the foundations, if not some of the institutional structures, upon which the indentured labor trades subsequently rested. As many as 24,000 Indian slaves were exported to the Mascarenes between 1670 and the late eighteenth century, 75 per cent of whom reached the islands between 1770 and 1793 when British forces seized France's Indian possessions following the onset of war in Europe and effectively ended the large-scale exportation of Indian slaves to the southwestern Indian Ocean.³⁵ Areas in southern India such as Malabar, Tanjore and Tinnevely nevertheless continued to function as slave trading centers that attracted the attention of British officials not only in 1812,

Bhattacharya, ed., *Essays in Modern Indian Economic History* (Delhi, 1987), 44-54; Barkur Udaya, 'Slavery on the Kanara Coast in the Early 19th Century,' *Indica* 40, 1 (2003), 13-28.

³³ [Jonathon Duncan, William Page, Charles Boddam, and Alexander Dow], *Reports of a Joint Commission from Bengal and Bombay, Appointed to Inspect into the State and Condition of the Province of Malabar in the Years 1792 and 1793* (Bombay, 179?), vol. 1, 164-65, and vol. 2, 35-36.

³⁴ OIOC: P/322/68, p. 2850 – W^m Thackeray to Judge and Magistrate Zillah North Malabar, 29 May 1812.

³⁵ Richard B. Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' in Gwyn Campbell, ed., *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia* (London, 2004), 33-50; Richard B. Allen, 'Carrying Away the Unfortunate: The Exportation of Slaves from India during the Late Eighteenth Century,' in Jacques Weber, ed., *Le monde créole: Peuplement, sociétés et condition humaine, XVII^e-XX^e siècles* (Paris, 2005), 285-98.

but also in 1819³⁶ and 1825,³⁷ and yet again during the early 1830s.³⁸ This continuing concern about the exportation of slaves from the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, and the funneling of children kidnapped from British territories to the French comptoir of Mahé on the Malabar Coast in particular, becomes more comprehensible in light of the fact that the mid- and late 1820s witnessed French attempts to recruit indentured Indian workers for Réunion, attempts in which the former slave trading enclaves of Pondichéry, Karikal and Yanam figured prominently.³⁹

What little we currently know about indentured labor recruitment in India before 1838 likewise points to structural connections between the slave and indentured labor trades. Marina Carter notes that the labor exporters who supplied Mauritius with indentured Indians before 1838 tapped into indigenous migrant labor systems to do so, and that approximately one-third of the 7,000 Indians who arrived in Mauritius during 1837-38 were *dhangars* or tribal hill people from the Chota Nagpur plateau in southern Bihar.⁴⁰ Hill tribesmen figured prominently among those who were enslaved in some parts of the subcontinent. An 1811 report about the trafficking of Nepalese into British territories⁴¹ and an 1816 report on the movement of enslaved children from Assamese tribal areas to Bengal,⁴² an important source of slave and then indentured labor for the Mascarenes, suggests that the presence of people from the Himalayan and/or As-

³⁶ OIOC: F/4/1128/30151 – Contraband trade carried on through Mahé [1819-20].

³⁷ OIOC: F/4/1034/28499 – Slavery, Kidnapping and Sale of children in Tanjore and Tinnevely [1825].

³⁸ OIOC: F/4/1414/55774 – Relative to the Kidnapping of Children from the Company's Territory for Sale as Slaves.

³⁹ Northrup, *Indentured Labor*, 60; Weber, 'L'émigration indienne à La Réunion,' 309-10.

⁴⁰ Carter, *Servants, Sirdars*, 104. See also J.C. Jha, 'Early Indian Immigration into Mauritius (1834-1842),' in U. Bissoondoyal and S.B.C. Servansing, eds., *Indian Labour Immigration* (Moka, Mauritius, 1986), esp. 9-11.

⁴¹ OIOC: F/4/369/9221 – Relative to the Measures adopted for the prevention of the Trade in Children carried on between the Upper Provinces and the Territories of Napaul.

⁴² OIOC: F/4/566/13970, pp. 32-33 – J.W. Sage to Shearman Bird, James Rattray, J.M. Rees and G. Hartwell, 12 February 1816.

Assamese foothills among these early indentured recruits cannot be discounted pending further research. The need for such research is underscored by the request made in 1825 by the governor-general's agent on the northeastern frontier that Assamese who owed state service but could not fulfill their obligations because of the partial famine that had swept the region be allowed to sell themselves into slavery.⁴³ Although the government in Calcutta promptly relinquished all of its claims to such service, British officials acknowledged that some Assamese had nevertheless 'contracted an obligation to serve private individuals for their lives during the pressure of the late famine.'⁴⁴

The depth and extent of the ties between the slave and indentured labor trades is also suggested by the scale of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean basin, especially during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. European ships carried Africans from Mozambique and the Swahili Coast to India, the Indonesian archipelago and the Mascarenes; Indians to Ceylon, Indonesia, the Mascarenes and South Africa; Malagasies to India, the Mascarenes and Sumatra; and men, women and children from Bali, Java, Makassar, Nias and Sumatra to Ceylon, the Mascarenes and South Africa. A review of published scholarship indicates that British, Dutch, French and Portuguese traders purchased and transported at least 431,000-530,000 slaves to their Indian Ocean establishments between 1500 and 1850.⁴⁵ The fragmentary and problematic data at our disposal suggest that a figure closer to 530,000 is a better low-end estimate of this traffic's volume. These data also point to a four- or possibly fivefold increase in the volume of this activity between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with

⁴³ OIOC: F/4/1115/29887, pp. 3-4 – D. Scott to Mr. Chief Secretary Swinson, 4 March 1825.

⁴⁴ OIOC: F/4/1115/29887, pp. 7-8 – Mr. Acting Secretary Stirling to D. Scott, 3 April 1825.

⁴⁵ These figures do not include slaves transported to and sold at European establishments by indigenous traders.

much of this growth occurring after 1770, and indicate that Europeans continued to trade large numbers of slaves within the Indian Ocean basin well into the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

The scale of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean becomes even more impressive when note is taken of Portuguese and French exports from the western Indian Ocean during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mozambique exported 90,000 slaves to the Mascarenes and the Americas before 1811, and another 386,000 men, women and children to the New World after 1811.⁴⁷ Limited and problematic data on the number of French slaving voyages to Mozambique and along the Swahili Coast make it difficult to gauge the volume of French exports from the Indian Ocean to the Caribbean during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with any precision. However, 33 Mascarene-based voyages are known to have delivered some 6,700 Mozambican and 1,700 East African slaves to French colonies in the Caribbean (especially Saint Domingue) between 1772 and 1790.⁴⁸ Slaves from 'the coasts of India' also occasionally reached the Americas, as in 1778 when *La Cibèle* landed 258 men, 49 women, 57 boys and 22 girls at Saint Domingue.⁴⁹ These figures, when added to those mentioned above, suggest that Europeans were involved in the purchase and transportation of at least

⁴⁶ Richard B. Allen, 'Satisfying the Want for Labouring People: European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800,' *Journal of World History*, forthcoming. Europeans are estimated to have traded a minimum of 12,500-20,000 slaves in the Indian Ocean basin during the sixteenth century, 41,000-61,500 during the seventeenth century, 201,700-240,700 during the eighteenth century, and 176,100-207-800 between 1800 and 1850.

⁴⁷ Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1999), 70-71; Edward A. Alpers, 'Mozambique and "Mozambiques": Slave Trade and Diaspora on a Global Scale,' in Benigna Zimba, Edward Alpers and Allen Isaacman, eds., *Slave Routes and Diaspora in Southeastern Africa* (Maputo, 2005), 51, 55.

⁴⁸ Richard B. Allen, 'The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' *Journal of African History* 49 (2008), 59-60, 62-63.

⁴⁹ Jean Mettas, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIII^e siècle*, vol. 1, *Nantes* (Paris, 1978), 613-14.

925,000 slaves within and beyond the confines of the *Maris Indici* between 1500 and 1850. Future research will undoubtedly increase this figure by a significant margin.

When viewed in its totality, this activity points to the existence of increasingly integrated networks of free and unfree or forced migrant labor within and beyond the confines of the Indian Ocean basin by the early nineteenth century. The ways in which these networks were intertwined can be illustrated in other ways. Recent scholarship has revealed that significant numbers of South and Southeast Asian convicts were transported across the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean to satisfy the relentless demand for labor in European factories, administrative centers and colonies. Dutch authorities first shipped convicts from Batavia and Ceylon to the Cape of Good Hope no later than 1688, and a small but steady flow of these convicts continued to reach the Cape during the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ British authorities, already versed in conveying large numbers of convicts to their American colonies,⁵¹ began transporting Indian convicts to British possessions elsewhere in the Indian Ocean during the late 1780s and continued to do so well into the nineteenth century.⁵² Indian convicts were first sent to the British East India Company's factory at Bencoolen (Benkulen, Bengkulen) in Sumatra in 1787, the same year that witnessed the departure from Britain of the first of the more than 160,000 con-

⁵⁰ James C. Armstrong, 'The Ceylon Connection: Convicts and Exiles from Ceylon Sent to the Cape of Good Hope during the Dutch East India Company Period,' paper presented to the interdisciplinary conference on 'Colonial Places, Convict Spaces: Penal Transportation in Global Context, c. 1600-1940,' University of Leicester, 9-10 December 1999. My thanks to the author for permission to cite his paper. A total of 1,025 convicts arrived at the Cape between 1722 and 1757.

⁵¹ Farley Grubb, 'The Transatlantic Market for British Convict Labor,' *Journal of Economic History* 60, 1 (2000), 94-122; Colin Forster, 'Convicts: Unwilling Migrants from Britain and France,' in David Eltis, *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives* (Stanford, 2002), 259-91. Approximately 50,000 British convicts reached America between 1718 and 1775.

⁵² For an overview of this activity, see Clare Anderson, *Legible Bodies: Race, Criminality and Colonialism in South Asia* (Oxford, 2004).

victs who reached Australia between 1788 and 1868. A total of 4,000-6,000 Indian prisoners were sent to Bencoolen between 1787 and 1825, while another 15,000 were dispatched to Straits Settlements such as Prince of Wales Island (Penang) and Malacca between 1790 and 1860.⁵³ Approximately 1,500 Indian convicts reached Mauritius as well between 1815 and 1837 where they labored on public works projects.⁵⁴ Overall, British authorities shipped some 30,000 Indian convicts overseas between 1787 and 1858, while perhaps another 60,000 suffered the same fate during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵

Events at Bencoolen provide a vantage point from which to begin to consider the ways in which late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century attempts to abolish slave trading, if not the institution of slavery itself, in parts of the Indian Ocean world may have influenced the development of the abolitionist movement in Britain and the ultimate recourse to indentured labor. We may note, for instance, that the first shipment of Indian convicts to Bencoolen in 1787 coincided with the approval of plans to emancipate those of the Company's slaves at the factory 'who are capable of supporting themselves, on the condition of their giving their Labors or furnishing their produce of Pepper to the Company when called upon taking care that they are in both instances paid for the same at the usual rate....' Aged and infirm slaves unable to work

⁵³ Anand A. Yang, 'Indian Convict Workers in Southeast Asia in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,' *Journal of World History* 14 (2003), 179-208.

⁵⁴ Clare Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius, 1815-53* (London, 2000).

⁵⁵ Marcus Rediker, Cassandra Pybus and Emma Christopher, 'Introduction,' in Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus and Marcus Rediker, eds., *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World* (Berkeley, 2007), 9, citing Clare Anderson, personal communication, April 2006.

were to be granted a small annual pension so ‘they may not experience the want of the necessities of Life.’⁵⁶

Unfortunately, the archival record sheds little additional light on these plans to emancipate the settlement’s slaves and turn them into wage laborers.⁵⁷ The rationale for this decision is rather problematical since officials at Bencoolen had pleaded repeatedly before the 1780s for the introduction of more Malagasy and East African slaves because, they averred, the cost of maintaining these ‘Coffrees’ was much less than what had to be paid to secure the services of free Malay workers.⁵⁸ What is clear, however, is that the decision to emancipate Bencoolen’s slaves in 1787 was not an isolated or unique event.⁵⁹ Thirteen years earlier, Governor-General Warren Hastings and his council had issued regulations to control slave trading in Bengal on the grounds that ‘the practice of stealing Children from their Parents and selling them for Slaves has long prevailed in this Country, and has greatly increased since the Establishment of the English Government in it.’ Hastings concluded that this ‘savage commerce’ was so extensive that there appeared to be no effective way of ‘Remedying this calamitous Evil’ but to abolish ‘the Right of Slavery altogether, excepting such Cases to which the Authority of Government cannot

⁵⁶ OIOC: F/4/279/6417, p. 5 – Extract of Separate Letter to Bengal Relative to Bencoolen Dated 31st July 1787.

⁵⁷ It is unclear whether these plans were actually implemented. Early in 1787, the government at Calcutta ordered Bencoolen to send 150 of its slaves to Penang (OIOC: G/34/2, p. 438 – Public Consultation, Fort William, 22 January 1787 – Separate Consultation relative to Prince of Wales Island). On 7 June 1787, the *Ravensworth* landed 125 slaves from Bencoolen at Prince of Wales Island, many of whom were reported to be so old as to be unfit for service (OIOC: G/34/2, p. 564 – Francis Light to Earl Cornwallis, 18 June 1787).

⁵⁸ OIOC: G/35/13, fol. 4v – 2^d Goods from Europe &c^a [referencing General Letter of 18 October 1762]; G/35/13, fol. 273v, para. 73 – Roger Carter, Robert Hay and John Hebert to Court of Directors, 19 April 1765.

⁵⁹ See Richard B. Allen, ‘A Traffic Repugnant to Humanity: Children, the Mascarene Slave Trade and British Abolitionism,’ *Slavery and Abolition* 27, 2 (2006), 219-36; Richard B. Allen, ‘Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave Trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770-1830,’ *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., (forthcoming, 2009).

reach....⁶⁰ Aside from these public pronouncements, the archival record is frustratingly silent about the motives behind these regulations, which also seem to have fallen quickly into disuse.⁶¹ Hastings' biographers, who ignore these regulations in their accounts of his career,⁶² provide no insight into the governor-general's mindset other than to credit him with a deep seated sense of humanitarianism and liberal idealism far ahead of his time.⁶³

Slavery and slave trading in Bengal became the subject of official British interest again no later than March 1785 when Matthew Day, Collector at Dacca, informed William Cowper that 'many hundreds' of children had been sold into slavery because of the famine then ravaging the surrounding countryside and were being shipped to 'the Foreign Settlements [near Calcutta] from whence...they are embarked in Vessels to different Parts.'⁶⁴ Day's report prompted Cowper to write to Governor-General John Macpherson requesting his 'speedy Interference to stop the pernicious Trade...which is also as inhuman as it is illegal.'⁶⁵ That same year, Sir William Jones also gave voice to the humanitarian sentiments that would be echoed by many other British officials in India during the late 1780s and early 1790s when he told a grand jury in Calcutta, 'The condition of slaves within our jurisdiction is, beyond imagination, deplorable; and cruelties are daily practiced on them, chiefly on those of the tenderest age, and weaker sex....'⁶⁶ This official interest in and concern about slavery and slave trading in Bengal continued after Lord

⁶⁰ OIOC: P/49/46, pp. 1484-85 – Regulations issued 17 May 1774.

⁶¹ Amal Kumar Chattopadhyay, *Slavery in the Bengal Presidency, 1772-1843* (London, 1977), 81.

⁶² E.g., A. Mervyn Davies, *Strange Destiny: A Biography of Warren Hastings* (New York, 1935); Keith Feiling, *Warren Hastings* (Hamden, CT, 1967).

⁶³ Davies, *Strange Destiny*, 55, 81-83, 101.

⁶⁴ OIOC: P/50/60 – M. Day to William Cowper, 2 March 1785, following L.R. No. 311, W^m Cowper to John Macpherson, 14 March 1785, in Fort William proceedings of 9 September 1785.

⁶⁵ OIOC: P/50/60 – W^m Cowper to John Macpherson, 14 March 1785 – L.R. No. 311.

⁶⁶ Cited in *Slavery and the Slave Trade in British India; With Notices of the Existence of These Evils in the Islands of Ceylon, Malacca, and Penang, Drawn from Official Documents* (London, 1841), 29.

Cornwallis became governor-general in 1786, and culminated in his proclamation of 22 July 1789 banning the exportation of slaves from the Bengal Presidency.⁶⁷ The Madras Presidency followed his lead on 8 March 1790.⁶⁸ The early 1790s would find British authorities taking variety of steps to prevent children from being sold into slavery and impede the exportation of slaves from their Indian territories.⁶⁹

Cornwallis's ban, which preceded the 1807 parliamentary abolition of the British slave trade by 18 years, becomes that much more significant in the annals of abolitionism because it appears to have been part of a more comprehensive attack on the institution of slavery itself in India. Less than two weeks after issuing his proclamation, Cornwallis informed the Court of Directors in London that he was considering a plan to abolish slavery throughout the Company's Indian territories in a way that would neither injure private interests nor antagonize the indigenous population. A simultaneous proposal to establish regulations to alleviate the misery of slaves 'during the time that they may be retained in that wretched situation' suggest that he envisioned a program of gradual emancipation.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, no copy of Cornwallis's plan survives in the archival record.⁷¹ The origins and depth of his abolitionist sentiments and the motives behind both the 1789 ban on slave exports from Bengal and his plan to abolish slavery in India likewise remain hidden from our

⁶⁷ OIOC: P/3/46, pp. 488-93. See also *Calcutta Gazette*, Extraordinary, 27 July 1789.

⁶⁸ OIOC: P/241/17, pp. 644, 682.

⁶⁹ Allen, 'A Traffic Repugnant to Humanity,' 227; Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic.'

⁷⁰ PP 1828 XXIV [125], p. 13 – Extract of a Letter from Lord Cornwallis, Governor General of India, to the Court of Directors; dated 2d August 1789.

⁷¹ PP 1828 XXIV [125], p. 13 – notation at the end of 'Extract of a Letter from Lord Cornwallis, Governor General of India, to the Court of Directors; dated 2d August 1789.

view. His personal papers are silent about these matters,⁷² and contemporaries offer little insight into his possible motives other than to observe that he wanted to ensure the security, prosperity and happiness of India's inhabitants.⁷³ What is clear, however, is that that Cornwallis acted during a period of intense agitation in Britain (1788-92) to abolish the British slave trade, which raises the question of whether his actions were a response to metropolitan political pressure or an attempt to influence the outcome of the growing debate at home about abolishing the British slave trade, or both.

Similar questions are raised by what we know about Charles Grant. Grant, who first reached India in 1773, worked closely with Cornwallis before returning to England in 1790, a departure which the governor-general attempted to forestall by offering Grant a seat on his council.⁷⁴ Back in England, Grant, an evangelical Christian, joined the London Abolition Committee (1791) and was deeply involved in the almost successful attempt in Parliament early in 1793 to ban the British slave trade.⁷⁵ Elected to the Court of Directors in 1794, he served as a director until 1813 and as the Company's chairman or deputy chairman six times between 1804 and 1815. H.V. Bowen notes that the few directors who attempted to apply moral, philosophical or religious principles to their work often encountered deep hostility and suspicion from their more conservative colleagues. However, Bowen also describes Grant as a very influential direc-

⁷² Cf. Charles Ross, ed., *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London, 1859).

⁷³ PRO 30/11/210 – Narrative of Marquis Cornwallis's proceedings in India, and an explanation of his plans just prior to his death. Sent to Charles Grant, Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company [September 1805]. Studies of his tenure in Bengal echo these sentiments; see A. Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal* (New Delhi, 1987), 173.

⁷⁴ Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, 11.

⁷⁵ Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783-1807* (London, 1997), 67, 81-82.

tor,⁷⁶ a characterization which raises the question of whether the Court's formal approval in 1796 of the measures taken to suppress slave trading in Malabar⁷⁷ was, at least in part, the product of abolitionist sentiments at the highest levels of Company management. Similar questions about the extent to which abolitionist sentiments shaped Company policies and influenced Company employees are raised by the decision in 1790 to commend Cornwallis and his council for prosecuting and convicting Captain Peter Horrebow for transporting Bengali slaves to Ceylon for sale,⁷⁸ by a proposal in 1805 to abolish slavery at Penang,⁷⁹ by the 1811 ban on the importation and sale of foreign slaves in the Bengal Presidency's territories,⁸⁰ and by Sir Stamford Raffles' call in 1813 for immediate emancipation of government slaves in Java (recently captured from the Dutch) since their labor 'may be superseded by granting a more liberal allowance to ordinary coolies.'⁸¹

Events in the Mascarenes further underscore the need to consider the extent to which developments in the Indian Ocean influenced abolitionist agenda and activities in Britain, the formulation and implementation of imperial policies to suppress slave trading and abolish slavery, and the subsequent recourse to indentured labor. The islands became the center of a notorious clandestine trade in slaves following their capture by a British expeditionary force in

⁷⁶ Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 130-32.

⁷⁷ OIOC: E/4/1011, pp. 411-12 – Answer to the Letter in the Political Department dated 25th Sept^r 1794.

⁷⁸ I.B. Banerjee, ed., *Fort William-India House Correspondence and Other Contemporary Papers Relating Thereto (Public Series)*, vol. 9, 1789-92 (Delhi, 1974), 104 [Letter to Governor General and Council at Fort William in Bengal, 28 April 1790].

⁷⁹ OIOC: F/4/279/6417, p. 11 – Extract General Letter to Prince of Wales Island Dated 18th February 1807.

⁸⁰ OIOC: F/4/403/10115, pp. 1-2 – A.D. 1811. Regulation X.

⁸¹ OIOC: G/21/64, [section headed 'Slavery'] – Notes of the Arrangements made by Lord Minto for the Occupation and Administration of the Affairs of Java; and of the principal Subjects treated of in the Despatches from the Lieu^t Governor of that Island [written by B.J. Jones, 7 October 1813].

1810,⁸² the magnitude of which rivaled East African exports to the northwestern quadrant of the Indian Ocean basin. Madagascar, Mozambique, the Swahili Coast and the Indonesia archipelago exported an estimated 123,400-145,000 men, women and children to Mauritius and Réunion between 1811 and 1848, mostly between 1811 and *circa* 1831,⁸³ compared to an estimated 164,000 East African exports to Arabia, Persia and India between 1801 and 1849. The illegal trade to the Mascarenes may have consumed 15 per cent of all slaves shipped beyond the eastern Africa coast and its adjoining islands during the nineteenth century.⁸⁴

The magnitude of this trade and the depth of the British commitment to suppressing it made the southwestern Indian Ocean a theatre of operations for anti-slave trade patrols by the Royal Navy well before the British government established an independent naval squadron in November 1819 to conduct such patrols off the West African coast.⁸⁵ The navy's activities in this part of the Indian Ocean during the 1810s and early 1820s were an important, and often overlooked, precursor to attempts later in the nineteenth century to suppress the East African

⁸² Early in 1811, the islands' British governor, Robert Farquhar, petitioned London to exempt Mauritius and Réunion from the 1807 parliamentary ban on slave trading by British subjects. His request was promptly denied and slave trading quickly resumed. This trade continued after Mauritius and its dependencies were formally ceded to Britain by the 1814 Treaty of Paris. Réunion, restored to French control, became a center of illicit activity again after France formally abolished its slave trade in 1818. For the trade to Réunion, see n. 2. For the trade to Mauritius and its dependencies, see Serge Daget, 'British Repression of the Illegal French Slave Trade: Some Considerations,' in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1979), 419-42; Claude Wanquet, 'La traite illégale à Maurice à l'époque anglaise (1811-1835),' in Serge Daget, ed., *De la traite à l'esclavage: Actes du colloque internationale sur la traite des noirs, Nantes, 1985* (Nantes, 1988), vol. 2, 451-66; Anthony J. Barker, *Slavery and Antislavery in Mauritius, 1810-33: The Conflict Between Economic Expansion and Humanitarian Reform Under British Rule* (London and New York, 1996); Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings.'

⁸³ Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade,' 41. Most of these exports occurred between 1811 and *circa* 1831.

⁸⁴ Based on figures in Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2000), 156.

⁸⁵ Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1999), 188.

export trade.⁸⁶ The extent of this activity is indicated by the number of captured slave ships and ‘prize Negroes’ condemned by Vice-Admiralty and colonial courts. The Vice-Admiralty court at the Cape of Good Hope condemned 27 slave ships captured by Royal Navy cruisers between December 1808 and December 1816 and funneled more than 2,100 Malagasy and Mozambican prize Negroes into the Cape Colony’s work force as ‘apprentices.’ Additional seizures during the 1840s swelled the ranks of the Cape’s prize Negro population by more than 3,000.⁸⁷ Colonial and Vice-Admiralty courts in Mauritius were even busier, condemning 48 captured slave ships between 1811 and 1825, 39 of which were seized between 1815 and 1819.⁸⁸ The number of adjudications handled by Mauritian-based courts during this 14-year period exceeded those dealt with by the mixed or joint anti-slave trade commissions at Rio de Janeiro (44) and Surinam (1) between 1819 and 1845, and almost equaled the number of cases (50) handled at Havana.⁸⁹ As at the Cape, the overwhelming majority of the 4,526 prize slaves landed on Mauritius were ‘apprenticed’ to local estate owners for 14 years. The Commission of Eastern Enquiry subse-

⁸⁶ Raymond Howell, *The Royal Navy and the Slave Trade* (New York, 1987), chap. 1. No comparable research has been conducted on French attempts to suppress slave trading in the Indian Ocean. See Serge Daget, *La repression de la traite des Noirs aux XIX^e siècle: L’action des croiseurs françaises sur les côtes occidentales de l’Afrique (1817-1850)* (Paris, 1997).

⁸⁷ Christopher Saunders, ‘Liberated Africans in Cape Colony in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,’ *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18, 2 (1985), 223-39. See also Saunders, ‘“Free, Yet Slaves”: Prize Negroes at the Cape Revisited,’ in Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais, eds., *Breaking the Chains: Slavery and Its Legacy in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony* (Johannesburg, 1994), 99-115.

⁸⁸ CO 167/141, Return No. 19 – Return of the Number of Prize Negroes Apprenticed in the Colony of Mauritius From the Year 1813 to 1827 inclusive.

⁸⁹ Leslie Bethell, ‘The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century,’ *Journal of African History* 7 (1966), 84. The mixed commission based in Sierra Leone dealt with 528 such cases during the same period.

quently estimated the value of the labor services provided by the apprentices who were still alive late in 1827 to be at least \$100,000 (£20,000) a year.⁹⁰

This commitment to suppressing the illegal trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles also led to increasing British involvement with regional polities, the impact of which resonated for years.⁹¹ As early as April 1816, Mauritian governor Robert Farquhar initiated negotiations with the Merina king, Radama I, to end slave exports from those areas of Madagascar under Merina control. Radama was induced to sign such a treaty in October 1817 and again in October 1820 after the first treat had been abrogated unilaterally by acting Mauritian governor Major-General Gage Hall in 1818. One immediate result of the 1820 accord was to deprive Radama of substantial revenue he had previously enjoyed from taxing slave exports.⁹² Loss of this revenue and the ultimate failure of his alliance with the British would lead Radama to adopt autarkic policies which resulted in radical changes in the local system of corvée labor (*fanompoana*), changes that had dire consequences for the Merina economy and imperial regime later in the century.⁹³

⁹⁰ CO 167/143, p. 8 – Report of the Commissioners of Enquiry at Mauritius upon the State of the Prize Negroes Apprenticed in that Colony [27 January 1829].

⁹¹ Cf. Sir John Gray, *The British in Mombasa, 1824-1826* (London, 1957); Gerald S. Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean* (Oxford, 1967); Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1968), 197-216; Mervyn Brown, *Madagascar Revisited: A History from Early Time to Independence* (London, 1978), especially chap. 10; Ralph A. Austen, 'From the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean: European Abolition, the African Slave Trade, and Asian Economic Structures,' in David Eltis and James Walvin, eds., *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Madison, 1981), 117-39; R.W. Beachey, *A History of East Africa, 1592-1902* (London, 1996), 17-23; Pier M. Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth, NH, 2000); Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750-1895* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁹² Deryck Scarr reports that Mauritian authorities calculated that Radama earned \$40,000 a year from the slave trade (*Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* [London, 1998], 132).

⁹³ Campbell, *Economic History*, esp. chap. 5.

Because it forced slave traders who had supplied the Mascarenes to shift the center of their operations from Madagascar to the East African coast,⁹⁴ the 1820 Anglo-Merina accord set the stage for greater British involvement along that coast. In April 1821, Farquhar signaled his intention to secure a treaty with the sultan of Oman, nominal ruler of Zanzibar and other parts of the Swahili Coast, similar to that with Radama.⁹⁵ The following year, Captain Fairfax Moresby, acting on the governor's instructions, negotiated a treaty with Sultan Seyyid Said in which the Omani ruler banned the external traffic in slaves from his East African dominions and prohibiting the sale of slaves to any Christian.⁹⁶ Like the 1820 treaty with Radama, the Moresby Treaty had a significant impact on the sultan's finances, depriving him of perhaps as much as \$56,000 in revenue each year.⁹⁷ According to Abdul Sheriff, these losses spurred Seyyid's interest in developing the clove industry on Zanzibar and Pemba,⁹⁸ an industry that soon consumed thousands of East African slaves each year.⁹⁹ The traffic in chattel labor to these islands would become the focal point of an escalating conflict between Britain and the sultan and his heirs that culminated in the establishment of a British protectorate over Zanzibar in 1873.

Events in Mauritius following the demise of the illegal slave trade *circa* 1827 would likewise a significant impact not only locally and regionally, but also far beyond the shores of the

⁹⁴ CO 167/57 – Despatch No. 46, R.T. Farquhar to Earl Bathurst, 11 June 1821.

⁹⁵ PP 1825 XXV [244], p. 37 – R.T. Farquhar to Earl Bathurst, 14 April 1821.

⁹⁶ Sir John Gray, *The British in Mombasa, 1824-1826* (London, 1957), 24-29; Beachey, *A History of East Africa*, 17-22.

⁹⁷ Estimates of these losses vary. According to R.W. Beachey, the sultan lost £11,250 a year, or \$56,250 at an exchange rate of £1 = \$5 (*History of East Africa*, 22). Deryck Scarr puts this figure at no more than \$30,000 a year (*Slaving and Slavery*, 132). Abdul Sheriff reports that the sultan claimed losing MT\$40,000-50,000 each year, or £8,421-£10,526 at an exchange rate of £1 = MT\$4.75 which prevailed during the first half of the nineteenth century (*Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* [London, 1987], 50).

⁹⁸ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices*, 50.

⁹⁹ Paul Lovejoy estimates that 769,000 of the 1,618,000 slaves traded in East Africa during the nineteenth century were retained on the coast and adjoining islands such as Zanzibar and Pemba (*Transformations in Slavery*, 155-58).

Indian Ocean. The increasing inability of Mauritian planters during the 1820s to obtain the labor needed by the island's rapidly expanding sugar industry, coupled with local resentment over slave amelioration policies that had been introduced during the late 1820s, erupted into armed insurrection with the appointment in 1832 of John Jeremie, a known abolitionist, as the colony's attorney-general. Although often dismissed as little more than a tempest in a small colonial tea pot, this rebellion exposed the false premises and defective administrative structures upon which the imperial policy of slave amelioration rested, thereby hastening the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.¹⁰⁰

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When viewed in their totality, the developments in the Indian Ocean outlined above highlight the need for studies of abolitionism and the overthrow of slavery to transcend the Atlantic-centrism that is a hallmark of classic works on these topics¹⁰¹ as well as scholarship that situates the origins of abolitionism in a broader British imperial context.¹⁰² The need to do so is underscored by a small but growing corpus of work on abolition and its aftermath in the Indian Ocean world,¹⁰³ and by a growing awareness among some historians of the Atlantic world of the conceptual and other problems that can result from a reliance on inflexible geographically-

¹⁰⁰ Peter Burroughs, 'The Mauritius Rebellion of 1832 and the Abolition of British Colonial Slavery,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 4, 3 (1976), 243-65.

¹⁰¹ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1966); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY, 1975); David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1987); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London, 1988).

¹⁰² Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, 2006).

¹⁰³ E.g., Gwyn Campbell, ed., *Abolition and Its Aftermath in Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia* (London, 2005).

defined units of historical analysis.¹⁰⁴ Some historians of empire also demonstrate a growing appreciation that if there were significant differences between the British experience in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, there were also important similarities between these two components of a single imperial entity.¹⁰⁵ Work on the impact that public knowledge about and perceptions of empire had on British politics,¹⁰⁶ on the politics and ideology of the early British East India Company state,¹⁰⁷ and on the geography of color lines in colonial Madras and New York¹⁰⁸ demonstrate the value of approaching European activities in these two 'worlds' from a pan-oceanic perspective.

However, to argue the need to study the origins, dynamics and impact of abolitionism within a truly comprehensive imperial context is one thing, to actually do so is something else. Thirty years ago Hubert Gerbeau discussed the problems inherent in any attempt to reconstruct the history of slavery and slave trading in the Indian Ocean,¹⁰⁹ not the least of which is the dearth of archival materials compared to those that exist for the Atlantic. Attempts to recon-

¹⁰⁴ See the forum on conceptualizing the Atlantic world published in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 63, 4 (2006), especially the contributions by Alison Games, Philip J. Stern and Peter A. Coclanis. For a review of how the Atlantic world has been defined, see Alison Games, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,' *American Historical Review* 111 (2006), 741-57. This article is part of an *AHR* forum on 'Oceans in History,' a forum which completely ignored the Indian Ocean.

¹⁰⁵ E.g., P.J. Marshall, 'The Caribbean and India in the Later Eighteenth Century: Two British Empires or One?,' in P.J. Marshall, *'A Free Though Conquering People': Eighteenth-Century Britain and Its Empire* (Aldershot, 2003), chap. X.

¹⁰⁶ E.g., J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade* (London, 1995); Jeremy Osborn, 'India and the East India Company in the Public Sphere of Eighteenth-Century Britain,' in H.V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby, eds., *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge, 2002), 201-21.

¹⁰⁷ Philip J. Stern, 'Politics and Ideology in the Early East India Company-State: The Case of St. Helena, 1673-1709,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35, 1 (2007), 1-23.

¹⁰⁸ Carl H. Nightingale, 'Before Race Mattered: Geographies of the Color Line in Early Colonial Madras and New York,' *American Historical Review* 113 (2008), 48-71.

¹⁰⁹ Hubert Gerbeau, 'The Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean: Problems Facing the Historian and Research to be Undertaken,' in *The African Slave Trade from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Paris, 1979), 184-207.

struct abolitionist activity in the Indian Ocean and understand how and to what extent developments in the *Maris Indici* actively shaped abolitionist discourse and policies face the same problem. The British East India Company archives, for example, contain only scattered and often oblique references to the Company's involvement in slave trading during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,¹¹⁰ a fact that helps to explain why histories of the Company and studies of Indian commercial relations make little or no mention of its trafficking in and reliance on chattel labor in many of its Indian Ocean establishments.¹¹¹ Studies of Portuguese activity in India,¹¹² the Dutch and French East India companies,¹¹³ and Indo-European trade and commerce¹¹⁴ do likewise.

Under such circumstances, coming more fully to grips with the dialogue between the forces of abolitionism in the Indian Ocean and those in the Atlantic during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century will require adopting research strategies that allow us to explore the complex and often nuanced web of socio-political relationships that linked colonial officials with their counterparts not only in London, but also elsewhere in the imperial world. Recent

¹¹⁰ Jill Louise Geber, 'The East India Company and Southern Africa: A Guide to the Archives of the East India Company and the Board of Control, 1600-1858', Ph.D. diss., University College London, 1998, 101.

¹¹¹ Cf. K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978); John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London, 1991); Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia, 1998); H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, 2006).

¹¹² E.g., Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1700* (Delhi, 1990).

¹¹³ Cf. C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (New York, 1975); Philippe Haudrère, *La Compagnie des indes française au XVIII^e siècle (1719-1795)* (Paris, 1989); Lakshmi Subramanian, ed., *The French East India Company and the Trade of the Indian Ocean: A Collection of Essays by Indrani Ray* (New Delhi, 1999); Donald C. Welling-ton, *French East India Companies: A Historical Account and Record of Trade* (Lanham, MD, 2006).

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade, 1740-1800* (Cambridge, 1967); Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740* (Delhi, 1986); Ashin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson, eds., *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800* (Calcutta, 1987); Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1998); Arvind Sinha, *The Politics of Trade: Anglo-French Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1763-1793* (New Delhi, 2002).

work on imperial careering during the nineteenth century provides a template for doing so.¹¹⁵

The applicability of such an approach to abolitionism and its impact in the Indian Ocean is suggested by the career of Robert Farquhar. In 1805, the future governor of Mauritius, acting in his capacity as lieutenant governor of Prince of Wales Island, would recommend the abolition of slavery at Penang on the grounds that this institution was ‘the greatest of all evils, & the attempt to regulate such an evil is in itself almost absurd.’¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2006).

¹¹⁶ OIOC: G/34/9, fol. 64v – Appendix No. 13, Report of the Lieutenant Governor of Prince of Wales Island, enc. in R.T. Farquhar, Late Lieu^t Governor of Prince of Wales Island, to John Lumsden, Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William, 30 September 1805.