

Reflections on Reconstructing Slavery and Slave Trading in Early Modern and Colonial Asia

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The first decades of the new millennium have witnessed a significant expansion in our knowledge and understanding of slavery and slave trading in early modern and colonial Asia.¹ This renaissance reflects historians' willingness to embrace the diversity of the slave experience in the Indian Ocean and Asia (IOA) and deal creatively with the problems inherent in reconstructing even the more visible aspects of that experience such as the trafficking of the 2.2–2.8 million African and Asian men, women, and children currently estimated to have been transported across and beyond this oceanic world between 1500 and 1900.² Doing so has entailed expanding research horizons to include previously ignored peoples and regions, exploring the complexities of local and regional systems of slave and coerced labour in greater detail, challenging long-standing beliefs about slavery and slave trading in parts of the IOA, developing new conceptual and methodological approaches to studying bonded and forced labour in this part of the world, and searching out new sources of information or making innovative use of underused archival sources already at our disposal. The fruits of such endeavours include important research on topics such as slavery in Ming and Qing China, India, Japan, Korea, and colonial Vietnam,³

¹ Allen, 'Slavery, Slave Trading, and Bonded Labor Studies in Asia', pp. 1–13.

² Gerbeau, 'The Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean', pp. 184–207; Alpers, 'The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean', pp. 62–81; Allen, 'Ending the History of Silence', pp. 294–313.

³ E.g., Kim, 'Nobi: A Korean System of Slavery', pp. 155–168; Delaye, 'Slavery and Colonial Representations in Indochina from the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth Century', pp. 129–142; Chatterjee and Eaton, eds., *Slavery and South Asian History*; Nelson, 'Slavery in Medieval Japan', pp. 463–492; Kim, 'Debt Slaves in Old Korea', pp. 165–172; Lessard, *Human Trafficking in Colonial Vietnam*; Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China*; Zurndorfer, 'Economic, Social, and Legal Aspects of Slavery and Indentured Labor in Late Ming China (1550–1645)', pp. 131–149; Lovins, 'Korea: A Slave Society', pp. 178–200; Chevalyere, 'Slavery in Late Ming China', pp. 297–317.

the abolition of slavery and slave trading in British India and China,⁴ the structure, organisation, and impact of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean world and Asia,⁵ and the commerce of enslavement in Central, East, and South Asia.⁶

The contributions to this volume reflect these trends. Angelina Kalashnikova's chapter demonstrates the need to include Siberia in discussions about servitude in northern Asia, acknowledge that Russia as well as Britain, France, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain was a colonising power in Asia, and pay greater attention to the role that gender played in shaping the slave experience in Asia.⁷ Filipa Riberio da Silva reminds us that the Portuguese and Spanish as well as the British, Danes, Dutch, and French traded slaves within and/or beyond the IOA, a point illustrated by the Manila galleon transporting thousands of enslaved South, Southeast, and East Asians across the Pacific to Mexico and Peru between the mid-sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸ Lodewijk Wagenaar and Hans Hägerdal in turn provide more detailed insight into how and why the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC) made extensive use of slave labour in, respectively, Sri Lanka and the Maluku. Priya Kapoor's chapter on coolies in modern Shimla reminds us that the abolition of slavery did not bring an end to various forms of bonded or coerced labour in the IOA,⁹ and that the continued existence of 'slavery,' especially in parts of Asia and the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf region, in the early twenty-first century remains a subject of vigorous discussion and debate.¹⁰

⁴ E.g., Major, *Slavery, Abolition, and Empire in India, 1772–1843*; Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*, pp. 141–178, 180–219; Chevalleyre, 'The Abolition of Slavery and the Status of Slaves in Late Imperial China', pp. 57–82; Herzog, *Negotiating Abolition*; Ling, 'The Abolition of Slavery, Constitutional Reforms, and Modernity in Late Qing China', pp. 201–225.

⁵ E.g., Allen, *European Slave Trading*; Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan*; Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Slave Trading in the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830', pp. 273–296; Allen, 'Exporting the Unfortunate', pp. 533–552; Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Labor Migration in the Colonial Indian Ocean World/Capital mercantil y migración de mano de obra en el Océano Índica colonial', pp. 129–153; Zurndorfer, 'Human Trafficking and Piracy in Early Modern East Asia', pp. 908–931.

⁶ E.g., Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550–1900*; Stanziani, ed., *Labour, Coercion and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th–20th Centuries*; Stanziani, *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*; Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia*; Chevalleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China', pp. 150–177.

⁷ For an overview of slavery studies in Asia, see Allen, 'Slavery, Slave Trading, and Bonded Labor Studies in Asia', pp. 5–13. For a survey of the literature on gender and slavery in Asia, see Herzog, 'Gender and Slavery in Asia', pp. 77–108.

⁸ Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico*.

⁹ Renault, *Libération d'esclaves et nouvelle servitude*; Gerbeau, 'Engagees and Coolies in Réunion Island', pp. 209–236; Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922*; Monnier, *Esclaves de la canne à sucre*.

¹⁰ E.g., Quirk, *The Anti-Slavery Project*; Bales, *Disposable People*; Kara, *Modern Slavery*.

As Hubert Gerbeau observed more than 45 years ago, a major problem in reconstructing slaving and slave trading in the IOA is the relative dearth of archival and other sources compared to those which exist for the Atlantic world.¹¹ Addressing this problem requires not only searching out previously unknown or unexplored archival and other sources, but also making innovative use of the underused materials already at our disposal.¹² As the chapters by Mrinalini Luthra, Matthias van Rossum, and Majusha Kuruppath on the one hand and Muhammad Asyraf and Fathiyarizq Mahendra Putra on the other demonstrate, one way to do so involves the careful application of new technologies to access, read, and research the ways in which Europeans thought about, recruited, and treated the chattel labourers upon whom their colonial establishments usually depended for survival. This information is important because of what it reveals about the nature, structure, and dynamics of slavery in the IOA, and how we understand the post-emancipation migrant labour systems which flourished in the British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonial empires in the Americas and Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Reconstructing slavery in the IOA has also entailed efforts to deepen our understanding of the commerce of enslavement in this part of the globe since 1500. While the illegal slave trade in the western Indian Ocean has long been a subject of scholarly interest,¹³ Michael Reidy's account of British merchant Michael Hogan's activities at the Cape of Good Hope reveals how individual entrepreneurs participated in this illicit commerce and, in so doing, sheds the kind of light on this trade's dynamics that only micro-histories can reveal. His case study underscores the importance of efforts to expand on pioneering work on reconstructing the volume, dynamics, and impact of European slave trading in the IOA and the need to appreciate that this commerce was a global, and not just an Atlantic, phenomenon.¹⁴

¹¹ Gerbeau, 'The Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean'. For more recent discussions, see: Alpers, 'The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean'; Allen, 'Ending the History of Silence'.

¹² See the forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Global Slavery* (2026) on 'Hidden Archives and the Commerce of Enslavement in the Indian Ocean and Asia' edited by Richard B. Allen, Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Matthew S. Hopper.

¹³ E.g., Gerbeau, 'Quelques aspects de la traite illégale des esclaves à l'île Bourbon aux XIX^e siècle', pp. 273–308; Gerbeau, 'L'océan Indien n'est pas l'Atlantique', pp. 79–108; Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave Trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1835', pp. 873–894; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 141–168; Gerbeau, *L'Esclavage et son ombre*, vol. 1, pp. 368–473.

¹⁴ E.g., Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIII^e siècle*; Hubert Gerbeau, 'Des minorités mal-connues', pp. 160–242; Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century', pp. 211–233; Carter, 'Indian Slaves in Mauritius (1729–1834)', pp. 233–247; Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*; Armstrong, 'Ceylon and the Slave Trade during the Dutch East India Company Period'; Allen, 'A Traffic of Several Nations',

Pascal Konings, Merve Tosun, and Matthias van Rossum's chapter introduces the online *Exploring the Slave Trade in Asia* database (ESTA),¹⁵ inaugurated in November, 2023, and highlights this database's potential to deepen our knowledge about slave trading, especially in South and Southeast Asia, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *Global Passages* database project discussed by Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Mathew S. Hopper promises to expand our understanding of slave trading in the IOA by various indigenous (e.g., Arab, Swahili, Indian) peoples as well as Europeans and, by extension, the globality of European transoceanic slave trading when it is inaugurated as an integral part of the open-access *SlaveVoyages* website.¹⁶

If these chapters attest to the promise inherent in IOA slavery studies as the second quarter of the twenty-first century begins, they are also reminders of the problems which continue to plague this field of study, not the least of which is the Atlantic-centrism which dominates slavery studies in general.¹⁷ This 'tyranny of the Atlantic' reflects the continuing scholarly preoccupation with slavery in the Americas and the Atlantic world and an attendant propensity to apply Euro-American models of slavery and coerced labour to studying slavery and bonded labour elsewhere in the globe.¹⁸ The same holds true for post-emancipation indentured labour studies which remain heavily influenced by Hugh Tinker's argument more than 50 years ago that the indentured Indian labourers who replaced African slaves in colonial sugar cane fields were the victims of a 'new system of slavery.'¹⁹ However, as many Asianists and Africanists have long appreciated,

pp. 157–177; Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', pp. 33–50; Allen, 'Carrying Away the Unfortunate', pp. 285–298; Carter, 'A Servile Minority in a Sugar Island', pp. 257–271; Allen, 'Children and European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', pp. 35–54; Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

¹⁵ <https://exploringslavetradeinasia.com>.

¹⁶ The *Global Passages: Creating a Public Database of Slaving Voyages across the Indian Ocean and Asia* project was funded by a United States National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Advancement Grant between its inauguration on 1 March 2023 and the grant's summary termination on 2 April 2025 pursuant to a presidential executive order. The project is continuing with support from the *SlaveVoyages* Consortium and will be inaugurated in 2026. In the interest of transparency, I note that I am one of the project's four principal investigators together with Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Matthew S. Hopper.

¹⁷ Alpers, 'The African Diaspora', p. 89.

¹⁸ Recent examples include: Eltis, 'Is the *SlaveVoyages* Database Useful for Scholars of Slave Trading in the Wider Indian Ocean World?', pp. 762–772; Patterson, *Enslavement*. Other discussions of this issue include Van Rossum, 'Slavery and Its Transformations', pp. 566–598.

¹⁹ Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. On the Tinkerian paradigm's legacy, see: Allen, 'Post-emancipation Labor Studies in the Early Twenty-First Century', pp. 43–59; Allen, 'A New System of Slavery at Age Fifty', pp. 961–969.

Western-inspired definitions and perceptions of 'slavery' and cognate labour systems are usually inadequate, if not inappropriate, to understanding slave and coerced labour in many parts of Africa and the wider Indian Ocean world.²⁰ These Western paradigms nevertheless continue to shape scholarly research on and discourse about slave and post-emancipation labour systems beyond the Atlantic. Doing so invariably entails ignoring, or at least discounting, the existence of different 'slaveries' around the globe in favour of reified, universal models of servitude which obscure, if not deny, the complexities inherent in the human experience with slave, bonded, and coerced labour.²¹

This 'tyranny of the Atlantic' is emblematic of another serious problem in early twenty-first-century slavery studies, namely many scholars' reluctance to look beyond the chronological, geographical, and conceptual confines of the specialised case studies which dominate this field of study and situate their studies in more fully developed local, regional, global, and comparative contexts.²² This conceptual 'tyranny of the particular' manifests itself in various ways, perhaps most obviously in the continuing propensity to study the IOA British, Danish, Dutch, French, and Portuguese slave trades in isolation from both one another and the transatlantic trades. This tendency to treat these trades in the Atlantic and IOA as phenomena separate and distinct unto themselves obscures the development of an increasingly complex global commerce of enslavement and cognate forms of labour between the fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries.

The need to transcend this particularism is demonstrated by recent research which reveals some of the ways in which the European slave trades in the IOA were entwined with one another, other local and regional commercial networks, and the larger historical processes which characterise early modern and colonial history in this part of the globe. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, witnessed the increasing intertwining of the slave, convict, and indentured labour trades in the IOA.²³ Examples of this interconnectivity include French

²⁰ More recent discussions include: Campbell, 'Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World', pp. vii–xxxii; Miers, 'Slavery: A Question of Definition', pp. 1–16; Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History*; Toledano, 'Shifting Patterns of Ottoman Enslavement in the Early Modern Period', pp. 199–220; Reid, 'Slavery and Forced Labour in Asia', pp. 33–48.

²¹ Zeuske, 'Historiography and Research Problems of Slavery and the Slave Trade in a Global-Historical Perspective', pp. 87–111.

²² Allen, *Slaves, Convicts, Indentured Laborers and the Tyranny of the Particular*.

²³ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 3, 193–206; Anderson, 'Convicts, Commodities, and Connections in British Asia and the Indian Ocean, 1789–1866', pp. 205–227. On the indentured and convict labour systems, see: Northrup, *Indentured Labor*; Anderson, *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies*; Yang, *Empire of Convicts*; Anderson, *Convicts*. For an overview of the indentured labour system, see Allen, 'Asian Indentured Labor in the 19th and Early 20th Century Colonial Plantation World'.

slave traders acquiring human cargoes destined for the Mascarene Islands of the Ile de France (Mauritius) and the Ile Bourbon (Réunion) with the acquiescence, if not active cooperation, of Dutch and Portuguese authorities in India, Mozambique, and elsewhere.²⁴ In addition to forming partnerships with Portuguese merchants in Mozambique, Mascarene-based merchants maintained extensive commercial ties throughout the Indian Ocean and deep into the Atlantic.²⁵ Gujarati merchants based in Mozambique likewise participated in the Mascarene trade during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as financiers and independent entrepreneurs, sometimes in partnership with Portuguese merchants in Mozambique.²⁶ The origins of the indentured labour system which flourished in the colonial plantation world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the ways in which indentured labourers were processed and treated cannot be understood without reference to abolitionism in the IOA and the transportation of Indian convicts to British colonies in the region during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁷ That this commerce of enslavement involved more than just the procurement and shipment of human cargoes is revealed by evidence that slave trading in the colonial IOA was frequently associated with the provisioning trades which supplied European establishments with the large quantities of food-stuffs they needed to sustain the chattel work forces upon which their survival depended.²⁸

These new insights are the product of making innovative use of already known but underused archival collections and searching out hitherto unknown archival and other source materials.²⁹ Equally important is the need to draw on the information and insights provided by cognate disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, and sociology.³⁰ The extensive body of scholarship on the

²⁴ Souza, 'French Slave Trading in Portuguese Goa (1771–1793)', pp. 119–131; Carreira, *Globalizing Goa (1660–1820)*, pp. 190–202.

²⁵ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 84–100; Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Labor Migration'.

²⁶ Machado, *Ocean of Trade*, pp. 208–267.

²⁷ Anderson, 'Convicts and Coolies: Rethinking Indentured Labour in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 93–109; Allen, 'Slaves, Convicts, Abolitionism and the Global Origins of the Post-Emancipation Indentured Labor System', pp. 328–348.

²⁸ Allen, 'Feeding Slavery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1500–1850'. On African and Asian slaves' role in creating and maintaining European establishments and empires in the IOA, see, for example: Allen, 'Slavery in a Remote but Global Place', pp. 151–176; Hassel, *Slavery and Religious Conversion in Portugal's Indian Empire, 1500–1700*.

²⁹ Allen, Domingues da Silva, Hooper, and Hopper, 'Hidden Archives.' Examples of such scholarship include: Zurndorfer, 'Economic, Social, and Legal Aspects of Slavery'; Chevaleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China'.

³⁰ Allen, 'History, Historical Archaeology and the 'History of Silence'', pp. 121–142; Allen, 'The Poverty of Archival Riches', pp. 328–344.

archaeology of slavery in the Americas confirms that the excavation and analysis of material culture associated with enslaved people can shed important light on aspects of slave life rarely, if ever, mentioned in the documentary record.³¹ While archaeologists have paid considerable attention to the western Indian Ocean,³² the archaeology of slavery in the IOA remains in its infancy.³³ The value of such research is demonstrated by research on the activities of slave washerwomen in South Africa,³⁴ the Shimoni caves on Kenya's south coast where slaves were held for export,³⁵ the *watoro* or fugitive slave communities in coastal East Africa,³⁶ the strategies used by the enslaved Malagasies and Mozambicans marooned on the 200-acre islet of Tromelin between 1761 and their rescue in 1776,³⁷ and the belief system of early nineteenth-century Mauritian free(d) people of colour.³⁸ Maritime archaeologists, in turn, have begun to reveal hitherto hidden details about slave trading in the western Indian Ocean through their excavation of the wrecks of the French slaver *Le Coureur* (1821, Mauritius)³⁹ and the Portuguese *São José Paquete de Africa* (1794, near Cape Town),⁴⁰ and preliminary work on the wrecks of the

³¹ Recent examples include: Marshall, ed., *The Archaeology of Slavery*; Bates, Chenoweth, and Delle, eds., *Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean*; Petley and Lenik, eds., *Material Cultures of Slavery and Abolition in the British Caribbean*.

³² See Seetah, *Connecting Continents*, especially the chapters by Anderson, Camens, and Clark ('Investigating Premodern Colonization in the Indian Ocean', pp. 30–67); Horton, Crow, and Boivin ('Facing Mecca from Africa: Islam and Globalization on the Swahili Coast during the First Millennium CE and Beyond', pp. 68–91); Lane ('The Archaeology of Colonial Encounters in Coastal East Africa: Recent Developments and Continuing Conceptual Challenges', pp. 143–170); and Paterson ('Historical Archaeology of Pearling in the Indian Ocean: Through the Lens of North West Australia', pp. 171–203). On archaeology's potential contribution to Southeast Asian history, see: Lape, 'Political Dynamics and Religious Change in the Late Pre-Colonial Banda Islands, Eastern Indonesia', pp. 138–155; Lape, 'On the Use of Archaeology and History in Island Southeast Asia', pp. 468–91; Lape, 'A Highway and a Crossroads: Island Southeast Asia and Culture Contact Archaeology', pp. 102–109.

³³ Kusimba, 'Archaeology of Slavery in East Africa', pp. 59–88; Walz and Brandt, 'Toward an Archaeology of the Other African Diaspora', pp. 246–268.

³⁴ Jordan, 'Unrelenting Toil', pp. 217–232.

³⁵ Kiriama, 'Archaeological Investigation of Shimoni Slave Caves', pp. 157–169.

³⁶ Marshall, 'Fugitive Slave Communities in 19th Century Kenya', pp. 21–29; Marshall, 'Spatiality and the Interpretation of Identity Formation', pp. 355–381.

³⁷ Marriner, Guérot, and Romon, 'The Forgotten Slaves of Tromelin (Indian Ocean)', pp. 1293–1304; Laroulandie and LeFèvre, 'The Use of Avian Resources by the Forgotten Slaves of Tromelin Island (Indian Ocean)', pp. 407–416; Béarez and Bouffandeau, 'Fishing for Survival', pp. 487–498.

³⁸ Seetah, 'Objects Past, Objects Present', pp. 233–253.

³⁹ Metwalli, Bigourdan, and Van Arnim, 'Interim Report of a Shipwreck at Pointe aux Feuilles, Mauritius', pp. 74–81; Van Arnim, '*Le Coureur*', pp. 40–45.

⁴⁰ E.g., <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/factsheets/history-s-o-jos-slave-ship-and-site>; <https://slavery.iziko.org.za/2015/07/23/sao-jose-paquete-de-africa/>.

French slavers *La Victoire* (1804, Mauritius)⁴¹ and *L'Aurore* (1790, Mozambique Island).⁴²

The social sciences' ability to deepen our understanding of the movement of slave and bonded labour populations in the IOA is attested to in other ways. Genetic and isotopic analysis of slave skeletal remains recovered in Cape Town⁴³ and from the 'Liberated African' graveyard on St. Helena⁴⁴ have yielded important information about the lives of the men, women, and children who reached these locations. DNA research has deepened our understanding of the modern Mauritian population's multi-ethnic origins,⁴⁵ confirmed the East African slave origin of modern Siddi communities in southern and western India and the Makrani community in Pakistan, and revealed some of their interactions with local populations through time.⁴⁶ Anthropological and sociological fieldwork has also figured prominently in deepening our understanding of slavery's legacy in places such as Mauritius, Madagascar, and elsewhere.⁴⁷

Establishing and maintaining IOA slavery studies' credibility and significance in academic and public fora will require doing more, however, than situating individual case studies in broader local, regional, global, and comparative contexts. Equally important is the need to make careful, informed use of the sources available to us. As Luthra, van Rossum, and Kuruppath and Asyrafi and Putra's chapters remind us, applying new technologies to access, read, and research

⁴¹ Manfio et al., *Reconnaissance Study of the Victoire Shipwreck, Pointe aux Canonnières*.

⁴² <https://core.tdar.org/collection/71542/the-underwater-archeology-of-a-french-slave-ship-in-northern-mozambique?text=On%2017th%20February%2C%201790%2C%20L'Aurore%20was%20hit%20by%20fate%20in%20the%20morning%20331%20of%20them%20had%20perished>. On slave ship archaeology in the Indian Ocean, see Manfio and Van Arnim, 'Maritime Archaeology of Slave Ships', pp. 492–508.

⁴³ E.g., Cox and Sealy, 'Investigating Identity and Life Histories', pp. 207–224; Kootker et al., 'Dynamics of Indian Ocean Slavery Revealed through Isotopic Data from the Colonial Era Cobern Street Burial Site, Cape Town, South Africa (1750–1827)'.

⁴⁴ E.g., Pearson et al., *Infernal Traffic*; MacQuarrie and Pearson, 'Prize Possessions', pp. 45–72; Sandoval-Velasco et al., 'The Genetic Origins of Saint Helena's Liberated Africans'; Sandoval-Velasco et al., 'The Ancestry and Geographical Origins of St. Helena's Liberated Africans', pp. 1590–1599.

⁴⁵ Fregel et al., 'Multiple Ethnic Origins of Mitochondrial DNA Lineages for the Population of Mauritius'.

⁴⁶ E.g., Gauniyal, Chahaland, and Kshatriya, 'Genetic Affinities of the Siddis of South India', pp. 251–270; Gauniyal, Aggarwal, and Kshatriya, 'Genomic Structure of the Immigrant Siddis of East Africa to Southern India', pp. 427–442; Narang et al., 'Recent Admixture in an Indian Population of African Ancestry', pp. 111–120; Shah et al., 'Indian Siddis', pp. 154–161; Laso-Jadart et al., 'The Genetic Legacy of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade', pp. 977–984.

⁴⁷ E.g., Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole*; Hamilton, Hodgson and Quirk, eds., *Slavery, Memory and Identity*; Regnier, *Slavery and Essentialism in Highland Madagascar*. See also Schrikker and Wickramasinghe, eds., *Being a Slave*.

archival sources must include a keen awareness of the limitations inherent in using these technologies, especially when the sources in question are themselves problematic.⁴⁸

Such analytical rigour is especially important when dealing with quantitative information because of the common tendency to accept statistical data at face value. This is particularly important in efforts to quantify transoceanic slaving voyages in the IOA, efforts which can elicit serious reservations or at least scepticism about the viability and value of such projects.⁴⁹ The limitations of many of the sources upon which we must rely require, for example, careful differentiation between confirmed, probable, and possible slaving ventures if we want to establish the credibility of arguments based on these data.⁵⁰ The need to raise this issue is prompted by the problems which surround the ESTA database.⁵¹ While the information contained in this database is of unquestioned importance in helping to reconstruct the commerce of enslavement in the IOA, its value is unfortunately compromised because it has been poorly curated. A systematic review of all 4,226 of its entries reveals, for example, high duplication rates in which a single voyage by a vessel is reported as two or more separate voyages; in one case, that of the *Hazenbergh* (or *Hasenbergh*) in 1677, the same voyage is recorded on five separate occasions.⁵² The compilation of master voyage lists by region reveals redundancy rates of 9.7 percent for voyages in Southeast Asia, 16.7 percent in South Asia, and 19 percent for voyages associated with the Cape of Good Hope.

Other problems, both large and small, abound. Of particular concern is the database's treating all voyages involving Madagascar and especially those between the Mascarenes and the Grande Île as confirmed slaving ventures even though

⁴⁸ See also Chevaleyre, 'Slaving and Trafficking in Ming China' in the forthcoming *Journal of Global Slavery* special issue on 'Hidden Archives and the Commerce of Enslavement in the Indian Ocean and Asia'.

⁴⁹ E.g., Eltis, 'Is the *SlaveVoyages* Database Useful'.

⁵⁰ Allen, 'Conceptualizing an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slaving Voyage Database', paper presented to the workshop 'Towards an Indian Ocean and Asian Slave Trade Database', International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 27–28 September 2018. I distinguished between these three types of voyages on the basis of the following criteria: Confirmed voyage – archival or other sources include explicit reference to the vessel carrying slaves or trading for, purchasing, or otherwise acquiring slaves during the course of its voyage; Probable voyage – there is strong circumstantial evidence that the vessel traded for slaves or carried slaves as part of its cargo, e.g., it is known to have traded slaves before or after the voyage in question, it was commissioned or otherwise authorised to trade for slaves, it remained in a known slave trading port or area for an extended period of time, etc.; Possible voyage – there is weak circumstantial evidence that the vessel traded for slaves, e.g., it visited ports or places where slave trading is known to have occurred.

⁵¹ <https://exploringslavetradeinasia.com>.

⁵² ESTA voyages 2679, 3672, 3669, 3995, 4147.

contemporary sources and published scholarship demonstrate that many such voyages sought only to procure the provisions, especially rice, cattle, and comestibles such as salt meat, needed to feed Mauritius and Réunion's resident populations or sustain French ships operating in the Indian Ocean during times of war or on their return voyage to France.⁵³ The four convoys/squadrons of Compagnie des Indes and French royal navy ships which sailed from Mauritius and stopped at Foulpointe on Madagascar's east coast before proceeding to Pondichéry, the seat of French power in India, during the mid-eighteenth century are a prominent case in point. Two of these convoys/squadrons – in 1746 (9 ships) and 1748 (7 ships) – sailed during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48) when France actively challenged the British in India,⁵⁴ while the other two sailed in 1757 (8 ships) and 1759 (14 ships) during the Seven Years' War (1756–63) when France once again fought Britain for dominance in South Asia.⁵⁵ That these ships called at Foulpointe primarily to procure provisions is illustrated by the fact that none of the 24 ships in the 1746, 1748, and 1757 convoys are known to have embarked slaves. Of the 14 vessels which left Foulpointe together on 2 August 1759, all 14 carried live cattle in their holds (a total of 912 head) while eight carried cargoes of rice as well; only four had slaves (a total of 27) on board. An argument that the three French royal navy ships which departed Foulpointe for France on 2 October 1761 had Malagasy slaves on board stretches the limits of credulity,⁵⁶ all the more so since the transatlantic slave trade database reveals that only five French ships, all privately-owned, landed African slaves in France, mostly between 1679 and 1739.⁵⁷

Other sources provide additional confirmation that not all ships which reached the Mascarenes from Madagascar or even from Mozambique and the Swahili Coast carried human cargoes. After the Ile de France's colonial assembly banned slave imports in 1794, ships sailing from Port Louis to Diego Garcia, India, Madagascar, Réunion, and the Seychelles had to post bonds for as much as 10,000 piastres (Spanish silver dollars), a staggering sum of money at the time, to

⁵³ On Madagascar's role as a provisioning stop for European ships operating in the Indian Ocean, see Hooper, *Feeding Globalization*. Hooper notes that many of the ships which called at the Grande Île were not interested in procuring slaves and that even if they wanted to do so, they were not always able to procure the human cargoes they sought.

⁵⁴ These voyages are: 1746 – ESTA voyages 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 663, 665, 667; 1748 – ESTA voyages 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688.

⁵⁵ These voyages are: 1757 – ESTA voyages 841, 842, 844, 846, 850, 851, 853, 857; 1759 – ESTA voyages 896, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 905, 906, 907, 910, 912, 913, 914, 915.

⁵⁶ ESTA voyages 958, 959, 960.

⁵⁷ <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>: voyages 34784 (1679); 33731 (1680); 33732 (1680); 30339 (1739); 34748 (1827).

guarantee that their return cargo did not include slaves.⁵⁸ Four and a half years later, on 9 January 1801, the French *chassemarée* *Thomas* arrived at Port Louis from Mozambique with a cargo consisting only of general merchandise that included tobacco, coal tar, and sail cloth; a week later, the French brig *Favorite* arrived from Kilwa with a cargo consisting only of tortoises.⁵⁹ In 1822, Mauritian police chief Edward Byam reported that 39 of 100 coasting voyages which reached the island did not include slaves among their cargo, a striking assertion at a time (1811–c.1832) when a flourishing clandestine trade was responsible for landing a total of some 107,000 slaves on Mauritian and Réunionnais shores.⁶⁰

These problems are compounded by the database organisers' failure to curate the information contained in each entry carefully. Reports about the quantity of a ship's cargo frequently do not indicate the unit of measurement of the commodity in question. The practice of treating each leg of a voyage as a separate sub-voyage makes it difficult to identify the African and/or Malagasy ports or locales where slaves were embarked with any certainty, especially when the ship called at several different ports during the course of its voyage. The same can be said about whether slaves were disembarked at either or both Réunion and Mauritius when the ship's itinerary indicates that it called at Réunion before continuing to Port Louis. This confusion extends to the *balles* (bales) of coffee contained in slave ships' holds when they arrived at Port Louis after stopping at Réunion; only those very well versed in Mascarene economic history will know that this commodity was grown only on Réunion, and that Réunionnais planters normally shipped their crop to Port Louis from whence it was exported to France and elsewhere.⁶¹

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Our knowledge of slavery in the IOA has clearly expanded dramatically since I first became involved in Indian Ocean studies more than half a century ago. The pioneering work of scholars such as Edward A. Alpers, Frederick c. Cooper, and

⁵⁸ E.g., Mauritius National Archives (hereafter MNA): NA 37/7C/112, 7 fructidor An IV [24 August 1796]; NA 37/7C, 26 fructidor An IV [12 September 1796]; NA 48/7C/138, 1 vendémiaire An V [22 September 1796].

⁵⁹ Respectively: MNA: F 4/883, 19 nivôse An IX [9 January 1801]; F 4/886, 26 nivôse An IX [16 January 1801].

⁶⁰ National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew: CO 172/38, Three Years Administration of the Isle de France (otherwise called Mauritius) and particularly in those Parts in which the Commissary of Police (Byam) has been connected with some Reference to the whole Administration of Sir R. Farquhar since the Commencement of his Government, 259. For a fuller discussion of the illegal trade, see Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 141–178.

⁶¹ Allen, 'Plantation Economy and Slavery in the Mascarene Islands (Indian Ocean)'.

Abdul Sheriff on Indian Ocean East Africa and James L. Watson, Anthony Reid, and James Francis Warren on Southeast Asia has inspired others to investigate slavery throughout the IOA.⁶² The 1970s and 1980s also witnessed groundbreaking work by historians such as J.-M. Filliot, Hubert Gerbeau, James C. Armstrong, and William Gervase Clarence-Smith which began to reveal the extent and complexities of the commerce of enslavement in this oceanic world.⁶³

Despite this expanding body of scholarship, research on slavery and slave trading in the IOA has not had the impact on global history and slavery studies that one might otherwise expect it to have. Recent histories of the Indian Ocean, for instance, pay little substantive attention to the commerce of enslavement despite emphasising the importance of trade and commerce in shaping the region's history.⁶⁴ The need to acknowledge this activity's importance is underscored by estimates that 2,392,000 Africans were exported across the Red Sea to the Middle East and India between 800–1900, while Arab, Swahili, and European merchants exported approximately 2 million East African and Malagasy men, women, and children to the Middle East, South Asia, and the Indonesian archipelago during the same period.⁶⁵ In addition to exporting hundreds of thousands of slaves to Central Asia, Indian and other merchants shipped at least 700,000 South Asians to the Indonesian archipelago, the Mascarenes, and South Africa between the fifteenth and late eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Well-developed commercial networks also moved hundreds of thousands of enslaved persons throughout and beyond the Indonesian archipelago. Bali exported an estimated 100,000–150,000 slaves between 1620 and 1830,⁶⁷ while 660,000–1,135,000 slaves are projected to have arrived in the VOC's Southeast Asian establishments between 1600 and 1800, perhaps one-half of whom did so on indigenous 'Malay' vessels and Chinese junks.⁶⁸ Slave raiders imported 200,000–300,000 slaves from insular Southeast Asia into the Sulu sultanate in the southern Philippines between 1770–1870, while the 1820s through 1840s witnessed the exportation of some 386,000–437,000 slaves from Bali, Batak, Kalimantan,

⁶² Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*; Watson, ed., *African and Asian Systems of Slavery*; Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768–1898*; Reid, ed., *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*.

⁶³ See n. 14.

⁶⁴ E.g., Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*; Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean*.

⁶⁵ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. 27, 46, 138; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Perret, 'From Slave to King', p. 164; Allen, 'Exporting the Unfortunate', pp. 541–542.

⁶⁷ Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade.' Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the India Ocean', p. 144; Raben, 'Cities and the Slave Trade in Early-Modern Southeast Asia', p. 131; Hägerdal, 'The Slaves of Timor', p. 21; Lobato, 'War-Making, Raiding, Slave Hunting and Piracy in the Malukan Archipelago', pp. 73–103.

⁶⁸ Van Rossum, 'The Dutch East India Company and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago World, 1602–1795'. See also Sint Nicolaas, 'Maritime (Im)mobility', pp. 51–75.

Lombok, Manado, the Mentawai Islands, New Guinea, Nias, Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Timor to elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago.⁶⁹

The number of Asian men, women, and children who experienced slavery and associated forms of bonded or coerced labour far exceeded these transoceanic estimates. Between 6.0–6.5 million enslaved Asians are believed to have been traded in Central Asia between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁰ Slaves comprised 10, 15, and as much as 30 percent of pre-colonial populations among, respectively, groups on Sarawak, the island of Nias, and among the Batak and Toraja on Sulawesi.⁷¹ The number of bondmen and -women in insular Southeast Asia remains difficult to ascertain, but perhaps 701,500–970,500 did so in the early nineteenth century, while the Indonesian archipelago (excluding Java and Madura) may have housed 567,000–806,000 in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷² At least 2 percent, or 3.0–3.2 million, of early seventeenth-century Ming China's population of 150–160 million were described as 'slaves' or 'bonded' persons, while approximately 30 percent of Korea's indigenous population, estimated at 14–16 million during the late seventeenth century, was held in bondage between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries.⁷³ Millions more belonged to India's so-called 'slave castes' which accounted for at least one-fifth of Mughal India's population of perhaps 140–150 million during the seventeenth century.

Despite such evidence, a nagging question remains: Why does slavery in the IOA remain marginalised in global history? The continuing 'tyranny of the Atlantic' in slavery studies is clearly partially to blame. Let me suggest, however, that the continuing failure of many Indian Oceanists and Asianists to situate their studies in more fully developed local, regional, global, and comparative contexts plays an equally, if not ultimately more, important role in perpetuating this state of affairs. Their ability to do so requires not only a thorough command of relevant scholarship, something that is not always present in the specialised case studies which characterise this field of study, but also a willingness to develop a broader, more comprehensive sense of the slave experience in this part of the globe. Such contextualisation is crucial to addressing a basic question that all historians must answer: *Why* should others be interested in what we do? Failure to answer this question

⁶⁹ Warren, *The Sulu Zone*, 2nd ed., p. 208; Bosma, 'Commodification and Slavery in the Nineteenth-Century Indonesian Archipelago', pp. 114–115.

⁷⁰ Stanziani, *Bonded Labor*, p. 90.

⁷¹ Reid, 'Closed' and 'Open' Slave Systems in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia', p. 161.

⁷² Bosma, 'Commodification and Slavery', pp. 114–115.

⁷³ Zurndorfer, 'Economic, Social, and Legal Aspects of Slavery'; Chevaleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China'; Lovins, 'Korea: A Slave Society'; Kwan and Shin, 'On Population Estimates of the Y-Dynasty, 1392–1910,' pp. 289–330, cited in Bae and Kim, 'History Lessons from the Late Joseon Dynasty Period of Korea', p. 1314.

in a compelling manner confirms the widespread scepticism that exists in many quarters about the heuristic value of history and slavery studies. Unfortunately, we live at a time when the humanities in general and history in particular are viewed as irrelevant by many people within as well as outside academe who believe that education should be all about producing 'worker bees' versed in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics but little else. Such attitudes are reminiscent of the ancient Indian parable about the blind men and the elephant, the moral of which is that true knowledge and understanding requires us to look beyond specialised 'truths' and contextualise the world in which we live. As we continue further into the twenty-first century, understanding the nature, dynamics, and legacy of the metaphorical 'elephant' that is the complex global human experience with slavery means that we must vigorously embrace that much-feared axiom in the age in which we live: *Non solum dare scire, sed etiam intelligere*, dare not only to know, but also to understand.