

Transition from Slavery in Zanzibar and Mauritius

This book is a product of CODESRIA Comparative Research Network with the Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute (ZIORI) and the University of Mauritius.

Transition from Slavery in Zanzibar and Mauritius

A Comparative History

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Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa

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BP 3304 Dakar, 18524, Senegal

Website : www.codesria.org

ISBN : 978-2-86978-680-6

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Typesetting: Alpha Ousmane Dia

Cover Design: Ibrahima Fofana

Distributed in Africa by CODESRIA

Distributed elsewhere by African Books Collective, Oxford, UK

Website: www.africanbookscollective.com

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CODESRIA would like to express its gratitude to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Open Society Foundations (OSFs), TrustAfrica, UNESCO, UN Women, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and the Government of Senegal for supporting its research, training and publication programmes.

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Preface

Abdul Sheriff

The coincidence of two islands in the western Indian Ocean of a similar size in terms of area and population, but with different histories of human habitation, and more particularly, with a contrasting experience of slavery, provided a unique case for comparative history of transition from slavery in Zanzibar and Mauritius. While the former is close to the East African coast, and has been settled by humans for perhaps as long as thirty centuries, the latter in the middle of the Indian Ocean was uninhabited when discovered by the Europeans in the sixteenth century. The Europeans came with a system of slavery that was an extension from the familiar Atlantic system, although slaves came from a broader range of sources, including Asia, Madagascar and Africa. Zanzibar, on the other hand, had been involved in intimate commercial, social and cultural interactions across the Indian Ocean for at least two millennia, including slave trade and slavery that was tinged by an older slavery tradition influenced by Islam. In the nineteenth century, dependent slave systems developed on the islands; but while Zanzibar represented a variant of an Indian Ocean slave system, Mauritius represented a variant of the Atlantic system – yet both flourished when the world was already under the hegemony of the global capitalist mode of production.

The opportunity was therefore taken by two directors of the Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute (ZIORI), Professors Abdul Sheriff and Vijayalakshmi Teelock, to initiate a research project on a comparative history of slavery and its transition to free labour in the two islands. The research was undertaken primarily by two young scholars, Mrs Saada Wahab and Mr Satyendra Peerthum, who conducted intensive research in their respective countries, and was coordinated by the two directors. The project was kindly funded by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). We are very grateful to the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, Dr Ebrima Sall, for encouraging us to undertake such a study; to Abdon Kouassivi Sofonnou, for following up on our progress with many helpful suggestions; and, finally, to Tesfaye Tafesse, for his very pertinent comments which helped us finalise our report. The CODESRIA grant enabled us to organise three workshops – the

inaugural and final workshops in Zanzibar in December 2011 and April 2012, and the mid-term workshop in Mauritius in January 2012, which allowed us to work more closely to bring out the comparative aspect of our programme.

We hope that the comparative study on Mauritius and Zanzibar will prove helpful to those involved in comparing the Atlantic experience with that in the Indian Ocean for the better understanding of both.

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Abbreviations

MNA	Mauritius National Archives
ZNA	Zanzibar National Archives
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office (British National Archive)

Glossary

Affranchissement	Manumission of the slave or apprentice through purchase or freed by his or her owner
Arpent	Old French measurement for land. One arpent is equivalent to 1.043 acres (one hectare is equivalent to 2.47 acres or 2.57 arpents)
Bredes	Leafy green vegetables
Camp des Noirs Libres	Suburb of Port Louis, capital of Mauritius, housing freed slaves in the eighteenth century
Edda	The transitional period, after divorce or a husband's death during which a woman cannot remarry
Gens de Couleur	A free Coloured or a legally free non-European, usually of African, Malagasy, European and Asian origin or of mixed ancestry
Harem	Private area of a Muslim household
Kijakazi	Slave girl
Maroonage	The practice of slaves running away from their owners
Matricule Department	The office where government-owned slaves, during the French and early British Period, were housed, clothed, fed and put to work
Metayage	Sharecropping
Metayers	A sharecropper or a land tenant who shares his produce with his landlord in exchange for the use of his land
Mzalia/ Wazalia	Born slave(s), born into the owner's household
Mjinga	Fresh, unskilled slave from interior of Africa
Mjakazi	Female slave who worked as a domestic servant
Non-praedial slaves	Non-agricultural slaves
Pas Géométriques	Crown land or government land located near or on the sea coast
Petit morcellement	The small-scale sub-division of plots of land which took place during the mid-nineteenth century
Praedial slaves	Agricultural slaves
Procureur General	Attorney-General
Sharia	Islamic law dictated either by Qur'an or Sunna (the Prophet's tradition)

Suria	Female slave who cohabitated with the slave master as a secondary wife with certain legal rights and social status
Temps margoze	Expression in Mauritian Creole concerning the bitter days or the days of slavery
Vieux affranchis	Freed slaves or slaves who were freed prior to 1 February 1835, either by purchasing their own freedom or being manumitted by their owner
Wachukuzi	Porters
Wasia	Testament or will

Contributors

Abdul Sheriff was born and educated in Zanzibar. He studied Geography (BA 1964) and African History (MA 1966) at the University of California at Los Angeles, and African History (PhD 1971) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He taught history at the University of Dar es Salaam (1969-1991); was Chairman and Member of the Presidential Committees on the State University of Zanzibar (1995-2002); Advisor and Principal Curator of the Zanzibar Museums (1993-2005); Executive Director of the Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute (ZIORI 2007-12); and Chairman of the Tanzania Constitutional Forum (2011-15). He has written or edited a number of books, including *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar* (1987), *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule* (ed. with Ed Ferguson, 1991), *History & Conservation of Zanzibar Stone Town* (1995), *The Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean – Cosmopolitanism, Culture & Islam* (2010), and *The Indian Ocean: Oceanic Connections & the Creation of New Societies* (ed. with Engseong Ho, 2014), as well numerous scholarly articles. He was awarded the Prince Claus Award ‘in recognition of exceptional achievement in the field of culture and development’ in 2005. Professor Sheriff’s current research interest is on the history of Zanzibar, the Swahili coast and the Indian Ocean.

Vijayalakshmi Teelock teaches and researches Mauritian and Indian Ocean History at the University of Mauritius. She is Founder and Coordinator of the Centre for Research on Slavery and Indenture at the University of Mauritius; and Member of the UNESCO International Committee of the Slave Route Project. She has published *Bitter Sugar: Slavery and Slavery in 19th century Mauritius* (1998), *Select Guide to Sources of Slavery* (1994) ; edited with Thomas Vernet an Inventory of Sources on Mauritian Slavery from the Col C4, French National Archives (2011) and *Traites, esclavage et Transition vers l’engagisme* (2015), amongst other publications. Professor Teelock has coordinated numerous projects relating to the history and archaeology of Slavery and Indenture, and Heritage in Mauritius.

Saada Omar Wahab is an Assistant Lecturer teaching and doing research on history at the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA). She studied History (Master of Arts) at the University of Dar es Salaam with a thesis on ‘Nationalization and Re-Distribution of Land in Zanzibar: The Case Study of Western District, 1965-2008.’ She is currently preparing for PhD studies on the History of Maritime Trade: A Case Study of Indian Traders in Zanzibar, c. 1870s – 1963.

Satyendra Peerthum obtained his B.A (Hons) in History from the University of Cape Town and M.A. from the University of Mauritius. In 2004, he was an awardee of an Outstanding Young Person of the Year by the Young Economic Chamber of Mauritius. He was a Researcher for the Truth and Justice Commission (2009-11), the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture, and the National Heritage Fund (2002, 2003, 2010). He was a part-time lecturer in history at the University of Mauritius (2002-2007) and the Charles Telfair Institute (2012-2013). He is now based in the Research Unit of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site in Port Louis, Mauritius. He coordinated two international indentured labour conferences (in 2011, 2014) and several AGTF publications. His areas of specialisation include the study of slavery, indentured labour system, the Mauritian working class and cultural heritage issues in Mauritius. He has presented academic papers at many conferences, published several academic articles and books, and participated in several TV programmes and documentaries on history. He is currently working on three publications on heritage sites, the Liberated Africans, and the Antoinette Sugar Estate in Mauritius which are due to be published in 2016.