
Emancipation and Post-emancipation in Zanzibar

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There has been a heated debate on slavery and transition from it in the Atlantic region and the rest of the world, and a comparative study of two islands in the Indian Ocean where the two types of slavery come together offers a very good opportunity to contribute to the debate. Both these two islands underwent intertwined histories of the establishment of slave economies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, and the consequent abolition of slavery.

The slave trade between Mauritius and Zanzibar which had started in the eighteenth century began to be disrupted at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century with the British blockade and subsequent anti-slave trade treaty signed between Captain Moresby and Sultan Said bin Sultan in 1822. This treaty prohibited the Sultan from shipment of slaves to Christian colonies, including Mauritius.

In 1840 when the Imam of Oman shifted his capital to Zanzibar, the islands were integrated into the world economic system. This ruler intensified the agricultural system of large plantations. By the mid-nineteenth century the demand for slaves had increased not only for export but for internal use as well, following the establishment of clove and coconut plantations in Zanzibar which required massive labour power. At this time, many slaves worked in clove and coconut plantations owned by Arabs and some Africans scattered in the islands.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the slaves in Zanzibar were divided into three categories: plantation (*shamba*) slaves, who devoted most of their time to coconut and clove plantations; domestic (household) slaves, who worked full-time in the houses of their owners, as personal attendants of the master; *suria* who were legally the secondary slave wives of the master; and skilled workmen, for example masons, carpenters, coolies (*wachukuzi*), daily labourers (*vibarua*),

and in general those slaves employed in the town by European, Indian and other merchants of various nationalities.

This chapter will document the life after emancipation of the two mentioned classes of slaves in Zanzibar, i.e., plantation and town slaves. Domestic slaves will be covered in chapter four.

Suppression of the Slave Trade

In the nineteenth century the European factor became important in the transformation of the lives of slaves in Zanzibar. The Abolition movement which had begun in Britain and her overseas territories first took effect in West Africa.¹ The decline in West African slave trade encouraged the expansion of the trade in East Africa especially to the Americas and the West Indies.

In the early nineteenth century, the British had begun to put pressure on Seyyid Said, Sultan of Zanzibar, to confine the slave trade to the islands. The question could be asked as to why the Sultan accepted the British demand for the abolition of the slave trade, considering the fact that this trade was very lucrative to the Arab State not only of Zanzibar but also in Oman. Two explanations will serve. First, it has to be remembered that Seyyid Said originated from the Busaidi dynasty of Oman and owed his position to the British who helped him and his dynasty against the Mazrui family (the former rulers of Mombasa). Secondly, Seyyid Said had a farsighted approach and had observed the expansion of Europeans in different parts of the world. To secure his position, Seyyid Said entered into good relations with the British in the early 1800s. His relations with the British were friendly and they ensured security for him and his territories. He was therefore obliged to support the British anti-slave trade campaigns.

In 1822 the British concluded the first treaty, the Moresby treaty, for the suppression of the slave trade with Sultan Said of Zanzibar. In the treaty, the Sultan agreed to proscribe and stop the sale of slaves to any Christian nation, and allowed British warships to seize all Arab vessels carrying slaves to the south of the East African coast.²

In 1845, another treaty was signed between Colonel Hamerton and Sultan Said. This time the treaty forbade the shipping of slaves outside the Sultan's East African possessions, i.e., beyond Brava to the north, but local trading of slaves was legal within East Africa. The 1840s was an opportune time for the British to impose a new treaty on the Sultan of Zanzibar. They had successfully imposed the first treaty on the Sultan. Familiarity had developed between the two as a result of working together for twenty-three years. Secondly, in 1840 Britain established diplomatic relations with Zanzibar, and posted its consul there.³ Primarily, the British wanted to keep an eye on Sultan Said's movement and control Indian Ocean trade, including acting against the island's position in controlling and supplying slaves.

Compared to the earlier treaty, the Hamerton treaty had a significant impact on the Sultan and his subjects in East Africa as well as Oman. It provided additional authority to the British to stick their noses along the East African coast and its trading system. Together with this, the treaty acted as an initial step in the disintegration of the Sultan's empire, and it triggered bitter resentment and anger among his subjects.

David Livingstone's figures, though exaggerated, pointed to the failure of the 1845 treaty, as large numbers of slaves were still being trafficked beyond the Sultan's empire. He stated that between 1867 and 1869, about 37,000 slaves had been successfully smuggled overseas.⁴ A study by Sheriff for the 1860s shows that the majority of the slaves were not smuggled overseas but were used in Zanzibar. He shows that of the 100 dhows captured by the British ships during the 15 years of slave trafficking '40 had no slaves at all, 35 dhows were involved in a local trade carrying an average of 27 slaves, whereas the 12 involved in the foreign trade to Arabia carried an average of 70 slaves, including one that had a cargo of 283 slaves'.⁵ The Sultan's subjects were also very dissatisfied with this treaty. While the Sultan had signed this treaty, his subjects were in no position to object to the terms of the treaty as it limited their profits in this lucrative trade.



Photo 3.1: Freed slaves on a British warship

(Note the different age groups and gender of the freed slaves)

Source: Zanzibar National Archives.

In 1873, Sir Bartle Frere, British Governor of Bombay, went to Zanzibar armed with another treaty to end the slave trade. Frere was sent to persuade the new Sultan of Zanzibar to end the slave trade in his dominions. However, Seyyid Barghash was not in a position to accept British demands so easily. He found himself in a most awkward position and stated to the British Consul: 'A spear is held at each of my eyes; with which shall I choose to be pierced?'⁶ He faced the same dilemma as his father as, on one hand, he faced Great Britain insisting on suppression of the slave trade while, at the same time, helping him to sustain his dominion. He knew, however, that the British could employ any tactic to enforce their demands. On the other hand, his Afro-Arab brothers and subjects who were slave owners, strongly opposed the British demands.

The problem had been compounded because in 1872 a terrible cyclone had struck Zanzibar and uprooted almost all the clove trees, thus destroying the clove plantations, especially those of Unguja. Since many planters lost their plantations, Barghash was intent on resolving their problems but had to tread carefully. He knew that he could not get any support from his subjects regarding the issue of ending the slave trade, especially now after they had lost their plantations. Barghash assumed that if he accepted the British demand, he would invite the anger of his Arab subjects, and his life and position as the Sultan would be jeopardised. This situation led Barghash to refuse to sign the treaty. As a result of his refusal, the British used the threat of a naval blockade. Frere had angrily left Zanzibar, leaving a copy of the treaty with the British Consul, John Kirk, who persuaded Seyyid Barghash to sign the treaty in June 1873. The Frere treaty prohibited the export of slaves from the mainland, and closed the slave market of Zanzibar.⁷

Officially, the Frere treaty of 1873 marked the end of the export of slaves to Zanzibar, other ports and overseas, but the legal status of slavery in Zanzibar was not abolished until 1897. However, the trade still continued illegally. After 1873 many slaves being smuggled for export were rescued from different dhows. Following the three mentioned treaties for the suppression of the slave trade, the sultans of Zanzibar began to lose their independence and influence over the East African coast, and started to act as British puppets in East Africa. They lost their legitimacy with many Afro-Arab planters and merchants who had been slave dealers.

The legal ending of slave trade in Zanzibar marked the beginning of the inflow of European agents in coastal towns as well as the interior of East Africa. For instance, Bishop Tozer arrived in Zanzibar in 1864 to preach Christianity,⁸ and an Anglican cathedral was built on the site of the last slave market in Zanzibar soon after the Frere treaty of 1873.

Zanzibar Slavery Emancipation, 1860s – 1900s

Emancipation in the 1860s

The treaties for the suppression of the slave trade concluded between the Zanzibari sultans and the British consuls marked the beginning of freedom for the slaves in East Africa. But before this, the 1860s were marked by another momentous event for slaves. Those slaves that had belonged to Indians who were British subjects, were freed as the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act began to take effect in Zanzibar. The Indians were thus obliged to obey British laws, and in the 1860s they were required to free their slaves. This was a surprise to many of them who expected to be protected from British laws as they originated from Indian princely states. The Indians in Zanzibar were traditionally merchants, but a few also became planters. As Princess Salme pointed out, 'some of them have hundreds and more slaves for cultivation of their estates'. Unlike Arab slave owners whose slaves were emancipated gradually, Indians were required to end ownership of slaves with immediate effect.⁹

There is no reliable estimate for the total number of slaves freed during the period 1822 to 1870. However, available evidence from slave registers in the Zanzibar Archives show that there were about 8,213 slaves freed in the 1860s. These included slaves who were unlawfully held by British Indian subjects who were emancipated at the consulate. However, no compensation was paid to any slave owner, as they had held them illegally. Between 1874 and 1876 there were 1,380 more slaves registered for emancipation. This brings the total number of slaves freed in the 1860s and 1870s to 9,593, of whom 75 per cent were emancipated from the Indians, and the rest were captured by British anti-slavery naval patrols.¹⁰

However, slave ownership in Zanzibar was not a matter of ethnicity. Anyone could own as many slaves as s/he could afford. In a slave society where there was no free labour, Indians (British subjects) used slave labour in their economic activities. As noted earlier, the Indians were predominantly merchants, and slaves worked in shops in towns, as coolies, and performed other skilled works. But since the 1840s a few had also begun to acquire clove plantations which was naturally accompanied by slave ownership.¹¹ Moreover, the nature of the nineteenth century Zanzibar economy encouraged many rich and middle class men to own and utilise slaves not only as labourers but also as prestigious status items.

While the available evidence shows that 9,593 slaves were emancipated in the period under discussion, this figure is not reliable in assessing the total number of slaves in Zanzibar in this period. There were also illegally traded fresh slaves who were caught by British warships. Nevertheless, sex, age and tribe proportion represented by this data can give some indication about the characteristics of the slave population at the time.

The sex and age proportion discussed in this chapter is based on a sample of 6,200 slaves emancipated from British Indian subjects residing in Zanzibar in 1860. The registers show that 51 per cent of the total emancipated slaves in this period were female, while men formed 49 per cent. These figures suggest that in the nineteenth century there was a fair ratio between male and female slaves.

The age profile of the same sample of emancipated slaves shows that 852 slaves (14 % of the total) were children ranging between 2 and 16 years of age; 4,456 slaves (72 %) were at the productive age of between 18 to 47 years; and the remaining 896 (14%) slaves were aged above 50 years.¹² It is evident that many of the freed slaves emancipated during this time constituted effective labour.

It is regrettable that the registers did not indicate the trajectory of the emancipated slaves after freedom. This would have allowed us to trace their post-emancipation movements and life. Stereotypes do abound, for example, in the work of Princess Salme, one of the Sultan's daughters, who takes an apologetic stand on behalf of slave owners, describing ex-slaves as idlers, vagabonds and thieves:

The freed grown-up children considered the fact that they did not have to work anymore as an essential element of freedom, and they wanted to really celebrate this freedom, totally unconcerned that they could not expect neither lodging nor maintenance from their masters anymore.¹³

What can be observed from the above statement is that according to slave owners, the anti-slavery campaigns in Zanzibar had liberated slaves from the hand of their masters only to create an unproductive social class. Anti-slavery campaigners were less concerned about what became of the freed slaves.

Emancipation in 1897–1900s Period

The legal ending of slave trade in Zanzibar did not mark the end of slave labour in both islands. The island of Pemba became even more dependent on slave labour after the hurricane of 1872. The list of slaves held in Pemba mentioned in chapter 1 allows us to gain an overview of the size of slave-holding by landowners in 1875. It shows that the 255 landowners held a total of 521 plantations, or an average of 2 plantations each. Of these landowners, 27 per cent held less than 50 slaves; another 31 per cent held between 50 and 99 slaves; a further 35 per cent held between 100 and 299 slaves; and only 7 per cent held more than 300 slaves, with an overall average of 54 slaves per owner. One interesting aspect that emerges from this list is that there were at least eight land- and slave-owners who are described as slaves or freedmen, and two of them are described as *nokoa* or supervisors who were probably freed slaves. Between them they owned 13 plantations with a total of 300 slaves, or an average of 38 slaves each. This shows that slaves who were freed under Islamic law (discussed below) before the general emancipation may have been trusted servants who were given plots of land by their masters, and even sizeable numbers of slaves.

Table 3.1: Freed slaves owning land and slaves in Pemba, 1875

No. of plantations	Land/slave owners	No. of slaves
2	Towfeek slave of Hamood b Muhammad II Mawli	40
1	Baba Kondo freed man	30
1	Lewela the Nokowa	60
2	Hamees b Khamas slave of Ismail	20
3	Juma b Said slave of Ismail	40
2	Nasor b Fahum slave of Ismail	20
1	Nocowa of Surbok	60
1	Imreeko freed by some Arab	30

Source: ZNA/ AA 12/4 Records of slave and slave owners in Pemba and Mombasa

The suppression of the slave trade was in many ways only the commencement rather than the end of the tale. The abolitionists never made any secret of the fact that their definitive intent was total emancipation throughout the islands, but it was to take another quarter of a century of campaigning before this was achieved. The explanation for the Sultan accepting this decree was the British bombardment of the palace in 1896.¹⁴ It forced the rebellious Prince Khalid to escape, and Arab resistance to British rule and to the abolition of slavery was thus broken. The British moved quickly and imposed the compliant Seyyid Hamoud Bin Muhammed who abolished slavery, and changed the legal system to facilitate emancipation: 'It was easy to introduce many reforms without tension between the palace and the British Consulate General as it happened during the previous three sultans.'¹⁵ The bombardment was a lesson to the Sultans of Zanzibar not to oppose British wishes and reforms, as they were capable of employing force to enforce their decisions.

Slave emancipation in Zanzibar was a long process, which went through several stages of approvals at different levels. By 1897 the British Cabinet had decided that after the fasting month of Ramadhan, British officials should invite the Sultan to issue a decree abolishing the legal status of slavery in Zanzibar, and give compensation to owners who could prove legal ownership of the slaves and the damage resulting from the abolition. The British Consul put it very clearly that no interference with the Arabs' family structure was contemplated.¹⁶

The Emancipation Decree was signed by Seyyid Hamoud on 5 April 1897 centred on the abolition of the legal status of slavery. While the earlier treaties suppressed the slave trade and made it illegal, slavery per-se was not abolished. The 1897 Decree gave the slaves the right to claim their freedom whenever they needed it. The replacement of the Consular Court by Her Majesty's Court in Zanzibar, consisting of a judge and an assistant Judge appointed by the Crown, further helped in implementing the Decree.

On 8 April 1897 the Sultan held a meeting at which he announced the contents of the decree, and ordered the Arabs' representative to explain the decree to others throughout the country. This notification was applicable not only in Zanzibar but also in the dominions of His Highness the Sultan of Zanzibar. However, this did not include the coast of Kenya, especially Lamu. As Romero's study shows, 'News of the legal emancipation came to Lamu at the same time as it reached the mainland, but the Slavery Commission which was empowered to enforce the Ordinance did not actively interfere in Lamu until 1910'.¹⁷

The Emancipation Decree included six important articles on abolition of slavery in Zanzibar.

Art. 1: From and after this 1st day of Zilkaada [April 1897], all claims of whatever description made before any court or public authority in respect of the alleged relations of masters and slaves shall be referred to the District Court (Mehkemet-ele-wilaya), within those jurisdiction they may arise, and shall be cognizable by the court alone.

Art. 2: From and after this 1st day of first of Zilkaada, the District court shall decline to enforce any alleged rights over the bodies, services or property of any person on the ground that such person is a slave, but wherever any person shall claim that he was lawfully possessed of such rights in accordance with the Decrees of our predecessors.

Art. 3: The compensation money thus awarded shall not be liable to be claimed in respect of any debt for which the person of the slave for whom it was granted could not previously by law be seized.

Art. 4: Any person whose right to freedom shall have been formally recognized under the 2nd article shall be liable to any tax, abatement, corvée or payment in lieu of corvée' which our government may at any time hereafter see fit to impose on the general body of its subjects and shall be bound, on pain of being declared a vagrant, to show that he possesses a regular domicile and means of subsistence, and where such domicile is situated on land owned by any other person, to pay the owner of such land such rent as may be agreed upon between them before the District Court.

Art. 5: Concubine shall be regarded as inmates of the Harem in the same sense as wives, and shall remain in their present relations unless they should demand their dissolution on the ground of cruelty, in which case the District Court shall grant it if the alleged cruelty has been proved to its satisfaction.

Art. 6: Any person making any claim under any of the provisions of this Decree shall have the right to appeal from the decision of the District court to ourselves or to such Judge or other public authority.¹⁸

A number of issues deserve special consideration as the various articles of the decree were implemented in Zanzibar. The first is the question of compensation

paid to slave owners. Unlike Mauritius where compensation was paid out of British revenue, in Zanzibar it came from Zanzibar's revenue, and £ 81,000 was borrowed from the National Bank of India to meet the expenditure. The decree stated that the slave owners were to be paid compensation for any legally-held slaves, and such compensation money could not be seized for past debt. The decree did not provide a fixed amount as compensation, but promised fair compensation for an able-bodied slave. It was meant to silence opposition to the decree, and the reference to the debt was to protect the owners from moneylenders and protect the clove economy.¹⁹

The compensation varied depending on the type of slave owned such as physical condition and ability, including skills, health and age of the slave. For an able-bodied slave the higher fixed amount was Rs. 60, equal to five months wages a master could earn from his slave.²⁰ This amount was paid only for those slaves who were above average in intelligence and skills, such as carpenters, masons, trainers, and workmen of any kind, including women slaves who worked in the house, cooks for their households and those who occupied the position of housekeepers. Other slaves were worth less than the average, such as sickly and weak, old and worn-out slaves, whose compensation ranged between Rs. 40 to 50.²¹ A total of £38,889.75 (Rs. 15 = £ 1) was paid as compensation to slave owners between 1897 and 1899 – 53 per cent to Pemba slave owners and 47 per cent to those in Unguja.²² This provides an insight into the relative positions of Pemba and Unguja regarding the question of the number of slaves in the two islands.

It is clear that there were a larger number of slaves in Pemba than in Unguja, and this was highlighted by many factors including the cyclone of 1872 which affected Unguja more than Pemba, and a larger number of clove plantations were established in Pemba thereafter. Secondly, it is possible that after the hurricane, a larger number of slaves in Unguja were domestic while in Pemba there were more plantation slaves, although lack of enough information regarding domestic slaves of Zanzibar makes it hard to draw a definite conclusion for this variation. If the above supposition is correct, then it is possible that more slave owners in Unguja may have voluntarily emancipated their slaves without asking for compensation, but expecting a huge reward in afterlife.

Another important issue is how the slave owners spent their compensation money. It is believed that part of the money, some £ 11,000 received by the Arabs was used to pay off or reduce mortgages on their *shambas*²³ as they were heavily indebted after taking mortgages from Indian merchants. In 1900, the total indebtedness incurred by the Pemba Arabs to moneylenders, and in connection to which they had pawned their *shambas*, amounted to a little over £6,000. Outstanding mortgages executed prior to 1900 amounted about £3,000.²⁴

Court Emancipation

Since the declaration of the decree for emancipation in 1897, the courts were legally authorised to grant freedom to slaves with a freedom certificate. Any slave who wished to be freed had to send his/her application to the courts for certification. This was quite a contrast with Mauritius as in Zanzibar slaves were free to apply for their freedom and the Zanzibar Protectorate government paid compensation fee to their masters. This did not occur in Mauritius where a slave was required to serve as an apprentice or buy his own freedom (by paying a non-fixed amount of money to his former owner) before the court.

However, many conditions were considered when a slave applied for freedom in Zanzibar. For instance, to be granted freedom, a slave had to provide enough information on what s/he was going to do and where s/he intended to stay, to minimise the problem of vagabondage. At the beginning, the speed of this kind of emancipation was very slow partly because many slaves were afraid of change. They had lived in the owner's compound all their lives and worked under his instructions and eyes, eating what the owner assigned to them, sleeping where the owner wished.²⁵

I.P. Farler (Commissioner in Pemba) reported that in the interval between the end of the clove harvest and the coming of the new season (rainy season), many slaves applied for their freedom and were subsequently freed at the rate of 160 slaves a week.²⁶

In the initial stage, slaves had only to state what they were going to do, and on whose *shamba* they had obtained permission to settle.²⁷ Slaves had all the freedom to choose where to stay. The decree stated that neither the late owner of the *shamba* himself nor any local authority could effect the removal of the slaves against their will. Many applicants went to the courts when agricultural conditions were bad, and fewer when conditions were good. Many of them were affected by the success or failure of the system of labour contract.

Complaints were brought to the Commission, and many *shamba* owners made a formal appeal to the government for help and protection.²⁸ The state found it necessary not only for the benefit of the *shamba* owners but also for the freed slaves to put into the emancipation decree an article of the supplementary decree of the Sultan 'that any person whose right to freedom shall have been formally recognized, shall be free on pain of being declared a vagrant to show that he possessed a regular domicile and means of subsistence.'²⁹ To make this effective, a notice was given that all slaves who were asking for court freedom had to bring with them a person on whose land they had obtained permission to settle, or if he was unable to come, someone in his place, and a letter would also suffice. The name of this person was then registered as responsible for the wellbeing of the particular freed slaves. This rule worked, and the slaves found no difficulty in getting their patron and a new home.

To be assured with a livelihood, the department did not place any obstacle in the way of those applicants who were willing to work on fair terms. The demand for free labour on the part of the Arabs greatly exceeded the supply, and if any slaves applying for their freedom failed to make a satisfactory agreement with the Arabs, there was always a demand for their labour on the various *shambas* owned by the Sultan and in connection with the Department of Public Works (PWD). While slaves were being freed, a large number of *shamba* owners or their deputies were waiting near the office, ready to make arrangements with the slaves being freed, to propose to them to live on their lands on government terms. However, many slaves stated openly that since they were free, they did not intend to work, especially on plantations.³⁰

The report of the Slavery Commissioners of Unguja and Pemba on the working of the decree for the year 1901 stated that the number of slaves freed by the court in the course of 1901 was 844, of whom 589 received their papers in Unguja and 255 in Pemba.³¹ However, the total number of slaves freed by the courts since the abolition of the legal status of slavery is hard to assess as data are not available. Table 3.2 shows the number of slaves voluntarily freed by their owners which will form the subject of the next section.

Table 3.2: Total Number of Slaves Freed by Court and by their Owners in Zanzibar

Year	Slaves freed by court			Slaves freed by owners and % of total	Total
	Unguja	Pemba	Total	Unguja & Pemba	
April 1897 to April 1898	469	778	1,247	799 (39%)	2,046
April to December 1898	704	1,316	2,024	709 (26%)	2,733
January to December 1899	1,427	2,230	3,657	798 (18%)	4,455
January to December 1900	1,126	594	1,720	770 (31%)	2,490
January to December 1901	589	255	844	624 (43%)	1,468
Total	4,315	5,173	9,488	3,700 (28%)	13,264

Source: Compiled from Mr Last to General Raikes, February 6th, 1902. ZNA DL10/12; Mr Cave to the Marquess of Lansdowne Zanzibar, February 21, 1902.

The above table shows that the number of freedom papers granted by the courts in 1901 was less than half of the number recorded in the previous year. Several reasons contributed to this situation. In the first place, unusually heavy rainfall enabled the slaves in agricultural districts to grow such abundant crops of various kinds of grain, fruits and vegetables on which they depended for their food supply that they had not only enough for themselves, but a sufficient margin with which to make a respectable profit in the neighbouring towns and villages,

and consequently there was little inducement for them to leave the plantations on which they were employed. Secondly, the condition of slave labour was considerably improved by the knowledge, which was shared by master and slave alike, that freedom could be had for the asking, and there was therefore less need to abandon their slave status. In any case, the rush for freedom which took place when the decree first became known had apparently expended itself, and the slaves who had real cause for complaint or real longing for emancipation, as well as those, according to a colonial official, who were 'attracted by a sense of novelty or by visions of idleness and indulgence, had their desire satisfied, and the remainder had made up their minds that it was better to remain as they were in comparative peace and contentment than tempt providence in some new and untried form'.³²

Court emancipation was perceived differently by different slaves, at different times and by different age groups (between youth and old-age slaves). The study found that at the beginning of the process many slaves had a negative perception towards this kind of freedom, and this factor was among many that delayed the process of emancipation. However, as time went by they learnt to accept the process.

Soon after they submitted their application for freedom at the courts, the slaves were taught by the colonial officials that they had to live an honest life and be respectable members of the society; that this kind of life could only be attained by work. Africans were taught to believe that a hardworking man was always a respectable one, who could achieve much economically, while lazy persons would gain nothing but disrespect from the community members.³³

Voluntary Emancipation

What was very striking about emancipation in Zanzibar was the large percentage of slaves who were emancipated by their owners voluntarily and without compensation. In comparison with the court emancipation, this type of emancipation did not include the various conditions for a slave to be granted freedom. What was needed was only an agreement between a master and a slave. Many slave owners who decided to grant freedom to their slaves using this method were influenced by two factors. The first was the religious motivation, as they expected a better reward in the afterlife.³⁴ The whole idea was initiated by the fact that money was nothing but material that always diminished. The second reason was the nature of the bond that had developed between the slaves and their masters. Many slave owners who applied this approach had a well-established attachment with their slaves. Between 1897 and 1901, voluntary emancipation granted and registered covered 3,776 cases from both islands, i.e., 28 per cent of the total number of 13,264 slaves who had received their freedom during this period.³⁵ (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Statement showing the total number of slaves freed by their owners, 1897–1901

Month	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	Total
January	43	61	33	65	20	222
February	39	32	50	26	68	215
March	35	115	33	58	28	271
April	84	69	46	30	28	257
May	52	48	182	75	125	492
June	55	66	61	106	71	359
July	68	84	76	25	59	312
August	72	68	74	66	44	324
September	54	47	61	69	63	294
October	64	43	76	65	52	300
November	171	57	70	107	49	454
December	60	19	36	78	17	210
Total	799	709	798	770	624	3,700

Source: Mr Last to General Raikes, Zanzibar. February 6, 1902. ZNA/DL. 10/12, p. 8.

Table 3.3 shows that slave owners in Zanzibar were ready to free their slaves before the issue of the emancipation decree, and they continued to do so after the decree was issued. While the decree was issued in April 1897, there were already 117 cases of slaves freed by their owners from January to March 1897. Although further research is required, it appears that a larger number of emancipations occurred from May to November, in other words, soon after the clove harvest and beginning of the rains. An average of 30 slaves were freed each month, while between December and April an average of only 19 slaves were freed.

There may also have been a motivation for owners to be more generous after harvest time when more money circulated. Unfortunately, the records do not show what kind of slaves were freed at this particular time, what were their age groups, sex, tribes and so on.

Although voluntary emancipation covered 28 per cent of the total number of freed slaves in Zanzibar, this proportion was not the same throughout the emancipation period, as shown in Table 6. It was reported that the number of slaves freed by the courts in the course of 1901 was 844, while slaves freed by their owners voluntarily during the same period numbered 624, i.e., 43 per cent of 1,468 freed that year, which was the highest, while they constituted only 18 per cent in 1899 when the largest number were freed in a single year. In addition, there were many slaves who never applied for their freedom for whatever reasons. These included very old slaves living on the plantations, and did not wish to move as this was the only place they had ever known and had nowhere else to go.³⁶ This same phenomenon was observed in Mauritius after abolition of apprenticeship in 1839.

A report from Mr. Last to General Raikes in February 1902 stated that there was also a considerable number of younger slaves who were attached to their owners by ties of respect and regard, and who were also sympathetic towards them because of their depressed status. 'They were determined to stick to their slave status, and no personal advantages would provoke them to abscond from their owners.'³⁷ They were generally personal attendants and house slaves, who had probably been brought up from childhood by their owners (*wazalia* – born slaves), and had received from them the consideration and care which was due to them from the owners, and by this treatment the owners had won the regard and fidelity of their slaves.³⁸ Even if their owner had decided to move his capital elsewhere and farther away, these former slaves found no reason to leave him.

One good example was that of an Arab, Hamaid bin Amor El-Hinawi, who was about to leave Zanzibar for Muscat in April 1898. He wished to take with him 36 of his former slaves, male and female. When those slaves were examined, all of them had freedom papers. When they were interviewed, all of them without exception stated that they were willing to follow their master to Muscat.³⁹ However, Basil S. Cave expressed his opinion that it was undesirable to permit him due to the fact that this case might set a very undesirable precedent. Nevertheless, this case confirms the close relationship that existed in Zanzibar between some ex-slaves and their masters.

The Contract System

Although the British had pushed through emancipation in Zanzibar, they were concerned about disrupting their protectorate's economy, which was now their responsibility. Therefore, the same courts were summoned to regulate new relations between master and slave, and up to 1901, some 4,000 labour contracts were drawn up and signed between them, although some of the slaves were frightened to have their privileges and responsibilities more plainly and precisely defined.⁴⁰ In 1902 there were 448 contracts approved by the courts, 664 in 1903, 91 in 1904 and 14 in 1905, totalling some 5,217 contracts.

The contract system was a mechanism that was introduced to ensure the former slave maintains his/her bond with the former owner, or with any other interested employer in order that cloves would continue to be produced. The courts stated very clearly that in a labour contract, a freed slave must be assured of sufficient land for his personal usage, care during sickness, supplied material for building his house, and food at least for a short period until his first crop was gathered. These terms were applicable mostly to plantation slaves. In return, a freed slave was required to work for three days in every week on a specified plantation. The courts made it clear that the labourer did not have any right to run away from the assigned plantation, and if he refused to work, the courts could punish him. The courts had the authority to enforce the condition under

which the labourer had agreed to serve, and at the same time insist on the due fulfilment of the terms on the side of employers as agreed to in the contract.

However, objections have been raised to this system of labour contracts on the ground that the free man had lost much of the liberty in that he could not leave the plantation to which he was sent without the court's consent. In entertaining that objection the court assured the applicant labourer that it would welcome and consider a request for a transfer to another plantation if the grounds were in any way reasonable.⁴¹

There was also objection to the contract system because under this system, the freed slave could not, except at harvest time, earn sufficient money to provide him with more than basic necessities such as clothes, food and goods to satisfy the requirements of his household. For three days of the week he had to work for his employer, and as the daily task which was apportioned to him could be got through, if he was fairly industrious, in three or four hours, it amounted to not more than twelve hours' labour that he had to perform in every seven days. For the remainder of the week, he was his own master, either to spend his time in cultivating his own plot of land or earn monetary wages elsewhere. In this context it was possible for a plantation worker to work in the plantations and work elsewhere for wages.

A freed labourer was free to select where to work on his four remaining days. If he selected to work for cash wages he could do so either on his employer's *shamba*, where his services were occasionally required for more than the stipulated number of days, or on that of some neighbouring landowner where paid labour was in greater demand. Vagrancy laws similar to the Mauritian ones thus ensured a restricted labour mobility. However, as with the Mauritian case, when labourers were not happy they simply deserted the plantations.

The consolidation of the new labour/ working discipline with the rise of imperialism and based on western work ethics and free labour ideology in the post-slave era in Zanzibar was in some cases seen by many slaves as a condition comparable to slavery. In Zanzibar it is very clear that beyond slavery there was simply no freedom as it was proposed within the emancipation decree, but instead a hazy shading into various forms of coerced and forced labour, with free labour itself being a severely defective ideal.

Slave Categories

Town Slaves

Between 1897 and 1904 reports show that the freed slaves had shown preference for living in the town rather than in the country. Town slaves included a large group of slaves who employed themselves in skilled work. This group included domestic and skilled slaves. For instance, of the 589 slaves freed in 1901, 357 (218

male and 139 female), or 60.7 per cent, elected to live in town. The remaining 232 preferred to take up their abode in the country. Two questions need answers here. First, why were the numbers for town slaves higher than for the plantation slaves, and secondly, why did male slaves opt to live in town compared to female slaves?

Many of the slaves who had run off to town after they had been issued their freedom certificates were young and skilled, such as artisans, masons, carpenters, tailors and fishermen.⁴² By far, the greater number of those who elected to live in town, both male and female, engaged themselves as daily labourers or *vibarua* as they were called. They were employed in loading and unloading ships, carrying loads to various parts of the town and country, drawing trolleys, assistants to masons and other artisans, and in any other kind of unskilled labour which happened their way. This nature of work attracted more male than female freed slaves. Apart from them, there was a considerable number of freed slaves, male and female, who were employed as house servants by the Europeans and other foreign residents in the town. Others were engaged as water-carriers, grass-cutters and petty trade dealers. Fortunately, there was work for all who were willing to work in town.

The economic future of the freed slaves who opted to live in town depended very much on their own efforts and actions, whether they would be fairly prosperous and comfortable or in poverty and wretchedness. The 1925 Ethnicity and Occupation census revealed that town ex-slaves numbered 1,654 out of a total of 5,695 town dwellers, equal to 29 per cent of the general town population.⁴³

However, there were many cases of immorality reported. Among the expected negative impacts from the implementation of emancipation was an increase of immorality. In 1901 the number of convictions for offences such as assault, drunkenness, theft, and vagrancy for Unguja only numbered 2,543. This figure was similar to that of 1898, a year after the enforcement of the decree; and in 1900 there were 2,057 convictions.⁴⁴ The state tried hard to prevent this situation but they found it impossible to prevent the freed slaves from embarking on a career of idleness and vice. In Pemba, things were different - each year there was a reduction in the number of vagrancy cases as pointed out by Farler: 'every effort is being made to provide respected employment for the freed slaves'.⁴⁵ To control the vagrants the colonial state consolidated a system of labour contract.

Another important feature as shown by the town slaves is widespread drunkenness. It was reported that the principal towns and streets after dark were habitually scenes of uproar and of brawling in which sticks and knives were freely used.⁴⁶ O'Sullivan, Vice consul in Pemba, reported that soon after the issue of the decree, Indian shopkeepers repeatedly complained to him that their stores were constantly being broken into and their goods looted by drunken bands.⁴⁷ These bands, however, consisted of not only ex-slaves, as there were also squatters imported from the mainland.

Moreover, in a report from the Slavery Commissioners in Unguja and Pemba during the year 1901, there was a shocking statement that nearly every unmarried freed female slave in Pemba had become a prostitute since the abolition of the legal status of slavery. This statement was made by Mr. Cave, and was strongly corroborated by Mr. Farler. In the town of Zanzibar the number of brothels was considerably greater than it had been five years before emancipation, and whenever there was a cause to enter and search one of these houses, it was generally found that a considerable proportion of its inmates were women who had been freed by the courts. By early 1900, it was found necessary to clear away some huts which had been built for immoral purposes on the outskirts of the town, and 75 per cent of the women who occupied them were found to be freed slaves.⁴⁸

British officials believed that amongst the lower-class Africans, voluntary morality was a virtue almost unknown. In previous years, before the abolition of the legal status of slavery, any laxity in this respect on the part of the female slaves of a house or a harem was severely punished and chastity was to a certain extent, compulsory. After emancipation, however, every Arab master or mistress was well aware that any severity or restraint would be met by an immediate application to the courts, and domestic slaves as well as their emancipated sisters followed their own inclinations.⁴⁹ For these reasons, it was felt that the issue of the decree had to be followed by a wholesome check upon the number of women who deliberately adopted prostitution as a profession and depended upon it for their livelihood.

Another important issue regarding freed slaves was socialisation in the town among themselves as a social group and their relation with their former masters. Many of them, while they stayed in town, shared the common idea that at one time in their lives they were slaves. The ex-slaves with the same skills formed a guild to make their services more profitable and protect their technology and skills.⁵⁰

On the other hand, some of the ex-slaves who lived in the town maintained their bonds with their former masters, by being employed in their economic projects as houseboys, water girls, shopkeepers, and daily labourers (*vibarua*). Others greeted them and paid their respect to them even after they became free. These slaves were skilled workmen before emancipation, and they had lived in town with their masters.

Plantation Slaves

It is more than likely that the action of the owners towards their slaves had a considerable influence in regulating the number of slaves applying for freedom. The owners recognised more and more that it was to their advantage to keep their slaves on their estates, and that in order to do this they had to respect their natural rights and wants as workers, before the workers would be willing to do and act for their owners as in the past.

But in many cases, the slaves were as anxious to remain on their owner's estates as their owners were to keep them. They knew that they had no other home to go to, and that the probabilities of improving on their prevailing state by living with their owners and in their homes would be very small. They realised that their status was not what it was a few years before, and so, without wishing to leave their prevailing homes and occupations, they were naturally desirous of improving their condition by making more advantageous arrangements with their masters. They knew that they could have freedom by simply applying for it, but they preferred to remain with their owners and in their environment, but only asking that the conditions of their relationship with their masters may be somewhat modified. Cases of this kind were frequently brought before the *Walis* (governors) of the various provinces of Zanzibar by owners and slaves, in which they requested the *Walis* services to arrange and place on an equitable basis their mutual obligations in a manner satisfactory to all concerned.

Generally, it is the aged and somewhat infirm slaves who, having lived all their lives in the country, preferred to remain rather than to make a fresh start in life in town, under circumstances that were very different to those they were accustomed to. However there were also a large number of young freed slaves between 18 and 30 years who also preferred to live in the country rather than in town.⁵¹

After total emancipation of slaves in Zanzibar, many slaves who were used to work in clove and coconut plantations owned by their owners signed new labour contracts with their former masters. As a matter of fact, the great majority of those slaves who presented themselves at the courts had already made their own arrangements as to their future, and what remained was for the court to give their blessing to the contracts. However, those slaves who had not done so, and did not have any preference for any particular district, were given a choice of several plantations where more labour was required, and they were sent there.

The contract labour system was constituted after the end of slavery. The institution of a system of labour bureau was an experiment which was watched with a good deal of interest. Farler explained in his report that, 'Some such system is urgently needed to equalize the supply of labour in the agricultural districts, and if it is successful, it will at once assist the Arab planters to gather a larger portion of their crops than they could under the existing condition, and enable the labourers to accumulate during the clove picking season a reserve fund which, if they were frugally inclined, will be of a great service to them during the remaining months of the year.'⁵²

In allotting freed slaves to the *shamba*, the court which as stated earlier had the responsibility of arranging for new contracts between ex-slaves and planters, had adopted the sound principle of distributing slaves to various *shambas*. Any *shamba* owner who was looking for labourers had to satisfy the court upon two

points: 'First as to the number of bearing trees upon his property and second as to the total number of slaves which he possesses.'⁵³ The court distributed freed slave labour proportionately to the various *shambas*. The desirable proportion of hands for cultivating and picking cloves was about 10 men to 100 clove trees. However, due to the scantiness of the supply of freed slaves, it became impossible to do so. Indeed, the proportion of the number of labour of freed slaves in clove plantations 'throughout the island [Pemba, was] more than 5 persons to every 100 bearing trees'.⁵⁴

As with the experience of town slaves, there was a similar problem of vagrancy even among plantation slaves. The colonial state tried to consolidate a system of labour contract to deal with this problem. These contracts were supplied and registered by the court, provided that the freed slave who was engaged under them 'shall' work for his employer on a personal plantation for three days in every week. This arrangement appeared to be a very fair one and was in writing and signed by both parties to it.

The liability of each side was observed with a certain amount of respect, and could if necessary be enforced in a court of law. These arrangements gave the impression that the court tried to recall the pre-existing relation between masters and slaves. Many of the terms applied here were rehearsing the bond that had existed between those two sides.

A plantation slave had three working days, but during harvest time even his regular employer had to pay him for picking his cloves, so that for seven days in the week during three months of each year he was engaged in piece work, which was paid for on a moderate scale. As for the proceeds, he could either squander them in a month's riotous living, or employed in the purchase of clothes and other requisites or to invest as was frequently done by the more thrifty, with a view to eventually becoming a landowner on a small scale himself – each according to his temperament – but, at any rate, each individual had the opportunity offered him of living a respectable life.

However, there was a considerable number of ex-slaves who were employed in the plantation but they did not have written contracts. At Mkanjuni (Pemba), a plantation owned by Suleiman bin Mbaruk, the Wali of Chake Chake, consisting of some 10,000 clove trees, there were 200 labourers, 150 of whom were freed slaves who did not have written contracts, but had all made verbal arrangements with their employer under which they picked his cloves. At another *shamba* belonging jointly to the four sons of Suleiman bin Mbaruk containing some 3,000 trees, there were 150 men employed, 80 of whom were freed slaves with no written contracts.⁵⁵ The implication of these cases is that many slaves in plantations were working under the close bond that existed with their former masters. It is obvious that even after emancipation the ex-slave still persisted in the ideology of trusting their former masters.

After emancipation, many landowners and traders possessed the same ideas that ex-slaves were the only ideal manpower for the progress of their economic projects including plantations. It was found that during the time of clove picking, the Arabs claimed that Indian merchants took their labourers and used them as '*wachukuzi*' (porters). This made Arabs suffer great losses.⁵⁶

Both landowners and merchants were not ready to impart new working discipline to other communities. Farler once advised Indians to speak with Watumbatu and Wapemba (native of Zanzibar) to act as *wachukuzi* and leave those energetic men (mostly ex-slaves) for the plantations. Many Indian merchants objected to the use of Swahili or Wapemba and Watumbatu as these people wanted much more pay than the *shamba* workers, and it would be a great loss to them if they could not have the *shamba* hands.⁵⁷

As the labour problem had become acute, the colonial official thought of the possibility of opening labour bureaux in Zanzibar and Pemba, and they were started under two commissioners and a branch office was opened at the Dunga plantation under Mr. Lyne. The objective was to organise and utilise all available labour, and employ it where it was most needed.

Conclusion

Emancipation history should be regarded as a transition period for slaves, their owners as well as the system itself. Slave owners, mainly Afro-Arabs and the Sultan's estates were dependent on the slave trade and slavery for profits and prosperity. This dependence was disturbed by the suppression of the slave trade by the British, and later by the legal emancipation of the slaves. The economic situation of Zanzibar was placed in a shaky position. The situation caused unease among many slave owners who did not accept changes easily, and reacted by organising smuggling to distribute slaves in and outside Zanzibar and East Africa dominions. In the earlier period the state had transformed the sector from being primarily an export trade that took slaves to work outside Zanzibar, to consolidation of clove and coconut plantations where slave labour became an important human force for production.

The slaves, on the other hand, had different understanding regarding their freedom. There was a group of slaves who decided to leave their masters and established their free life in distant areas. There was also a group of slaves who chose not to leave their masters, but maintained and renewed their former bond with their masters. In their new status as free men, they lived with their former masters as labourers.

Historians have been debating why slave revolts were not frequent in the Indian Ocean, for example in Zanzibar and Mauritius. It is important to highlight that if they occurred, there is not enough information in the Zanzibar national archives regarding this issue despite its importance in a slave society in transition. In Zanzibar, the British government established clear distinction between slaves of Unguja and Pemba in terms of understanding and controlling them. There was a famous saying that '*watumwa wa Unguja wajanja sana, watumwa wa Pemba wajinga kabisa*' (Zanzibar slaves are a very cunning lot; the Pemba slaves are absolute fools).⁵⁸ This was a colonial perception; in reality slaves from both islands rioted when there was a need to do so. At different times it was reported that slaves in various parts of the island went on strike from time to time. But this was mainly after the issue of the emancipation decree. In one instance, an Arab planter applied for advice to the vice consul in Pemba in the following circumstances: 'it appears that the slaves on one of his plantations, which was at that time under rice, had gone on strike and absolutely refused to do any work; even the boys declined to mount guard as usual and scare away animals from the growing crops. The slaves had no special grievance to urge, but they boldly told their master that he no longer had any power to punish them.'⁵⁹ A similar strike was reported in other parts of Pemba island where slaves organised a strike as they claimed that they did not receive the usual two days per week of free time or that they were kept too long at work.⁶⁰ Although there appears to have been no major slave revolts in both islands, slaves showed their distaste for their enslavement.

One of the most significant transformations on the part of the slaves as a result of the abolition of the legal status of slavery in Zanzibar was the increasing tendency of the best of the freed slaves to save their harvest money or collect their salaries from town work and add to it to by selling the product of their allotment, until they had saved up enough money to buy a small *shamba* of their own.⁶¹ Farler, the Slavery Commissioner in Pemba, reported that there was a large number of freed slaves in Pemba who had borrowed money from Indians at an exorbitant rate of compound interest to buy *shambas* which they had agreed to pledge to the Indians as security until the purchase was completed. Thus the emancipation decree can be said to have opened the possibility for the African ex-slaves to become small landowners themselves.



Photo 3.2: A manumitted slave woman in early nineteenth century Mauritius
Source: Mauritius National Archives

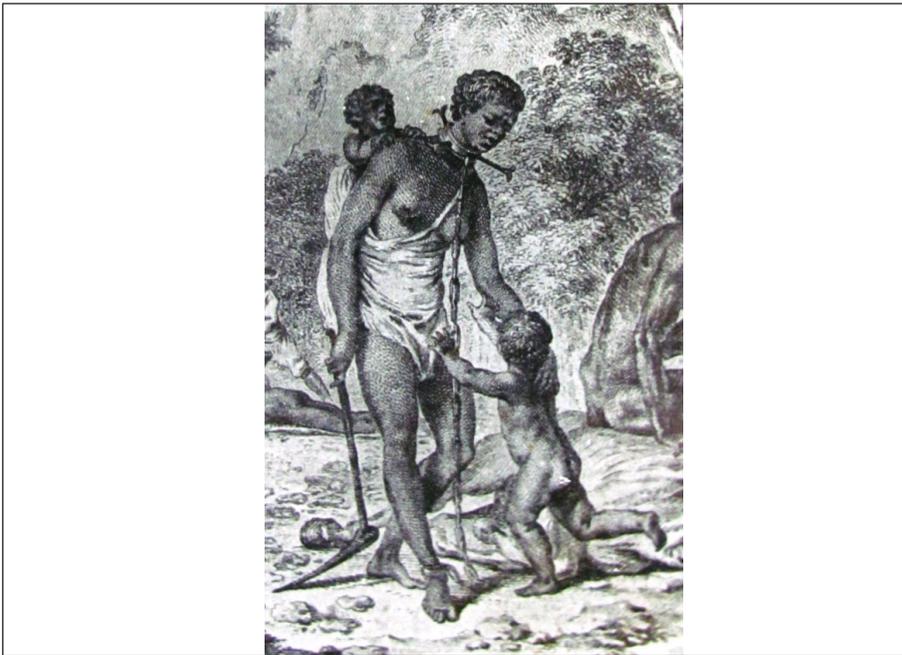


Photo 3.3: A female slave with her children in late eighteenth century Mauritius
Source: Mauritius National Archives

Notes

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