
PART I

Mobility, Emotions, Identities

Slavery, Ethnicity, and Identity in the Indian Ocean Colonial World

A Case Study of “Indian” Slaves on Mauritius

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Slaves brought from India were among the first permanent inhabitants of Mauritius – then known as the Isle of France – after the French took control of the island in the early eighteenth century, but, a minority in servility for the most part without indigenous names, they merged into creoleness and are all but forgotten today, their descendants for the most part ignorant of their Indian slave forebears. This can at least partly be attributed to the fact that slaves originating from the Indian subcontinent were a marginal group virtually everywhere they were transported.¹ They have consequently received much less attention than the numerically more important diaspora of slaves of African origin, although works discussing the Dutch Indian Ocean slave trade have identified three interlocking circuits: “Greater South Africa”, South Asia and Southeast Asia.² Direct slave importations from the French settlements in India, notably Pondicherry, to Mauritius have been recorded from the 1720s, but many arrived “silently”, individually, humans shipped through unrecorded transactions or rarely uncovered deceptions. Some came as spoils of war: captured lascars or sepoys sold on into slavery. Others were victims of scarcity: when famine stalked the subcontinent it was quickly echoed in the Isle of France civil status registers in pages littered with the death records of un-named newly arrived Bengalis or Telugus. The paucity of the slave archive is compounded by its ambiguity: in eighteenth-century French-language records the term “indien” could serve to represent people arriving from China and Southeast Asia as easily as those deriving from the subcontinent of India. This chapter reflects on the difficulties of recovering the history of slaves whose ethnicities are historically questionable and continue to be questioned and whose lived experiences have yet to be fully retrieved

from archival holdings so as definitively to puncture the facile stereotyping of contemporary travel accounts.

Enslaved Indians in the Indian Ocean world

Reviewing the literature on slavery in the Indian Ocean Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum concluded that while a significant body of work has excavated the lives of Asian slaves at the Cape, “for other regions, the scale of such scholarship is more modest”.³ And even the South African historiography remains flawed, as indicated by Loren Kruger’s lament about the “almost wilful ignorance of the fact that the majority of the first-generation slaves brought by the Dutch to the seventeenth-century Cape Colony were from Bengal and Madras rather than from Malaya as is still commonly supposed”.⁴ Yet, as Anthony Reid had pointed out decades earlier, Asia provides “important evidence of European colonists taking over and interacting with an existing Asian system of slavery, rather than imposing their own system in a vacuum as in the New World”. For example, he contends that the “phenomenon of slaves buying and owning other slaves” appeared to have been exported to the Cape from Southeast Asia and uses this and other examples to show why Indian Ocean slavery offers important countervailing narratives to the more commonly referenced Atlantic model.⁵ Chatterjee and Eaton provide some clues to this conundrum when they highlight – in reference to India – the complexity of slavery in the region, being “very much a process” whereby “vast numbers of people” move “through various kinds of slavery with a range of different outcomes”, the only common denominator being “the slaves’” condition of total dependency on some powerful person or institution. A further complication, they note, is that historical accounts of slavery in South Asia “must be painstakingly reconstructed from records that are typically fragmentary, opaque, and tainted by the politics of the day”.⁶ Nair’s study of slavery in only one region of India – Kerala – underscores this complexity. Alongside what are described as “hereditary slave castes” including Pariahs, Pulayas and Kuravas, Nair asserts that criminals and even women “found to have engaged in inter-caste sexual activity” were liable to be sold as slaves. In addition, a “third class” of slaves is enumerated: those who sold themselves or their children “during times of intense scarcity”.⁷ Sinnaph Arasaratnam has noted that the South Asian slave trade was fuelled by a combination of food crises and political instability.⁸

Unravelling the trajectories of slave exportation in the colonial Indian Ocean world is equally challenging. Secondary sources detailing the activities of East India trading companies in often bulky or multi-volume tomes can be surprisingly meagre when the commodity in question is slaves.⁹ Auguste Toussaint's study of the voluminous correspondence of the French merchant Jean Baptiste Pipon explains away the few allusions to slave trading on the ground that this constituted but "a minor operation" in his multifarious commercial ventures.¹⁰ Allen notes that evidence of the British East India Company's involvement in trading slaves is scarce after 1772, while Dutch records indicate that Indian slaves are frequently a small element of "mixed cargoes" shipped from one settlement to another.¹¹ The difficulty of tracking slave movements across Portuguese, Dutch, French and British colonial empires, settlements and within the minutiae of bureaucratic recording systems is compounded by the diversity of nations involved in the trade. Pedro Machado details Indian, and especially Gujarati, merchant links with Portuguese, French and Brazilian slavers from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, while Mbeki and Rossum describe networks of Chinese and Bugis slave-traders in Southeast Asia.¹² The linguistic and geographical challenges of tackling such diverse sources can well be imagined and go some way towards explaining the problematic of reconstituting patterns and routes of the trade in Indian slaves in the region.

The trade in Indians to Dutch and French Mauritius

VOC archives at the Cape indicate that the Dutch brought slaves and convicts from India to their embryonic settlement on Mauritius, but we know little about them other than their names and participation in occasional sanguinary events, such as the arson attack on the Dutch fort at Vieux Grand Port in which Antoni of Malabar and Esperance from Bengal were key participants.¹³ Foreign, particularly British, ships visiting the island indicate that some private slave trading also took place involving captives from "the East". In 1701, for example, Diodati, the Dutch Governor of Mauritius, complained of the problems caused by the purchase of individuals who subsequently claimed to be free, adding "it would help if the freemen were forbidden to buy slaves from the English, who generally kidnap them in the East. Among them are many who are really not slaves, and after being sold here are unwilling to work in the forests, thus greatly inconveniencing the Company and freemen."¹⁴ The

difficulties of dealing with runaway “slaves” as well as unruly pirate visitors and marauding rats led the Dutch to abandon Mauritius in 1710.

The French, already established on the neighbouring island of Bourbon [present day Réunion], claimed the island for France soon afterwards, renaming it the Isle of France, and settled there from 1721.¹⁵ The presence of Indian slaves on Bourbon has been recorded from the late seventeenth century, and the 1704 census there listed 45 Indians out of a total slave population numbering 311.¹⁶ Indians may well have been amongst the earliest arrivals from Bourbon on the Isle of France, and direct slave importations from the French settlements in India, notably Pondicherry [Puduchery, Andhra Pradesh] and Chandernagore in Bengal have been recorded there from the 1720s. Between 1728 and 1735 it is estimated that 269 slaves were landed on the island from India.¹⁷ However, these human cargoes were relatively insignificant in relation to the lucrative commodities trade with India, which was itself circumscribed by the vagaries of weather and war. Ships tended to stop at the Isle of France on the return voyage from India between March and June when cyclones were least likely.¹⁸ It was during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, however, that the Indian slave trade to the Mascarenes attained its zenith. French East India Company rule of the islands ended in 1767, and a free trade in slaves followed. Richard Allen estimates that 15,000 to 18,000 Indian slaves arrived on Mauritius and Réunion between 1770 and 1810.¹⁹

Scarcity and hunger did much of the work of would-be slave exporters from India to the French Mascarene islands. In 1785 the British representative in Dacca alerted his counterpart at Fort William [Kolkata] to the mass transportation of starving children:

The long continued distress this district has laboured under from a general scarcity of grain, and the failure of crops in consequence of the late deluge, has reduced its inhabitants to the lowest pitch of misery and distress; the poor and the lowest class of people, to secure to themselves a subsistence, are reduced to a sale of their children, and many hundreds have been purchased ... and immediately dispatched for Calcutta and its environs, they are, for the most part, landed in the foreign settlements, from whence, I am given to understand, they are embarked in vessels to different parts ...²⁰

Wider Anglo-French conflicts and the knowledge that their bitter rivals were profiting from the sale of “British subjects” was a key factor in developing

indignation in India about this “infamous traffic”. The purchase of 130 children by a Frenchman, Reiny, at the French enclave of Chandernagore and their subsequent shipment to Mauritius was a catalyst for Lord Cornwallis’ denunciation of the practice of “purchasing and collecting native children in a clandestine manner, and exporting them for sale to the French islands” in a despatch to the Court of Directors dated 2 August 1789.²¹ The British prohibition of the slave trade was echoed by the French in Chandernagore but abolition on paper did not prevent shipments in practice.²² The tensions which developed between these two nations over slave trafficking and the subsequent correspondence that these incidents generated are a useful source of evidence for historians.

In 1791, for example, the *Stisam Low* was stopped and searched en route from Calcutta to Pondicherry, and twenty girls and eight boys were disembarked. The boys were aged between 4 and 12 and originated from Danah, Chinsurah, Chandernagore, Calcutta and Serampore. Several were alleged to have been kidnapped directly from their homes. Fourteen-year-old Mirham’s case was typical – she had been stolen from the house of her parents by Moondhee Mahjee and sold to a Mr Sampson in Calcutta who left her in Serampore from where she was then sold on to Petit Jaun of Chandernagore who, finally, sold her to Monsieur Jourdan who shipped her, with the intention of sending her to the Mascarenes. Petit Jaun was described as “a well-known character in the line of obtaining and conveying away many helpless children from this country”.²³

In Andhra Pradesh, the kidnapping of two young men in their twenties, who had gone to the French settlement of Yanam to deliver cloth and were then instructed by one Rajah Gopaul to deliver some produce to the riverside where he forced them into a boat, was prevented only when they were able to pass a message to their relatives through local boatmen who arrived on board with a delivery of ballast.²⁴ Correspondence between the French commandant at Yanam and local British officials indicates how prevarication was a useful tool of the former – on receiving a report of 65 slaves being confined within his jurisdiction he failed to act – whilst ostensibly awaiting orders from his superior officer at Pondicherry – during which time the slaves were “dispersed”. In another case, the French commandant claimed that he had been unable to prevent the departure of a slave trader for the Isle of France, but pointed out that English vessels had also just left for the same destination, also with a quantity of slaves! At the Dutch settlement of Jaggernautporam, through which some of the ships transited, the local chief observed wryly

that the English prohibition on slave trading would be more effective if they provided “the natives all over the country with victuals, for the obtaining of which a number of natives choose slavery rather than a certain death; and indeed, I cannot see that their choice is much to be blamed”.²⁵

Identity, ownership and status issues

Classifying the ethnic status of Indian slaves is particularly problematic in the Dutch and French Indian Ocean colonial world. Dutch slave toponyms like *Esperance van Bengalen* are “often more likely an indication of the place of purchase or transshipment as opposed to geographic origins”, since the source of slave journeys is frequently unknown and contact with Europeans generally begins only when a specific city or port or settlement is reached.²⁶ Similarly, instances have been recorded in the French Mauritian archives of ethnic designations for slaves such as “indien” or “malais” being used interchangeably, while the toponym ‘malabar’ is equally problematic. Applied frequently to slaves originating from the Coromandel coast and other parts of South India, it was occasionally also used more widely, for slaves from any part of the subcontinent.²⁷ The records of slave traders are even more vague. The correspondence of French merchant Jean Baptiste Pipon is a case in point. A transaction involving three slaves describes them as handsome and aged between 12 and 18, and infers that they were purchased in India, although this is not made explicit. In two other examples he advises a prospective buyer of the arrival of nine slaves coming from Bengal and acknowledges receipt of a female slave who arrived from Pondicherry in 1791 without furnishing any further details.²⁸

French civil status records offer occasional glimpses of the Indian birth-places of slaves, but most were given new names on arrival in Mauritius and we therefore have few traces of their ethnic origins. Durba Ghosh has noted how naming practices can be used to chart racial and gendered topographies, remarking how the process of renaming Indian women domestic servants and concubines in white households “had the consequence of detaching women from their own communities by erasing a crucial sign of their origins” particularly in the South Asian context where surnames often serve to locate people by region, religion and caste.²⁹ In the Mauritian context, non-Christian slave names occasionally survive because a significant proportion of slave owners were co-religionists and from ethnically similar

groups. In 1775 Moutou, a free Malabar, reported the death of his 80-year-old Malabar slave Rama, for example. Of course, the meaning of “malabar”, as noted above, was itself problematic. In 1809 the death of Pierre Louis Maga, a “malabar”, is recorded; however it is then specified that the 47-year-old fisherman was born in Bengal.³⁰

The introduction of slave registers in the early nineteenth century forced many French owners to create “surnames” for slaves who had hitherto possessed only a forename. Some of the new names, such as Jean Bengali, Silvain Talinga and Nancy Patna, may allude to a known regional or ethnic identity. Other given surnames point to a possible caste or religious identity i.e. Hector Bramine, Adesh Musulman and Lafleur Lascar, but whether these names are fanciful rhetorical flourishes of registrants or accurate identifiers cannot, for the most part, be verified.³¹

Unlike new world slave systems, a significant proportion of slave owners and purchasers in the French and Dutch Indian Ocean settlements were non-European and frequently of similar ethnic status to their slaves.³² The presence of a free coloured Indian middle class on the Isle of France certainly served as an avenue of social mobility for some slaves, who were freed by their owners for the purposes of marriage with a free co-religionist and who were then in turn more likely to be in a financial position to purchase family members, thereby effectively freeing them from subordination to other owners.³³ Runaway slaves had opportunities to find safe refuge amongst free communities of Indians in the port capital of entrepot settlements, while those who had been kidnapped as slaves were sometimes able to obtain character witnesses from amongst their free compatriots and thereby gain their liberty. In 1785 several Indians testified before the police in Port Louis calling for the liberation of Odia Padam who had been kidnapped by Jean de Silvas, for instance.³⁴

On the other hand, plenty of examples can be found to demonstrate that owners were perfectly capable of wanton cruelty towards slaves presumed to be of their own ethnic group. Sinetamy, a free Indian at the Isle of France, was described as a “very hard character” in a local police report discussing the suicide of one of his slaves, which they attributed to his harsh treatment, without however having necessary proof to arrest him. On another occasion, it was reported that his Indian slave Arnacelon was found badly wounded with his arms bound.³⁵ Slaves were a capital asset, and whereas ties of family and conjugality could serve to mitigate and circumscribe conditions and terms of slavery, a shared ethnic identity was no guarantor of good treatment or empathy in transactions between owner and owned.

That said, powerful stereotypes were engendered about the diverse ethnic groups enslaved in the Dutch and French Indian Ocean settlements, and it is likely that these tropes played a role in determining the employment and status of some slaves. At the Cape “Bengali women had a reputation as skilled needlewomen while Malays were reputed to be excellent craftsmen” while in Mauritius the “docility” of Indian slaves and their “better qualifications” for domestic service are frequently remarked on by contemporaries.³⁶ French naturalist and artist Jacques Milbert, who spent several years on the Isle of France, most clearly expresses the tendency of white settlers and visitors to hierarchize Indian Ocean slaves according to ethnocentric perceptions in his descriptions of enslaved Indians as “the most attractive and well formed” as well as cleaner, more faithful and more sober than slaves of other ethnic groups. His depiction of the naked, breast-feeding Indian slave mistress of a French planter as equal to a sculpture by Phydias is especially noteworthy in this genre.³⁷ Punishments, equally, were meted out according to ethnic type in the opinion of one owner: “the Slaves are descended from different stocks, and the mode of punishment adapted to act on one race, is not applicable to all the castes [...]. This sense of honor prevails, especially in those of Indian origin: Degradation from the rank of commander is their punishment.”³⁸

A gendered elite in servility?

How far did these tropes impact upon the lived experiences of slaves? Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum contend that stereotypes were important in the trade and employment of slaves. They could be reflected, for instance, in the price that slaves fetched, or in the type of labour that they were assigned to do.” They acknowledge, however, that the extent to which stereotypical preferences could be acted upon was determined by availability: “the effects of these stereotypes would become less marked as the supply of Asian slaves to the Cape dwindled towards the end of the VOC period.”³⁹ Closer investigation of the occupational status of slaves of all ethnic groups does not however bear out the favoured status of Indian slaves ascribed to them by contemporaries at the Isle of France such as Milbert. During the eighteenth century, the island was a port and entrepot-based economy, and the high proportion of slaves engaged as artisans, domestics, market-sellers and similar occupations reflects this. Such slaves were not confined to the homes of their owners; on the contrary many were required to undertake work which necessitated them

travelling to, and sometimes even residing in, other spaces. As discussed in chapter 3 by Geelen et al. in this volume, “a range of formal and informal social controls” nevertheless continued to dominate the lives of such slaves.

Towards the close of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, Mauritius, conquered by the British in 1810, evolved into a plantation society. Accordingly, Indian slaves, alongside their African and Malagasy counterparts, were increasingly employed in agricultural occupations, particularly in sugar cane labour. By 1817, the commonest employment of Indian and African slaves alike was that of “pioche”, i.e. field hand. After the abolition of the slave trade, the proportion of Indian slaves declined; by 1830 there were only an estimated 3,500 Indian slaves in Mauritius out of a total slave population of 68,000, and following abolition in 1834 the Indian ex slave population vanished from popular consciousness in the wake of the much larger immigration from the subcontinent of indentured labour.⁴⁰

Reid’s study of slavery in Southeast Asia led him to the conclusion that “opportunities for upward mobility and an easier life appear to have been far greater for bonded women than men”.⁴¹ Female slaves were probably imported and purchased for the express purpose of serving as concubines in male-dominated early settler societies such as the Cape and Mauritius. Many bore children from these relationships; some were freed by their owners and inherited property from them. Kate Ekama’s chapter in this collection discusses evidence from the Ceylon VOC archives of sexual relationships between women slaves and their owners, and how, despite legal impediments to intimacy, this became a route to manumission and inheritance for themselves and their children. She eloquently portrays the difficulties for the historian of establishing the nature of such relationships, concluding that “consent cannot be read in these stories with any kind of clarity.”

In a few cases, Indian women became the legal spouses of white male settlers despite the fact that marriages between population groups categorized as white, coloured or slave were proscribed for most of the eighteenth century in Mauritius. In 1771 Pierre Dufour, an ex-soldier born in Brittany, France, married Marie Christine, his former slave, described as a “Bengaly negress”; during the Revolutionary years such marriages became increasingly common as long-term relationships were formalized when laws prohibiting intermarriage were relaxed. It is also evident that the large free Indian community (skilled contract workers such as masons and carpenters, and a few traders) provided a route to freedom for some Indian women slaves, who were purchased and liberated for

purposes of marriage. Marie, the Bengali slave of a European merchant, was expressly given up by her owner and confided to Félicien Jérôme, a free Indian from Karaikal, in order for her to contract marriage with the latter. When Josephine Franchine of Madras married Jean Louis Basile of Pondicherry, they formalized a relationship which had lasted more than eleven years, during which time she was freed by him and bore him six children. Certainly the presence of the large, initially predominantly male and Indian “free coloured” community helps to explain the fact that Indian female slaves in the Isle of France were more likely, statistically speaking, to be manumitted than female slaves of African origin.⁴² Of 199 female slaves emancipated between 1784 and 1803, 126 or 63 per cent according to Tegally were Indians, while Allen has noted the wealth acquired by such freed Indian women.⁴³ Were Indian female slaves in Mauritius, in these respects, therefore, an elite in servility?

It is in fact challenging to find unequivocal patterns demarcating Indian slaves from other ethnic groups in terms of spouse selection. Free African and Malagasy men also purchased, bore children with, and occasionally liberated women slaves of all ethnic groups, including Indians. For example, in 1778 Paul, a free Malagasy, married his Bengali slave, Suzanne, and legitimized their two children. Albert, a Mozambican employed as a postman, also married a Bengali slave. Marriages between Indian or Malay male and African female slaves are similarly on record albeit in smaller numbers. Inter-marriages between slaves of every ethnic group were in fact common, and although one might point to unions between slaves of a similar ethnicity or religion as being indicative of a certain element of “choice”, the rapidity of creolization renders such characterizations increasingly specious. Thus, while we can identify first-generation slaves Uzirmahmod and Koki, both from Calcutta, as a Muslim married couple in the records, their son was named Hector and married Sophie, a native of “Coringhee”. Given that the *Lettres Patentes* of 1723 required slaves to be instructed in the Catholic religion and baptized, the widespread adoption of Christian forenames makes it practically impossible to discover whether they or their island-born baptized offspring continue to identify with the religious and cultural traditions of forebears.⁴⁴

Secondly, how we can define and describe relationships which begin in the violence of slavery and are characterized by long periods of presumably enforced concubinage is a difficult question. As E.G. Jordan argues,

women slaves were arguably disadvantaged due to the greater likeliness of their being confined to the household in the role of domestic servants and intimately abused. Physical mobility enabled slaves to create “zones of personal autonomy” and permitted interactions with others, and while slave men’s work frequently took them into the streets, “the everyday experiences of their female counterparts were far more circumscribed. Isolated within their masters’ homes, slave women were subject to close supervision and endless workdays, as well as physical and sexual abuse.” Using the case study of Cape Town Jordan notes that the “domestic work assigned to most slave women limited not only their physical mobility but their economic opportunities as well”, pointing out that even women who were “rented out” did not necessarily benefit from the arrangements. Washerwomen were an exception, because they carried out their work almost as a “public performance” and hence became “fixtures on the landscape”.⁴⁵

Durba Ghosh tackles the problematic from a rather different perspective, making the important point that “conjugal relationships offered some native women room to maneuver strategically, fashioning selves that could be both socially and politically advantageous given their circumstances on the margins of colonial society”. Her research on women in household slavery in India demonstrates effectively how “native men and women negotiated the structures of colonial labor extraction in very different ways”.⁴⁶ Of course, the sexual dynamic in unequal power relationships between white men and black enslaved women sometimes led to sanguinary acts of vengeance and mutilation wrought on the latter and which were endlessly recycled in salacious contemporary travel and anti-slavery accounts.⁴⁷ Less well publicized were the dangers inherent in lending Indian female slaves out to young sailors and soldiers to act as temporary concubines – who could be removed on the whim of the owner – when real passions were unleashed. In 1798, a French sailor slit the throat of a Bengali slave, Rosalie, and then committed suicide by shooting himself in the mouth. The circumstances of the case remain unelucidated in the archive but indicate a crime of passion and despair.⁴⁸ As Ghosh pertinently concludes in her study of sex and the family in colonial India, “[n]ative women were often the silent, unnamed other that enabled the elaboration of various types of hierarchies and social anxieties ... the agency and subjectivity of native women was overridden, but only partially so”.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Whilst no historian of subaltern labour in the Mascarenes can be unaware of the presence of an Asian slave minority, it is surprising to note how little textual space and analysis has been allotted to this group in recent studies of eighteenth-century Isle of France society and of Indian Ocean bonded labour.⁵⁰ The erosion of their identity and interrogation of their ethnicity continue today when images of African slaves are superimposed over their stories. Remarkably, even in the very rare cases where a slave of Indian origin is the principal subject of study, the ethnic identity is appropriated or suppressed and an African physiognomy is assumed. A case in point is the recent publication of the Furcy affair by French journalist Mohammed Aïssaoui.⁵¹ Furcy was born on Réunion island to an Indian slave woman – subsequently freed by bequest – and a French father, according to his own testimony. Furcy’s long struggle to be declared “free” led to his being exiled to Mauritius from where he launched further bids for freedom. Eventually his case was heard in France where it raised a series of questions about identity and slavery and became a *cause célèbre*. The depiction of Furcy on the book’s cover and reproduced in subsequent media coverage in Réunion prompts further reflections on representations of slaves of diverse ethnic backgrounds and how studies of Indian Ocean slavery might be used to counteract, or at the very least to nuance, the currently dominant Atlantic model.

If, as Christiansē notes in this volume, the photographs of nineteenth-century Indian and African migrants “suffer from a lack of narrative”, we may argue that the pictorial representations of eighteenth-century Indian slaves too has suffered from an oversimplified narrative, one which is unable or unwilling to confront and unwrap the ethnic complexities of Indian Ocean slavery. In the absence of a competent, wide-ranging historical study of the Indian slave trade in the Indian Ocean, creative writers have fortunately stepped up. As Paul White has noted, the representation of migrancy in imaginative literature has become an effective tool for exploring the multiple worlds in which migrants lived and which required negotiation and constant self-re-fashioning.⁵² Whereas historical studies of Indian Ocean slavery choose to accord very little space to South Asian slaves, writers like Amitav Ghosh, Rayda Jacob and Ishtiyak Shukri offer revealing imagined trajectories of Indian slaves across the colonial Indian Ocean world in their novels.⁵³ European travel accounts depicted Indian slaves as aesthetically more pleasing, tractable and intelligent than “African” slaves – an elite among

the servile. The free coloured community, itself comprising many “Indians”, was more likely to manumit and marry them, thereby securing the social mobility and economic prosperity of a sizeable number. The slaves born in India themselves rarely speak directly to us, but civil status records show significant levels of intermarriage with slaves of every other ethnic group. In fact, to paraphrase Ghosh, “there are no easy ways to understand their subjectivity or to categorize their agency. [They] brought local knowledges, sexual labor, domestic expertise and linguistic abilities into their relationships with European traders, explorers and colonial officials. In less obvious ways, they also crossed various boundaries – cultural, ethnic, religious, racial – when they entered into these domestic arrangements.” Albeit on the margins of historical narratives, Indian slaves “proved to be critical to the colonial enterprise in the contact zone between Britons and the peoples they encountered.”⁵⁴

Notes

1. Richard B. Allen, “Carrying away the Unfortunate: the Exportation of Slaves from India during the late Eighteenth Century” in *Le monde créole: Peuplement, sociétés et condition humaine, XVII^e-XX^e siècles*, edited by J. Weber. Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005; M. Carter, “Slavery and Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean,” *History Compass*, 4, no. 4 (2006), 800-813. For statistics comparing the size of the Indian population vis-a-vis other slave ethnic groups see J-M. Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: CHEAIM, 1974.
2. Markus Vink, “‘The World’s Oldest Trade’: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (June 2003): 131-177.
3. Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum, “Private Slave Trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean World: A Study into the Networks and Backgrounds of the Slavers and the Enslaved in South Asia and South Africa,” *Slavery & Abolition*, 38, no. 1 (2017): 95-116.
4. Loren Kruger, “Black Atlantics, White Indians and Jews: Locations, Locutions and Syncretic Identities in the Fiction of Achmat Dangor and Others,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2001): 111-143.
5. Anthony Reid and Jennifer Brewster (eds.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, 14-17. New York: St Martin’s Press, 1983.
6. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (eds.), *Slavery & South Asian History*, 3-8. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

7. Adoor K.K.R. Nair, *Slavery in Kerala*, 24-25. Delhi: Mittal, 1986.
8. Sinappah Arasaratnam, "Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century," in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, edited by K.S. Mathew, 195-208. New Delhi: Manohar, 1995.
9. See, for example, Philippe Haudrère, *La compagnie française des Indes aux XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 1989, and Louis Dermigny, *Cargaisons indiennes*, 2 vols. Paris: SEVPEN, 1959-60.
10. Auguste Toussaint, *Le Mirage des Iles Le négoce français aux Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle*, 94. Aix en Provence: Edisud, 1977.
11. Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850*, 35-36. Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2014.
12. Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean c. 1750-1850*, 41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Mbeki and Rossum, "Private Slave Trade," 97-98.
13. Perry Moree, *A Concise History of Dutch Mauritius, 1598-1710*. London: Kegan Paul, 1998.
14. Patrick Joseph Barnwell, "Extracts from Logs of Ships Visiting Mauritius 1697-1707," in *La Revue Retrospective de l'Ile Maurice*, 3, no. 3 (May 1952): 144.
15. The name Mauritius was given to the island by the Dutch, and after the British conquest in 1810 this name was reverted to.
16. One of the earliest references to slavery on the Mascarenes relates the sale of a 12-year-old boy from India in 1687: Hubert Gerbeau, "Des minorités mal connues: esclaves indiens et malais des Mascareignes au XIXe siècle," in *Migrations, minorités et échanges en Océan Indien, XIXe-XXe siècle*, Aix-en-Provence: IHPOM, 1979: 160-242.
17. Allen, "Carrying Away the Unfortunate," 288.
18. Marina Carter, "Indian Slaves in Mauritius (1729-1834)," *The Indian Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (1989): 233-247.
19. Richard B. Allen, "The Mascarene Slave Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Slavery and Abolition* 24, no. 2, (2003): 41.
20. IOLR Bengal Revenue Consultations, 50/60, 9 September 1785, Day to Cooper, 2 March 1785.
21. Lord Cornwallis to Court of Directors, 2 August 1789, *Parliamentary Papers* 1828 Slavery in India: Correspondence of Court of Directors and the Governments in India (125).
22. The formal abolition of the slave trade decreed by the French Governor of Chandernagore was published in the *Calcutta Gazette* of 17 September 1789. The

- Joint Commissioners appointed to inspect conditions in the province of Malabar in 1792-3 after the fall of Tipu banned natives of Malabar from being exported as slaves, but Governor John recognized that the proximity of the Dutch port of Cochin and of French Mahé made preventing slaves being sold overseas difficult. Nair, Adoor K.K.R. Nair, *Slavery in Kerala*, 49-50. Delhi: Mittal, 1986.
23. IOR/P/165/53 Bengal Foreign Consultations, 20 April and 17 June 1791.
 24. IOR/P/253/6 Fort St George Military & Political Consultations, 2 March 1792.
 25. Sadlier et al., Masulipatam to Chief at Jaggernautporam, 16 January 1792, in *Parliamentary Papers 1828 Slavery in India: Correspondence of Court of Directors and the Governments in India* (125).
 26. Mbeki & Rossum, "Private Slave Trade," 107-108.
 27. The use of the term "malabar" to designate a person from the Indian sub-continent may date from earlier Portuguese explorations of the Malabar and Coromandel coasts and their failure to distinguish between the inhabitants of these regions: see Jacques-Gérard Milbert, *Voyage Pittoresque à l'Île de France, au Cap du Bonne Esperance et l'Île de Teneriffe*, 169. Paris: Nepveu, 1812, and Pierre Sonnerat, *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine fait par ordre du Roi, depuis 1774 jusqu'en 1781*, 2 vols., 1: 59-60. Paris: Private Publication, 1782. Doojenraduth Napal, *Les Indiens à l'Île de France*. Mauritius: Private Publication, 1965.
 28. Toussaint, *Le Mirage des Îles*, 94.
 29. Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire*, 19, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
 30. These entries are taken from the Isle of France civil status registers held at the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix en Provence, France.
 31. The slave registers are held at the UK National Archives in Kew, Surrey and can be found in the Treasury T71 series.
 32. See Mbeki & Rossum, "Private Slave Trade," 105 for data on the Cape, and Carter, "Indian Slaves" (1989) for slave ownership data in Mauritius.
 33. See Carter, "Slavery and Unfree Labour."
 34. Sadasivam Reddi, "Aspects of Indian Culture in Ile de France between 1803 and 1810," in *History, Memory and Identity*, edited by Vijayalakshmi Teelock and Edward A. Alpers, 35. Mauritius: Nelson Mandela Centre, 2001.
 35. The slave was sent for medical treatment and the cost was charged to Sinetamy. These cases are described by M. Jumeer, "Les Affranchis et les Indiens Libres à l'Île de France au xviiième siècle 1721-1803," 277-80. University of Poitiers thesis, 1984.
 36. Mbeki & Rossum, "Private Slave Trade," 98; Charles Grant, *The History of Mauritius or the Isle of France*, 470. London: Private Publication, 1801; Auguste

- Billiard, *Voyage aux Colonies Orientales ou lettres écrites des Iles de France et de Bourbon pendant les Années 1817-1820*, 44. Paris: Ladvocat, 1822.
37. Milbert, *Voyage Pittoresque*, 170-172.
 38. Charles Telfair, *Some Account of the State of Slavery at Mauritius, since the British Occupation in 1810*, 160. Port-Louis: Vallet and Asselin, 1830.
 39. Mbeki & Rossum, "Private Slave Trade," 98.
 40. See Carter, "Indian Slaves," for a detailed examination of the occupations of slaves of various ethnic groups.
 41. Reid and Brewster, *Slavery, Bondage*, 25.
 42. Around 6,000 free "malabars" were brought to Mauritius as skilled contract workers in the course of the eighteenth century see Amédée Nagapen, "Les Indiens à l'Ile de France: Acculturation ou Deculturation?," in *Historical and Cultural Relations between France and India, XVIIth-XXth Centuries*, 2 vols, 26. Réunion: Université de la Réunion, 1987.
 43. S. Tegally, "Social Mobility among Indians in Mauritius," BA thesis, University of Mauritius, 1996, 20; Richard B. Allen, "Lives of Neither Luxury nor Misery: Indians and Free Colored Marginality on the Ile de France, 1728-1810," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 78 (1991): 337-358.
 44. Nagapen, "Les Indiens," 25-49.
 45. Elizabeth Grzymala, "It All Comes Out In the Wash Engendering Archaeological Interpretations of Slavery," in *Women and Slavery Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic*, edited by Gwyn Campbell et al., 335-58. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007.
 46. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 23-24.
 47. In the case of Mauritius, the brutal mutilation and murder of a young woman slave by Madame Nayl is a case in point. See *Representation of the State of Government Slaves and Apprentices in the Mauritius; with observations. By A Resident, who has never possessed either land or slaves in the Colony*. London: James Ridgway, 1830.
 48. Claude Wanquet, "Violences individuelles et violence institutionnalisée: le régime servile d'Ile de France à la fin du XVIIIe siècle à la lumière des dossiers de procédure Criminelle " in *Esclavage et Abolitions dans l'Océan Indien (1723-1860). Systèmes esclavagistes et abolitions dans les colonies de l'Océan Indien*, edited by Edmond Maestri, 207. Réunion: L'Harmattan, 2000.
 49. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 251.
 50. See, for example, Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2005, and Alessandro Stanziani, *Sailors, Slaves, and Immigrants Bondage in the Indian Ocean World, 1750-1914*. New York: Palgrave, 2014.

51. Mohammed Aïssaoui, *L’Affaire de l’Esclave Furcy*. Paris: Gallimard, 2010.
52. Paul White, “Geography, Literature and Migration,” in *Writing Across Worlds. Literature and Migration*, edited by Russell King, John Connell and Paul White, 6. New York: Routledge, 1995.
53. Gaurav Desai, “Asian African Literatures: Genealogies in the Making,” *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2011): V-XXI.
54. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 256.

