Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia

Edited by
Gwyn Campbell

ROUTLEDGE

Studies in Slave and Post-Slave Societies and Cultures

Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia

Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia constitutes an important collection of essays dealing with the history and impact of the abolition of the slave trade and slavery in the Indian Ocean world, a region stretching from southern and eastern Africa to the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia and the Far East.

Slavery studies have traditionally concentrated on the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas. In comparison, the Indian Ocean world slave trade has been little explored, although it started some 3,500 years before the Atlantic slave trade and persists to the present day. This volume, which follows a collection of essays on *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Frank Cass, 2004), examines the various abolitionist impulses, indigenous and European, in the Indian Ocean world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and assesses their efficacy within a context of a growing demand for labour resulting from an expanding international economy and European colonisation.

The essays show that, in applying definitions of slavery derived from the American model, European agents in the region failed to detect or deliberately ignored other forms of slavery and as a result, the abolitionist impulse was only partly successful, with the slave trade continuing today in many parts of the Indian Ocean world.

Gwyn Campbell is a Canada Research Chair in the Department of History, at McGill University. He initiated the series of Avignon conferences on Slavery and Forced Labour and has published widely on slavery, the slave trade and other aspects of forced labour including *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*. He is also author of *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750–1895* (Cambridge, 2005).

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1 Introduction: abolition and its aftermath in the Indian Ocean world[1]

Gwyn Campbell

This is the second volume of a collection of new studies on Indian Ocean world (IOW) slavery. The papers presented here complement the contributions to the first volume by analysing the impact of abolitionist forces on the structure of slavery and other forms of unfree labour in the IOW in the context of the rise of the international economy and of European colonialism. Historians have viewed the abolition of slavery in the non-European world as largely an initiative of Western governments. Through treaties and colonial legislation, they are alleged to have successfully eradicated slavery and the slave trade in the IOW by the early twentieth century – some four decades after the end of the Atlantic slave trade. However, as these studies demonstrate, the abolitionist impulse in the IOW was far more complex than in the Americas, as there existed in the IOW a much greater variety of forms of slavery and other unfree labour.

This immediately begs clarification of what constituted slavery and how slaves differed from those subject to other forms of unfree labour. Slavery is here defined according to the 1926 Slavery Convention as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised',[2] while unfree labour is defined as 'labour that is not able to bargain at its will over wages and conditions of work, and which cannot legally withdraw from contract, implied or specific'.[3] Not all forms of slavery in the IOW conformed to that of 'chattel' slavery. Indigenous elites and Western authorities defended some forms as 'benign', or even beneficial to the slave.[4] Some escaped anti-slavery legislation and continue to the present day.[5] Abolition and emancipation are thus complex and blurred issues for much of the IOW. Any analysis of them needs to consider both the historical relationship between the different forms of unfree labour, and the dynamics of the transition from slavery through abolition to new forms of labour.

Abolition in the IOW: the context

While the international abolitionist movement arose in the context of industrialisation in Britain and elsewhere around the North Atlantic, historians have attempted to relate these developments to abolitionist impulses in the IOW in varying ways.

(i) Industrialisation and the growth of the international economy

Countering the traditional view that the abolitionist impulse originated with the eighteenth-century humanitarian movement, Eric Williams argued that economic and political goals were the true motivations of abolitionists. The Industrial Revolution fundamentally altered the British economy, lessening the importance to it of the Caribbean sugar plantations. Only once this economic transformation was underway did Britain, the foremost slave-trading nation, move to attack the slavery upon which rivals such as France were still dependent.[6]

While both the historical dynamics and the ideology involved were more complex than outlined by Williams,[7] the forces of nineteenth-century capitalism profoundly influenced the abolitionist movement. Central to the abolitionist argument was the liberal tenet that wage labour was more efficient than slave labour. This, however, needs to be placed in the wider context of classical liberal theory, which attacked the patronage inherent in the pre-industrial order, and mercantilist concepts of protectionism, monopolies and state involvement in the economy. Liberalism promoted free trade and individual endeavour in a *laissez-faire* environment, marked by the absence of government and domination by the market, wherein people sold their labour according to laws of supply and demand. Such forces were neutral and just, governed by the invisible 'guiding hand' described by Adam Smith. Liberals espoused the new economic creed with religious fervour, preaching the moral superiority of free trade to protectionism, and of wage labour to slavery.

The catalysts of change in Britain – cheap capital, population growth and industrialisation – spread to affect the entire North Atlantic world, where they steadily undermined forms of bonded labour and 'Owenite' experiments in paternalistic labour relations, and promoted the rise of contract wage labour. The process took longer than is usually thought – slave labour persisted in the southern United States until the 1860s – but by the late nineteenth century, wage labour predominated. One result was the emergence of a class structure wherein labour attempted to defend itself against the vagaries of the market through trade unionism and socialist attempts to procure government protection for the working class.

In the IOW, espousal of free trade and wage labour occurred in a very different economic context. With the exception of Japan, attempts to industrialise failed; IOW economies remained overwhelmingly agricultural and artisanal. Capital investment was directed predominantly at cash-crop production, mineral extraction, exploitation of forest resources and the establishment of a transport and communications infrastructure to facilitate export to regional and Western markets. For example, in India from 1845–75 some £95 million was invested in railways, helping to stimulate links with the interior and promote, from 1870–1914, a fivefold increase in the value of Indian exports.[8] Rail and maritime steam-transport innovations similarly reduced freight costs and promoted production and trade across the IOW.[9]

Such developments greatly enlarged regional demand for labour: much overland freight devolved upon human porterage, while increased shipping boosted demand for sailors and dockworkers. However, while in a few areas a sustained demographic boom resulted in higher population densities and the rise of a 'free' labour market – as occurred periodically in Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) towns in Indonesia[10] – overall demographic growth in the IOW compared poorly with that in the West. Europe's population more than doubled in the nineteenth century, from 190 million to 423 million, while that of Britain, Germany and the United States increased almost fivefold in the 100 years prior to 1914.[11] By contrast, it took almost 200 years for the Asian population to double: it increased from about 415 million to 970 million between 1700 and 1900. From 1871 to 1921, the Indian population grew at an annual rate of only 0.4 per cent,[12] while that of Africa increased from some 61 million to 110 million over the same period.[13]

(ii) The catastrophe century and labour

Eurocentric historiography has emphasised that the slave trade and colonial rule were largely responsible for demographic stagnation or decline in the IOW. It is asserted, for example, that these forces resulted in drastic population decline in East Africa between the late 1880s and late 1920s.[14] However, it has been shown that, in the case of Madagascar, demographic stagnation – conventionally attributed to French colonial policies from 1895 – was evident from the early 1830s and resulted from both man-made (warfare, slave raiding, economic mismanagement, labour exploitation) and natural (disease, cyclones, climatic variations) causes.[15] Many of these factors also affected the neighbouring African continent, which in addition suffered acutely from rinderpest and other cattle diseases, notably from the 1880s. It is therefore likely that the same mixture of forces as were active in moulding demographic trends in Madagascar were present in the rest of eastern and southern Africa from the early nineteenth century.[16]

Indeed, it is probable that they reflected general demographic influences across the IOW, as the entire region experienced a series of major human and natural disasters in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Climatic fluctuations played a central role in this as the nineteenth century marked a global transition from the colder climate of the Little Ice Age to a warmer climate. However, the process was uneven. In the northern hemisphere, temperatures fell from 1770, the period 1805–20 being the coldest on record in Europe, North America and Japan.[17] From 1825, temperatures started to increase, but the Far East was affected by low temperatures from 1870 to 1900, exceptionally cold weather hitting South China from 1876 to 1895.[18] Moreover, between 1830 and 1900 the southern hemisphere was in the grip of a colder climate, with an advance north in the rain zone.[19]

Longer-term climatic change was complicated by shorter-term factors. Strong 'Southern Oscillation' or 'El-Niño' ('ENSO') effects, associated with severe droughts followed in consecutive years by unusually heavy rain,[20] were experienced in 1844–6, 1876–8 and 1899–1900.[21] Again, high volcanic dust veil marked the periods 1783–8, 1832–8 and 1884.[22] Both the ENSO effect and high dust veil indexes correlate with crop failures, food shortages, and disease.[23]

Disease had always played a major role in influencing demography and wider economic and political events. However, its importance was magnified in the nineteenth century, due to increased trade and migration and improvements in transport and communications, associated with the rise of the international economy. These helped diseases to break out of old disease-tolerant environments and spread to new hitherto protected environments, where they could prove devastating. For example, cholera, endemic in Bengal, had often erupted into epidemic form and spread to other parts of India. However, from 1817 it was carried by British troops to Nepal and Afghanistan, and by British ships from 1820–2 to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, China and Japan, as well as to Muscat, from where it travelled to the Persian Gulf and to East Africa. By 1831, cholera was established in Mecca: between 1831 and 1912 it broke out forty times during the *Hadj*, pilgrims carrying it to every part of the Muslim world, from Indonesia to East and West Africa.[24] A similar pattern developed with other killer diseases such as smallpox and malaria. Venereal disease, which was rarely as dramatic but severely affected health and fertility, also spread rapidly throughout the IOW. Only from the mid-twentieth century did the spread of modern medicines and effective treatment counter this pattern in some IOW regions.[25]

The spread of virulent diseases had considerable demographic impact. The 1831 cholera outbreak killed approximately 13 per cent of Cairo's population,[26] while in the second half of the century, almost 30 million Indians died in epidemics.[27] The evidence from China illustrates what could happen when man-made disasters coincided with natural catastrophes. One of the few IOW regions initially characterised by very fast demographic growth, its population leapt from approximately 300 million to 420 million between 1800 and 1850. However, epidemics in 36 of the 61 years from 1811 to 1872,[28] combined with almost constant warfare from 1850 to 1878, left vast tracts of central and northern China depopulated; in the T'ai-p'ing and Nien uprisings alone, some 25 million people died. In the famine of 1877–9, a further ten million perished in northern China. Many sought to escape through emigration. By 1900, the Chinese population stood at only 450 million.[29]

The slave trade

Due to comparatively low and uneven population growth rates, and the extent of traditional forms of bonded labour, the stock of free wage labour in the IOW remained limited and expensive. Accessible capital resources in the region were similarly restricted. Consequently, authorities and private employers in the IOW, indigenous and European, turned largely to forms of unfree labour to meet their requirement for cheap manpower.

This led first to an expanded slave trade. Indeed, the IOW slave trade peaked in the nineteenth century. Estimates for the maritime slave trade from East Africa at that time vary considerably. Higher estimates consider over two million slaves were exported between 1830 and 1873, when slave shipments from Zanzibar were banned. If mortality through slave raiding and losses en route to the coast is taken into account, the total loss of East African manpower could have been over 20 million.[30] Ralph Austen's revised estimates indicate that 800,000 slaves were exported from East Africa to Islamic countries to the north in the nineteenth century, 300,000 across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and the rest from the Swahili coast.[31]

However, Abdul Sheriff emphasises that nineteenth-century demand for African slaves in the Middle East was generally low as few sectors there experienced economic development. This was reflected in the relocation of the Omani ruling elite to East Africa where the slave trade fed its Zanzibar and Pemba plantations, and only in part Persian Gulf markets.[32] Indeed, demand from the French islands and Madagascar may have promoted East African slave exports more than Middle Eastern markets did.[33] Conventional assumptions that the 1820 Britanno–Merina Treaty and the Moresby Treaty of 1822 ended the slave trade in waters south of Cape Delgado have long been discredited. Slaves were exported from the Swahili and Mozambique coasts to the Mascarenes, neighbouring French islands and, increasingly from the 1820s, to Madagascar. Indeed, there is evidence that from 1873 a considerable portion of the slave traffic formerly channelled through Zanzibar to Muslim markets in the north was diverted into this 'southern' trade.[34] My previous estimates give possible maximum slave imports into Imerina from East Africa of around 300,000 slaves from 1821 to 1895 and slave exports from Madagascar to the Mascarenes from 1801 to 1820 of 35,800, roughly half the figure reached by Pier Larson. I also estimated that over 400,000 East Africans entered the French islands, many via Madagascar, over the period 1801–95, most under the guise of contract labour, of which some 145,500 were landed in the period 1801–30. In his turn, Richard Allen considers that some 165,000 to 173,000 slaves, mostly East African and Malagasy, were imported into the Mascarenes alone between 1800 and 1848.[35] Combined 'southern' and 'northern' western Indian Ocean sector estimates indicate that total East African slave exports in the nineteenth century may have reached 1.5 million.

At this stage, no overall estimates exist for the nineteenth-century slave trade elsewhere in the IOW. However, the indications are that it was considerable and grew dramatically with the increasing integration of the region into the international economy, notably from the mid-century.[36] For example, rising British trade with China stimulated production and commerce in the South China Sea and eastern Indonesia, which in turn increased demand there for slaves as sailors and traders as well as collectors of forest resources and agricultural workers.[37]

Indigenous resistance to slavery

Extraneous forces, notably a combination of capitalism and Western colonialism, were mainly responsible for abolitionist measures in the IOW.[38] However, as a number of contributions emphasise, indigenous resistance to, and structures for escape from, slavery were also significant.[39]

(i) Manumission and redemption

The rate of individual manumission was strongly linked to the desire to assimilate slaves into local society.[40] Islamic societies, as William Clarence-Smith notes, developed the legal apparatus for both manumission and assimilation well before the nineteenth century.[41] The *sharia* taught that manumission of slave converts was meritorious. Slaves could redeem themselves while children resulting from the sexual union of slave masters and concubines inherited a non-slave status, as did a concubine mother upon the death of her owner. Of Bahrain's 'African' pearl divers in 1831 and Kuwait's 'African' population at the start of the twentieth century, an estimated one-third were non-slaves.[42] In Sulu, where integration of outsiders was of vital economic importance, conversion to Islam was not a prerequisite for manumission of female slaves; marriage to a non-slave subject could suffice.[43]

Manumission was more readily granted where a close owner–slave relationship existed. It was thus accorded more readily to domestic slaves than to those employed in activities and areas separating them from the slave-owning household. A high rate of individual manumission by Europeans in the city-ports of Southeast Asia and the Cape stemmed from the wish of the owner that upon his/her death the slave be freed.[44] In Imperial Madagascar (*c*.1790–1895), manumission was considered meritorious for *zazahova*, or Merina enslaved chiefly for indebtedness, with whom slave owners shared a common cultural heritage. This contrasted with non-Merina slaves, who often spoke dialects of Malagasy largely incomprehensible to the Merina, and with slaves of African origin.[45]

Redemption[46] started in some cases at the point of enslavement. In most societies, war captives could be ransomed and it was theoretically possible for slaves everywhere to redeem themselves. In Southeast Asian cities and Sulu, self-redemption was reasonably common.[47] Again, where the threat of uncompensated abolition loomed, as in German East Africa in the late nineteenth century, some indigenous slave owners encouraged self-redemption by slaves.[48] Nevertheless, in practice self-redemption was rare in most IOW regions as most slaves found the price demanded too high. To the original slave purchase price, owners added maintenance and training costs.[49] Labour extracted from the slave 'debtors' was usually counted towards payment of the interest on the 'loan', while owners normally took from 50 to 75 per cent of any earnings a slave might make, and could charge for food, clothes and lodging.[50]

Individual manumission/redemption posed no threat to the slave system: the number of slaves affected was limited, sometimes by law; the possibility of manumission acted as an important psychological safety valve that helped temper the slaves' impulse to revolt; and manumissions encouraged slave imports to replace those thus 'freed'.[51]

(ii) Marronage

Marronage occurred on a scale sufficient to worry authorities, both in plantation societies such as the Mascarenes, and non-plantation economies across the IOW.[52] In Korea, where the crown tacitly encouraged flight, up to 8 per cent of all privately owned slaves ran away from their owners.[53]

Nevertheless, escape tended to be a spontaneous, individual and short-term reaction to mistreatment. Flight, rare for female slaves who preferred to remain behind with their children, was most common amongst newly acquired young adult male slaves. However, slave escapees were vulnerable to recapture as few possessed local kin or spoke the local language. Also, they could often be easily identified by their physiognomy, or by self-inflicted 'tribal' brand marks. Fugitive slaves risked re-enslavement by 'free' people unconnected to their owner. In larger urban areas, runaway slaves might even seek the protection of alternative 'masters'. Many who returned to their home communities, such as Filipino slaves fleeing Sulu, were rejected and subsequently lived marginal existences on the periphery of the dominant society.[54]

Those runaway slaves desiring permanent escape commonly joined maroon bands. Predominantly male, maroons inhabited geographically remote and often economically marginal areas where subsistence cultivation or foraging proved difficult. To survive, they were forced to raid surrounding communities, often kidnapping people for sale. The authorities crushed most maroon communities, although a minority flourished, some transforming themselves into major slave traders.[55] The colonial advance in the late nineteenth century weakened slave-holding powers. Where this happened, as on the Benadir coast of Somalia and in German East Africa, it could, at least temporarily, offer maroons increased chances of establishing independent existences.[56]

Slave revolt in the IOW was remarkably rare for many of the same reasons that slave flight was limited: most IOW slaves were women. Often involved in intimate relationships with their owners, and frequently offered greater opportunity to assimilate into the dominant society than male slaves, they were reluctant to take risks that might damage their children's interests. Again, assimilation and ethnic or caste divisions hindered the development of a slave consciousness and leadership. As noted, rebel slaves often survived by participating as agents in the slave trade.[57]

(iii) Abolitionist measures

The major orthodox Islamic legal schools held that freedom was the normal condition of humanity, with the result that the Muslim debate over slavery never ceased. In 1808, Muslim *muftis* in Calcutta ruled that sale of family members and enslavement for debt, possibly the main causes of enslavement, were wrong.[58] 'Modernist' Muslim forces reinforced external abolitionist pressures, notably in Egypt and East Africa, while some Islamic regimes adopted abolitionist measures coterminously with European powers. Thus in 1847–8, Ottoman rulers banned the maritime slave traffic in the Gulf.[59] Slavery was also a major issue for unorthodox Islamic groups one of which, the Ismaili *Druzes* sect, opposed slavery from their foundation in the eleventh century.[60]

Nevertheless, in practice most Muslims defended slavery on the grounds that the *sharia* supported the institution. Modernist influences were weak in the Arabian peninsula, where slavery was particularly strongly upheld by the 'literalists' who originated in the Wahhabi movement of central Arabia in the eighteenth century and later spread to South Asia. In the late 1840s, the Shah of Persia even argued that the purchase of slaves was meritorious as a means of converting infidels to the faith.[61] Many Muslims resisted the abolitionist movement as a 'Christian' assault on Islam. Some, such as the Somali nomads in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, did so violently.

At the far eastern side of the IOW, in Korea, sharecropping had largely replaced slavery on big estates by about 1700 and the crown sought through abolitionist measures to transfer remaining private slave resources into royal control. In 1744, it abolished enslavement for debt and, in 1783, ended 'guilt-by-association', whereby a convicted prisoner's family members might be enslaved. The 1801 abolition of the public *nobi* system of hereditary enslavement, which emancipated 66,000 *nobis*, marked the effective demise of Korean slavery; all private slavery was officially abolished in 1894.[62]

Other 'indigenous' abolitionist moves, generally interpreted as the result of Western abolitionist pressure, had mixed results. In Thailand, where they appear to have been effective, slavery had largely disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century.[63] Abolition proclaimed in China just prior to the end of Manchu rule in 1911 had little impact on rural areas until after the communist seizure of power in 1949.[64] Imperial Madagascar and Ethiopia adopted anti-slave-trade legislation but slave trading and slavery persisted: in Madagascar until the French abolished slavery in 1896, and in Ethiopia well into the twentieth century.[65]

Western powers and abolition in the IOW

In the nineteenth century, there were three main Western-driven abolitionist impulses in the IOW: the abolition of slavery in existing empires; pressure on indigenous powers to enact anti-slavery laws; and implementation of abolitionist measures under the new colonialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The British and French officially abolished slavery in most of their imperial domains in 1834 and 1848 respectively. However, abolition did not extend to India – under East India Company rule – until 1843 and was then only partial. Not until 1860 was slave holding banned in India.[66] There is considerable debate about slavery and other forms of bonded labour in British settlements being undermined prior to abolition by economic forces associated with the new financial and industrial structures of the nineteenth century. For instance, well before the 1834 abolition of slavery in the Cape, the 1826 removal of measures protecting wine had diverted investment to the far less labour-intensive wool-producing sector. Advocates of *laissez faire*, including the *South African Commercial Advertiser* and nonconformist missionaries, urged the abolition of slavery and other forms of bonded labour, such as indentureship. They considered wage labour to be more productive and the only true form of 'free' labour.[67] Elsewhere, however, the labour-intensive nature of the economy and lack of free wage labour rendered academic any arguments that slave labour might be inefficient.[68] In other European colonies, authorities often supported slavery until formal abolition. For instance, Robert Farquhar, the first British governor of Mauritius, delayed anti-slave import measures in acknowledgement of the cheap labour requirements of local sugar planters.[69] Even following abolition, French planters on Réunion continued to import slaves under the guise of contract labour.[70]

Western powers, notably Britain, also applied pressure on indigenous IOW authorities to adopt abolitionist measures, often with the veiled threat of intervention. This prompted powers as far apart as the Ottoman empire, Thailand, Zanzibar, Imerina and Ethiopia to make at least official proclamations against the slave trade and slavery.[71] However, as noted, forms of slavery were widely maintained in these countries in which even overtly abolitionist resident Europeans sometimes resorted secretly to slave labour. For instance, in Madagascar, foreign missionaries 'redeemed' slaves whom they subsequently obliged to work for them, allegedly in repayment of their redemption price, or hired slaves from Merina.[72]

The late nineteenth century witnessed an imperialist surge in the IOW during which the fight against slavery formed a central justification for the imposition of European colonial rule. Moreover, 'liberated' slaves were a source of manpower in a colonial era that was, like the pre-colonial era, characterised by a scarcity of wage labour and capital. Preconditions for economic development were the establishment of law and order, private property rights, and basic transport, communications and banking structures. All these were costly. However, colonial regimes were governed by the precept that the colony should be both self-financing and, in the longer term, a source of profit for the imperial power. Significant European capital investment occurred only in immediately profitable projects, such as gold mining, and significant European settlement only in temperate climes. With limited aid from the mother country, colonial governments attempted to maximise exploitation of local resources. As the colonised were the chief source of taxation and manpower, a colonial priority was to transform the local working population into an exploitable and taxable wage-labour force.

However, much of that manpower was tied up in forms of servitude to private individuals, largely to members of the local elite whose assistance was required to administer the colony. Thus, while moving quickly to hinder slave trading, colonial authorities were reluctant to enforce rapid abolition lest it alienate the indigenous slave-owning elite. Their fears were sometimes justified; for instance, in the Muslim province of the southern Philippines abolition in 1904 sparked a decade of warfare.[73] Colonial authorities also feared that abolition would deprive European colonists of labour. In Somalia, the colonial regime initially permitted European settler farmers access to slave labour and even returned fugitive slaves to their owners;[74] while in German East Africa, European planters were permitted to 'ransom' slaves who were obliged to work for their 'liberators' until the ransom had been paid off.[75]

The British, in a variant adopted by other colonising powers, declared newly conquered territories to be 'protectorates' and thus avoided enforcing some abolitionist measures compulsory in colonies. Complete bans on slavery in European-controlled territories occurred fitfully well into the twentieth century. In Africa, the internal slave traffic remained buoyant for some fifty years after the banning of the external slave trade. In the Sudan, effective measures to curtail slavery were taken only in the late 1920s.[76] On the eastern side of the IOW, the French first seriously apply anti-slavery measures in Indochina in 1897, while the British abolished slavery in Hulsawng valley in eastern Burma only in 1926. Slavery was outlawed in the Netherlands Indies in 1860, but the Dutch then possessed only one-quarter of the Indonesian territory that was to pass under their control by 1910, in much of which they tolerated slavery. Slavery endured in remoter regions of French Indochina and the Dutch Indies into the 1940s.[77]

The Middle East was drawn into the British informal empire with the disintegration of the Ottoman empire after the First World War. However, abolitionist pressure was muted due, from the 1930s, to Britain's wish to safeguard the region's oil resources. Indeed, the British oil company at Abu Dhabi on the Trucial coast, the modern-day Gulf Emirates, knowingly employed slaves as late as the early 1950s.[78] The trans-Red Sea slave traffic was maintained, notably under the guise of pilgrimages to Mecca and other holy sites, as was the slave trade across the Persian Gulf from the impoverished Makran coast of Iran. Qatar formally abolished slavery only in 1952, Saudi Arabia, which possessed a literalist regime, in 1962; and the Trucial states in 1963.[79]

Many nationalist movements identified colonisation with slavery, and independence with emancipation. This identification had a long heritage. Thus in South Sulawesi, Wajo described their rebellion against Bone in 1737 as a 'liberation struggle' in which they successfully shed their 'slave' status.[80] In twentieth-century nationalist rhetoric, it was common to distort history and deny the presence of slavery in pre-colonial times.[81] In the Second World War, Japan justified its military expansion in the Asia-Pacific region as a means of liberating Asian countries from centuries of subjection to Western colonial powers.[82] However, liberation struggles did not necessarily imply a desire to eradicate structures of servitude. The economies of both eighteenth-century Wajo and Japan's Second World War Asian empire largely rested on slave and other forms of bonded labour.[83]

Non-slave sources of unfree labour

Abolitionist measures in the IOW reduced the volume of the slave trade without boosting the quantity of 'free' wage labour sufficiently to meet demand. Consequently, there was an expansion of non-slave forms of unfree labour. These shared many of the attributes of slavery; Suzanne Miers suggests that, when unfree labourers were treated worse than slaves, it would be appropriate to term them 'virtual slaves'.[84]

(i) Penal labour (imported and local)

European and indigenous authorities in the IOW used convict labour. European settlements regularly transferred penal 'slave' labour from one part to another of their IOW empire. Thus indigenous convicts were sent from Goa to Mozambique by the Portuguese and by the Dutch from Batavia to the Cape.[85] This practice increased in the transition years of abolition as slave labour progressively dwindled. For example, during the early nineteenth century, the English East India Company despatched Indian convicts to Singapore, Malacca, Mauritius and Burma. Clare Anderson presents a case study of some of the 1,500 Bengali convicts shipped to Mauritius between 1815 and 1836 (the migrant convict labour system there lasted until 1851), ostensibly for public works but sometimes assigned, in return for payment, to private planters who often treated them as slaves.[86] Nevertheless, some of the convicts' relatives volunteered to accompany them rather than remain at home in conditions that might be more wretched.[87] Penal labour was also widely used by indigenous authorities for the harshest types of work. For instance, the Merina regime in Madagascar used convicts in road construction, mining and foundries.[88]

(ii) Apprenticeship and indentured labour

A number of contributors to this volume explore the overlap between slavery, 'apprenticeship' and indentured labour, arguing that recruitment methods, conditions of work and housing were similar.[89]

Indentured labour was an old institution, either formalised by contracts, or *ad hoc*, as with Khoi and San boys captured by Dutch farmers in the Cape interior during the eighteenth century. The captives were forced to work until the age of twenty-five, by which time they were often married, with sons who were subject to similar obligations. Many parents refused to abandon their children and so remained tied to the farm for life. Following abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the Caledon Code of 1809 formalised indenture in the Cape through a 'pass' system, which restricted San and Khoi to farms in a system of 'virtual slavery'. Thus, Nigel Worden argues, the first effective formal abolition in the Cape was not official abolition in 1834 but the 1828 repeal of the Caledon Code.[90]

Upon abolition in the Cape and on Mauritius, ex-slaves, who received no financial assistance, were declared 'apprentices' and obliged to continue working for a fixed period for their old masters. In the Cape, the system ended in 1838, but on Mauritius it continued until mid-century. Many apprentices fell into debt bondage to their old employer or chose to continue working for him in order to remain with their children.[91] Another temporary solution to labour shortages was the placing of 'prize negroes', captured from the slave ships, under contract to European settlers; those granted to Mauritian planters were 'leased' to the government for four days a year to perform public works.[92]

With the dramatic rise in demand for labour due to the expanding international economy, European authorities in the region inaugurated a new indenture system. Generally involving five-year contracts, it channelled manpower resources to enterprises both within and external to the IOW, such as the sugar plantations of the Fiji Islands. Recruits comprised essentially poverty-stricken Indians, Chinese and, for the French islands, Africans. By the end of the nineteenth century, approximately one million Indian indentured labourers were employed in India; two million were also shipped to overseas plantations between 1834 and 1920.[93]

Certain features of the new indenture system resembled those of slavery. Workers were overwhelmingly of low-status origin. For instance, the first labourers on the Brahmaputra Valley tea plantations in Assam were 'primitive' aboriginals, followed by low-caste Hindus and low-status Muslims.[94] The major recruitment areas for Indian indentured labour in general were Bihar, the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Labourers were invariably recruited on the basis of advances made to their families – a highly effective way of ensuring the individual honoured his/her contract.[95] Recruitment agents sometimes used trickery, coercion and even abduction to obtain workers. They also received sums of money from employers, which the latter considered an advance on wages due to recruited workers. Wage rates, consistently far lower than in the 'free' wage-labour sector, were seldom standardised until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Payment was sometimes made in the form of tokens redeemable only in plantation-associated stores.[96] Indentured labourers were forbidden to strike and their geographical movement was severely restricted. Legislation was enacted to punish those who deserted or otherwise broke their contract. Workers' living quarters were frequently unsanitary and labourers experienced high rates of sickness and disease. On the Brahmaputra plantations from 1865–7, worker mortality rates ranged from 20 to 40 per cent.[97]

Indentured labour elsewhere in the Indian Ocean world also comprised mainly impoverished 'outsiders' often recruited by force or through debt. So closely did the contract-labour schemes to Réunion from India and East Africa resemble the slave trade that both were prohibited.[98]

Nevertheless, indentureship and apprenticeship were not synonymous with slavery. Legally, the slave and his/her offspring were condemned to life-long servitude, with no right to remuneration or inheritable property. By contrast, the servitude of the apprentice and indentured labourer was nominally voluntary and based on limited, generally three- to five-year contracts, enforceable by law. Apprentices and indentured labourers also possessed the right to remuneration and heritable property, and controlled much of their social life. Some voluntarily renewed their contracts. Others returned home. Most ex-indentured labourers, unlike ex-slaves, established successful livelihoods locally outside the plantation sector, where they developed viable communities, some members of which, as illustrated by certain Indians on Mauritius, achieved positions of considerable wealth and power.[99]

(iii) Forced-labour schemes

Another common response to manpower shortages in pre-colonial and colonial times was the imposition of forced labour or *corvée*.[100] Some indigenous IOW powers instituted massive unfree-labour schemes, a factor often overlooked in traditional historiography. In the nineteenth century, governments from Korea, Thailand and Burma to Iran, Zanzibar and Imerina attempted to create and economically exploit regional empires. Critical to their success were centralised administrations and armies equipped with modern weapons, produced locally and/or imported. Administrations needed bureaucrats and armies required soldiers. Also, in the absence of capital investment, attempts to stimulate industrial production and cash crops or other export staples, to finance imports, called for huge labour inputs.

Martin Klein considers that the labour requirements of Middle Eastern and pre-colonial African state building were met by an increased use of slaves.[101] However, in pre-colonial Asia and Madagascar, neither the slave trade nor forced-labour impositions satisfied state manpower requirements. Consequently, some governments sought to transfer slave-labour resources