Chapter 2

An historical introduction to forced migration in the Indian Ocean world
Chapter 2

The Indian Ocean world throughout the ages

As stated earlier, this study focuses on the lives of enslaved persons, particularly their migration as a result of European involvement in Indian Ocean slave trade networks. Before I do this, I will paint, with broad strokes, a picture of the Indian Ocean before and after the arrival of Europeans. It will become evident how The Cape became connected to old slave-owning societies and became a slave society itself, sharing characteristics with other cosmopolitan Indian Ocean port cities.

The Indian Ocean world (Figure 1) as a unit of analysis has been favoured over, for instance, nation states which have been found to be limiting, distracting “attention from large-scale processes that have deeply influenced both the experiences of individual societies and the development of the world as a whole” (Bentley, 1999:215). The study of the Indian Ocean world has concentrated on the environment (monsoons), the spread of religion (Islam), and particularly trade (Stanziani, 2014). Although this maritime approach allows for the study of the movement of peoples, culture and the understanding of commerce, recurring themes in this chapter, it has its shortcomings. It is difficult to determine when this World came into being and whether this unit of analysis is relevant throughout this time. Where does this World begin and end (Alpers, 2014)? What are the relationships between the basin’s regions and the world at large (Bentley, 1999)?

There are five accepted periods in the long history of the Indian Ocean; ancient; Islamic, early modern, European dominant/empire, and the 20th century. One sees conqueror-traders rise and fall in the Indian Ocean world, all while indigenous trading networks continued to thrive despite the machinations of these intruders (Parthasarathi and Riello, 2014; Rossi, 1995). It has been posited, however, that the arrival of Europeans changed the nature of Asian trade by disrupting the overland caravan trade in favour of maritime trade (Rossi, 1995).

Commercial interactions between the different parts of the Indian Ocean were many in number throughout the ages into the early modern period and beyond. For instance, Indian cloth was traded in the western Indian Ocean for ivory and slaves (Machado, 2009). Products that crisscrossed the Indian Ocean also included rice and cattle (Allen, 2008); spices, fabric and metals (Andaya, 1991). Metals from Europe and Japan, wood from East Africa (Alpers, 2014), cowries from the Maldives and spices from the Indonesian Archipelago were other goods that traversed the Indian Ocean.
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Figure 1: Map of the Indian Ocean world
Map by Jacques Nicolas Bellin, 1747 www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl [AMH-7873-KB]

Arabia

An expansionist period is evident with the rise of Islam from the 7th-century and the venturing of Arabian Muslim traders further afield. This period saw the spread of Islam and the Arabic language into the wider Indian Ocean World (Alpers, 2014) “from Mogadishu to Melaka” (Risso, 1995:54). Ideally, Islam permeates all aspects of life including the spiritual, social, legal, political and economic realms. Islamic state formation is thus essential for the divine laws governing these aspects of life to be practiced (Risso, 1995).

It is not surprising that in the early years of the existence of Islam, the Muslim merchant in the Indian Ocean doubled as a missionary and founded governments (Risso, 1995). Equality amongst Muslims encouraged conversion especially in caste divided India (Pearson, 2003). The Prophet Mohammed is believed to have been a merchant himself, it follows that Muslims should also aspire to be commercially active (Risso, 1995). Islamic law as it pertained to commerce would attract many converts as it standardised business practices such as investment liability, customs rates, and interest over a wide geographic area as was the case in thirteenth century Gujarat (ibid).
Abu-Lughod (1989) writes of how Arab merchants and sailors had taken residence at the Gujarati ports of Cambay and Saymur during the early days of Islam. From 1200, maritime trading in manufactured, semi-processed, primary forest and marine products and foodstuffs intensified. Calicut came to prominence with the decline of Persian Gulf ports. Arab merchants began sailing from Aden to Calicut where Samudri Raja (Zomorin) provided an environment conducive to trading in exchange for political support.

Also looking to expand its sphere of influence into the Indian Ocean was the Ottoman Empire, resulting in a rivalry that at times led to open conflict in the Red Sea, the Gulf, the Strait of Melaka and the Swahili Coast. The Ottomans had had their eye on maritime trade, and conquered North Africa, including Egypt, Syria and the Arabian Hijaz province in 1516-1517 (Risso, 1995). Despite their aspirations and conquests, the Ottomans did not commit to the maritime project and remained a largely land-based empire. Although they were successful in excluding the Portuguese from the Red Sea, their devastating loss and that of their Swahili allies in the late 16th century and the loss of Mocha and Aden in 1636 and 1645 respectively signalled the end of Ottoman ambitions in the Indian Ocean (Alpers, 2014).

South Asia

Throughout the ages, the Indian Peninsular, the geographic fulcrum of the Indian Ocean world, saw the rise and fall of different kingdoms involved in maritime trade. From the late 10th to the early 11th century the Chola kingdom dominated South Indian trade, even successfully challenging the Shrivijaya kingdom of Sumatra to gain control over the Strait of Malacca for fifty years (Asher and Talbot, 2006).

The Coromandel Coast also experienced a period of prosperity from 1200 due to the international trade in textiles and other goods such as pearls, spices and betelnut (Abu-Lughod, 1989). With the Hindu Vijayanagar state formation (14th-17th century), resulting in the largest ever south Indian state, however, came the loss of control of international distribution of Indian textiles. Ultimately Gujarati and Malabari Muslims came to dominate this trade, spreading themselves thin (ibid). Pulicat was the most important port on the Coromandel Coast during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The primary exports were textiles sent to Southeast Asia, whilst goods such as spices and non-precious metals were some of the imports (Asher and Talbot, 2006).

Asher and Talbot (2006) have written extensively on Indian States throughout history. The Vijayanagara state was in competition with the Bahmani Sultanate over the west coast of India. This strategic region provided access to maritime trade and the much-coveted imported war horse. The Vijayanagara kings exercised influence over the Indian west coast by entering into tributary relationships with small chiefs. Under the Vijayanagara, long-distance trade
flourished as they developed good road networks between urban centres and provided facilities for travellers. Also during the Vijayanagara period, Bengal was home to many rich ship owners who traded regionally, with China and as far as southern Europe. Textiles such as high-quality cotton and silk were the major exports from this region whilst silver bullion from Myanmar was an important import.

The Mughal empire was not involved in maritime trade until its conquest of Gujarat in 1572 (Asher and Talbot, 2006). The Mughals were primarily interested in Gujarat to ensure that Muslim pilgrims could enjoy safe passage to Mecca. By the early 1600s, however, the Mughal royal family began investing in ships and cargo. Surat became the main port city in Gujarat.

Masulipatnam came to pre-eminence as a port city with the rise of the Golkonda state (early 16th century to late 17th century), not least of all because the Portuguese wielded minimal power in the Bay of Bengal. This allowed Masulipatnam to develop into an entrepôt where goods from Bengal, for instance, could be transhipped (Asher and Talbot, 2006). A road from the port to Surat via Golkonda allowed for efficient overland transportation of goods until a sea route was established between the Coromandel Coast and Arabia.

**East Africa**

Pouwels (2002) tells us how the East African coast was already part of a commercial network that included the Arabian Sea by the sixth century (pre-Islam) and one that reached as far as China by the ninth century. Ivory, rhino horn, iron, gold (from Zimbabwe), and slaves from the hinterland were traded on the Swahili Coast for imports such as Arabian, Persian and Indian ceramics, cloth, and beads. Enslavement could follow after kidnapping and raiding. Between the years 950 and 1200, the Swahili would replace cowries as money and instead adopt copper and silver coins becoming further integrated into the commercial system. Different Muslim groups settled on the Swahili Coast over the years, adding to the rich culture that developed. These groups did not impose their identity on the indigenous Africans but rather adapted to local conditions. This is most obvious from the Kiswahili language which has borrowed Arabic, Persian and Indian language words but remains essentially an African language.

**East Asia**

The Genghis Khan-led Mongol expansion in the 13th century required a robust naval force (Wade, 2015). Instead of waging war, however, the Mongols sent emissaries to convince foreign rulers that paying tribute to the Yuan emperor was more desirable than attack by his navy (ibid; Pearson, 2003). This type of diplomacy was successful in Southern India where ten states agreed to the arrangement and Southeast Asia save Java which was attacked by the Chinese several times during the century (Wade, 2015). The Yuan also encouraged maritime trade as did the
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Song before them. In 1282 Qubilai, son of Genghis, launched a grand ship-building exercise. The state partnered with ortogh merchants who travelled by government ships and shared the profits of their trade.

The Yuan dynasty was usurped by a rebel leader by the name of Zhu Yuanzhang who established the Ming state in 1368 (Wade, 2015). Under the leadership of Yung Lo, the Ming dynasty expanded militarily and economically, particularly into Malacca, which had become a major trading centre (ibid; Abdullah, 2013). Yung Lo commissioned the construction of a large fleet. The purpose of the large navy was to demonstrate Ming power, give him legitimacy after he usurped his uncle, and to collect wealth. This fleet, led by Zheng He, made several voyages from 1405 until 1433 some of which ended with military action (Wade, 2015). Zhu Zhanji, Yung Lo’s successor would put an abrupt end to the expansionist strategy.

Europeans
In the 15th-century, the Portuguese reached India via the Swahili Coast in the quest to secure a trade in spices. Janet Abu-Lughod (1989) convincingly argues that before the arrival of the Portuguese the Indian Ocean had experienced a time of surplus wealth, technological and social innovation, and economic integration that resulted in contact between distant places. This period of free-flowing trade ran from the mid-13th to the mid-14th centuries with trading regions overlapping allowing for contact between places as far apart as China and Venice (Risso, 1995). Abu-Lughod’s thesis that a Eurasian “world system” existed before European industrial capitalism emerged in the 16th century is contrary to Immanuel Wallerstein’s assertion that such a system was first found in Europe and the Americas and that Asia was incorporated into this system resulting in changes in modes of production as a result of European market forces (Abu Lughod, 1989; Wallerstein, 2004).

Abu Lughod also challenged the view that European exceptionalism led to its dominance in the Indian Ocean. She found that there were similarities between Asian, Arab and European forms of capitalism such as the invention of money, pooling of capital and sharing risk, and merchant accumulation of wealth in favourable conditions. Furthermore, she argued that it was Asian decline and lucky timing on the part of the Europeans that ultimately led to the latter’s rise in the Indian Ocean. The situation in the Indian Ocean when the Dutch arrived on the scene was one of indigenous traders’ predominance, with Portuguese influence restricted to strategic forts such as Mozambique island, Diu and Melaka from where they collected port taxes from non-Portuguese vessels (Alpers, 2014).
The VOC in the early modern Indian Ocean world

In 1494 the monarchies of Spain and Portugal, with the blessings of the Spanish born pope, split the world into two spheres of influence. In The East, was the Spanish sphere of influence, and in The West was Portugal’s. The Treaty of Zaragoza led to the Americas becoming Spain’s stamping ground, while Africa and Asia became Portugal’s (save for the Philippines).

The Spanish threat to the privileges enjoyed by the nobility of the Low Countries such as control of judicial and financial institutions along with the rise of Protestantism led to a reluctant revolution against the Spanish crown (Limm, 1989; Israel, 1995). The seeds of the revolution included the anti-heresy campaign against Protestants, increased demand on the Low Countries in terms of tax, provisions, and men to support efforts in the 1540 war against France (Israel, 1995). Although England and the Netherlands were allies in the preservation of Dutch liberties in the face of Spanish catholic oppression and ensuring security of the channel, they were also competitors and often at war with one another (Jacobs, 1991).

Much money was to be made from the trade in Asian spices in 16th-century Europe and Dutch merchants were eager to capitalise on the high demand. Jacobs (1991) has documented the formation of the VOC in great detail and I shall paraphrase here. A group of Amsterdam merchants formed a “Company” and raised 300 000 guilders for an expedition to Asia in search of the coveted spices. This first expedition was not a success, but it was significant in that it paved the way for other Dutch merchants to seek their fortunes in The East. Companies from different Dutch provinces competed fiercely, driving up purchase prices and flooding the Dutch market. Under pressure from the States-General and Prince Maurits, the bickering factions merged into a United Dutch East India Company. Special privileges were bestowed on this Verenigde Oost-indische Compagnie (VOC) including monopoly rights to trade in the Indian Ocean and the right to wage war.

“The Company’s primary goal was to secure a monopoly on spices” (Jacobs, 1991:73). As the demand for European goods was not great in Asia, the Company had to engage in convoluted transactions to get its hands on said spices. On Banda where mace and nutmeg were cultivated, the Company massacred the local population to gain exclusive rights to these spices. Indian goods were traded for cloves in the Moluccas, high quality cinnamon was sourced from Ceylon and pepper from Sumatra. By the end of the 17th century, the proportion of spices to other Company trade goods decreased. Indian fabrics became popular in Europe, as did tea and coffee. The Company had a monopoly in the opium trade in Asia, saltpetre was sold in Europe and tin in China.
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**Historiography of Indian Ocean slavery**

Compared to the Company’s trade in commodities, slave trading was a secondary concern, yet multitudes of enslaved persons were traded and transported great distances thanks to its extensive seaborne empire. Vink reminds us that “whereas the Atlantic slave trade has been mapped out in relatively great detail...its Indian Ocean counterpart has remained largely uncharted territory” (Vink, 2003:132). He has attempted to quantify the volume of the VOC’s slave trade in the Indian Ocean. He found that it was 15-30% the size of the Atlantic Ocean slavery, and 1.5-3 times the size of both the Swahili coast and Dutch West Indian Company’s slaving activities. Allen reminds us that the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean worlds were not independent of each other (Allen, 2010).

Van Welie’s work raises some issues in attempting to quantify the chronically understudied Indian Ocean World slave trade (Van Welie, 2008). Slaving was but a minor aspect of Dutch trade in the Indian Ocean and is often overlooked. Much of the slave trading was left to private enterprise which has led to poor documentation. The beginning and end of the Indian Ocean slave trade are not as clear as in the case of Atlantic Ocean slavery. The multi-directionality of the trade and the multiple players make it difficult to generate a clear picture of the trade.

The study of the Atlantic slave trade is a good 20 years ahead of the study of its Indian Ocean counterpart, and today there exists an online database that one can use to research one’s family history and the history of the Atlantic slave trade in general. To date no such synthesis has come out of the study of Indian Ocean slave trading despite its relevance to world history. The displacement of people from diverse cultures and the sheer geographical size of the Indian Ocean basin make this system of slavery as significant as its Atlantic Ocean analogue.

Research into slavery in the Americas was fuelled by the civil rights movement (Worden, 1985). In response to dramatic social and political events in South Africa in the 1980s, along with the international trend to write history from below, Cape historians broadened their focus from just white settler history to include other Cape histories (Worden, 2014). During this time, a comparative approach to the history of Cape slavery was adopted (Worden, 1985). Although the VOC record at The Cape and in The Hague is extensive, the abundant accounts of slavery by formerly enslaved persons do not exist as they do in the New World. This makes it difficult to recreate enslaved persons life histories and has led to innovative readings of judicial documents, for instance (Worden and Groenewald, 2005).
South African historiographical trends

In the case of South Africa, the slave trade during colonial times has often been ignored because it has not served the purpose of elites over the years. The British rulers of South Africa emphasised the role they played in the industrialisation of the country. Afrikaans nationalists glorified settler history, concentrating on the struggle between them and the oppressive British and the uncivilised Africans (Nxumalo, 1992; Visser, 2004; Worden, 2009). This historiography takes the arrival of the Dutchman, Jan van Riebeeck, in 1652 as its point of departure. According to this school, black South Africans migrated from northern regions at approximately the same time as the Dutch arrived at The Cape (Nxumalo, 1992). It follows from this erroneous belief and complete erasure of the Khoisan from the South African landscape, that all was fair among the races.

Later Afrikaans historiography, emanating from Stellenbosch and later Potchefstroom and Pretoria Universities, would become Eurocentric in its approach, highlighting the contribution whites, Afrikaners in particular, had made to South Africa (Visser, 2004). It was F.A. van Jaarsveld who characterised the different phases of South African historiography as “Afrikaner republican, settler, imperialist and liberal schools” (Visser, 2004:5). Afrikaner nationalist historiography, in the objective-scientific fashion, has been juxtaposed to social history. Where the former is concerned with ethnic unity, state institutions and ‘great’ men, the latter is interested in intergroup struggles, interrogates institutions and tries to address the experiences of “ordinary people” (Grundlingh, 1993).

From the 1920’s, the liberal historiographical school challenged the “segregation” of South African histories prevalent in previous scholarship (Visser, 2004:6). The trends in this school of thought were captured in the publication of The Oxford History of South Africa in the 1960’s, a time of great social change that saw many African countries gaining independence from colonial metropoles and the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa. Subsequent liberal works approached history from a black Africanist perspective in which the Europeans were the others (Visser, 2004).

In the early 1960s, Govan Mbeki, a communist and African nationalist, wrote his seminal work, South Africa: The Peasants’ Revolt (1964). In it Mbeki challenged historical fallacies perpetuated by those who benefitted from white minority rule such as the popularly held belief that South Africa was a vacant land before the arrival and inland migration of Europeans, making them its rightful occupants. He systematically chronicled black resistance to disenfranchisement by the white minority.

The revisionists of the 1970s and 1980s grew out of such black resistance to the white South African government and its racist policies. They were strongly influenced by Marxist
theory and saw black subjugation as a class struggle between the oppressed masses and the racist capitalist state. These radical activist-historians, whose ultimate goal was revolution and black majority rule, were white (Visser, 2004). It may have occurred to the reader that South African historiography has been dominated by white men. This is no doubt a direct result of the country’s chauvinistic past and Nxumalo believes, deliberate efforts to exclude African historians from historical debate.

The African nationalists’ focus is now on the defeat of the Apartheid regime and the peaceful transition to their idyll: a non-racist, non-sexist South Africa (Freund, 2004). The notion of a “Rainbow Nation” as espoused by Archbishop Desmond Tutu is under threat as it becomes apparent that racial tensions still run deep in South African society and that not all who make up the Rainbow are benefitting equally in the ‘new’ South Africa (Freund, 2004). Habib (1997) challenged the focus on racial harmony at the expense of considerations such as the racial nature of ownership and today we see the folly of having not addressed such issues earlier in our democracy.

Interestingly, the Rainbow construct is not associated with the beginnings of Cape Town, a multi-cultural slave society for nearly 200 years, when slaves from all corners of the Indian Ocean basin were brought to The Cape. No administration has found it beneficial to popularise the history of modern South Africa in its infancy and the discourse on this subject has remained largely in the academic arena and out of the public’s imagination.

Worden highlights several watershed moments in the (white) Anglophone study of The Cape Dutch Colony (Worden, 2009). The first was the publication of The Shaping of South African Society in 1979. VOC Cape historiography was again revived in 2003 with the launch of Social Identities in VOC Cape Town a National Research Foundation funded project that concluded in 2009. This project culminated in an international conference in 2006 entitled Contingent Lives which brought Asian, African and European VOC scholars together. This gathering was significant in many ways including that it brought together researchers of Indian Ocean slave systems whereas an earlier trend was the heavy reliance of Cape historians on comparisons to North American. In her review of Contingent Lives, Nicole Ulrich warns against “developing a narrow micro-historical analysis (Ulrich, 2010:572)” at the expense of “Macro-narratives [which] allow for discussions of culture and language in relation to long-term processes as well as more elaborate explanatory frameworks concerned with origins, causes and consequences”. It is, however, possible and necessary to tell microhistories whilst simultaneously acknowledging long-term processes.

Despite the difficulties of putting a number to the Indian Ocean slave trade in general and at The Cape in particular, Robert Shell (1994) and Richard B. Allen (2015) have made attempts to do exactly that. Indian Ocean slave trading is notoriously difficult to enumerate due to its multi-
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directionality, the involvement of many different players and paucity of sources and difficulty in interpreting them. Be that as it may, Shell concluded that East Africa, Madagascar, South Asia and the Indonesian Archipelago each contributed approximately a quarter each to the imported slave population at The Cape. Nigel Worden (2005, 2016) has refined these findings, showing shifts in source regions for slaves at The Cape from South Asia, to the Indonesian Archipelago and finally to East Africa.

Indian Ocean world slave migration in the 18th century

This subsection will concentrate on the movement of enslaved persons in the Indian Ocean world, illustrating the diversity of origins of the traders and traded. Europeans took advantage of existing slave trading networks, increasing demand and expanding the geographic range of the trade to satisfy their labour needs. The manner in which Europeans became involved in indigenous slave trading networks was not uniform as shall be seen below.

Southern and East Africa

By founding the settlement at The Cape, the Dutch created a new node that previously had no connection with the Indian Ocean World. This node simultaneously became connected to the East African coast through trade, particularly in people, South and Southeast Asia as a part of the VOC seaborne trading empire. The early Cape resembled a VOC port city more than it did an Atlantic Ocean colonial settlement. The Cape Colony was under the governance of Batavia, modern day Jakarta, which in turn was under the governance of the VOC’s Heren XVII, the Gentlemen Seventeen, in the Netherlands. One major difference between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean World slave systems is that for the most part in the Atlantic Ocean there existed a triangular movement of peoples, money and commodities. Goods from Europe were shipped to the west coast of Africa to be traded for slaves. The slaves would then be shipped to the Americas where they worked on plantations and produced goods that would be shipped back to Europe. The Cape was far more cosmopolitan than any one of these nodes, with slaves coming from several slaving regions:

The Dutch Indian Ocean slave system drew captive labor from three interlocking and overlapping circuits of subregions: the westernmost, African circuit of East Africa, Madagascar, and the Mascarene Islands (Mauritius and Reunion); the middle, South Asian circuit of the Indian subcontinent (Malabar, Coromandel, and the Bengal/Arakan coast); and the easternmost, Southeast Asian circuit of Malaysia, Indonesia, New Guinea (Irian Jaya), and the southern Philippines (Vink, 2003: 139).
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Shell (1994) tells us that the provenance of slaves at The Cape was dependent on mercantilist rivalries, changes in shipping patterns, and the construction of stereotypes based on origins. These stereotypes were reflected for instance in the price that slaves fetched, and in the type of labour that they were assigned. Bengali women were reputed to be skilled needlewomen. Malays were reputed to be excellent craftsmen. Forty percent of slaves in the service (e.g. street vendors, laundresses, domestics) sector were from the Indian subcontinent, while Africans were often put to labour in the fields.

An aspect of Western Indian Ocean slave migrations is illustrated by Armstrong (1984) who writes of the slave trade between Madagascar and Arab, Portuguese, English and Dutch slavers. The Arab and Portuguese trades cannot be quantified due to the paucity of sources. The monopoly exercised by the Royal African Company in the Atlantic Ocean forced individual English traders to look further afield (Armstrong, 1984). At the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, Madagascar was a source of slaves for the New World and The Cape. The supply of slaves depended on the fortunes of warring kingdoms. The more enemies conquered, the more people enslaved, the more muskets could be purchased to continue warring.

It was necessary to constantly import new slaves to The Cape due to high mortality and the inability of the slave population to reproduce itself. The VOC sent 33 to 38 slavers to Madagascar from The Cape, but could never satisfy its demand (Worden, 2016). From the 1720s to the 1740s, the period during which the VOC had a trading post at Rio de la Goa, the main source of Company slaves would be Mozambique. Between 1740 and 1785 slaves would once again be sourced from Madagascar however, mainland Africa would continue to be a significant source of slaves from the end of the VOC period till the end of the oceanic slave trade (ibid). Private slave owners would also obtain their slaves from the African mainland from the 1790s. This stream of slaves was made available by Portuguese and Brazilian slavers en route to Brazil. These slave traders developed networks at The Cape that resulted in some Cape traders investing in Portuguese slaving voyages to Mozambique (Harries, 2014).

As mentioned above, the trade in Madagascan slaves could not satisfy the demand at The Cape. In the late 18th century, the company ventured further north, up the East African coast, to trade for slaves on the Swahili Coast. This change came about as the French demand for labour on their plantations in the Mascarenes shifted the balance of power on the island to the east. Insufficient slaves and the high prices they fetched also contributed to the decision to look for another source. There were difficulties involved in slaving along the Swahili Coast such as the lengthy journey and the prohibition on the sale of slaves to Europeans (Ross and Holtzapfel, 1986). Despite these difficulties, the Dutch managed to acquire 50 slaves at Zanzibar in 1776, and 328 the following year.
The Western Indian Ocean economic system was based on the exchange of cloths and beads for African gold and ivory. Slaving in Madagascar, Mozambique and the Swahili coast existed before European contact, however it was not of primary importance until the 18th century (Alpers, 1970). The establishment of a plantation economy (coffee, cotton, indigo and sugar) in the French Mascarenes resulted in an unprecedented demand for slaves (ibid). The demand for chattel labour was also fuelled by the need to supply provisions to French ships and those of other nationalities operating in the Indian Ocean (ibid; Allen, 2015). Between 1670 and 1810 French ships carried at least 24000 enslaved persons from South and Southeast Asia, but mainly from Mozambique, the Swahili Coast and Madagascar to the Mascarenes (Allen, 2015). The French bought slaves from Mozambique with the help of colluding Portuguese officials who disobeyed orders not to allow other European powers to trade in their sphere of influence (Alpers, 1970; Ross and Holtzappel, 1986). These officials in turn worked with African agents who acquired slaves further inland (Alpers, 1970).

The French demand for chattel labour could not be satisfied by trading in Mozambique, and by the 1760s this trade had become difficult to conduct in Madagascar (Alpers, 1970). This period also coincided with the royal decree allowing all French nationals trade access to the Mascarenes leading to a threefold increase in the slave population to more than 93000 (Allen, 2003). As a result, the French ventured further up the East African coast to Zanzibar and Kilwa where they had an arrangement with the Sultan to buy a quota of slaves annually (Alpers, 1970). Allen (2015) has identified some 950 confirmed and probable slaving journeys between 1718 and 1809 involving the French Mascarenes as the destination, or as the place of departure for slavers destined for locations as far as the Americas (Allen, 2015; Alpers, 1970). Not only did the French procure slaves from mainland Africa for the Mascarenes, but also for plantations in St Domingue (Harries, 2014).

Allen (2015) writes about English involvement in slave trading along the East African coast. Slaving voyages sanctioned by the British East India Company (EIC) were made to Madagascar and de la Goa Bay (Mozambique) to supply Bencoolen on Sumatra and at times Bombay and Madras in the 18th century. Angolan slaves reached St. Helena and Bencoolen in 1764, whilst in the early 1770’s the Company was involved in its final large-scale slaving enterprise which supplied 273 slaves to Bencoolen, 215 of whom were Malagasy. Although Malagasy accounted for 75% of the slaves delivered to British stations in the Indian Ocean and St. Helena, some were also procured from Cape Verde, Indonesia, West and West Central Africa.

There is a striking difference between the British trade in slaves in the Indian Ocean in the 17th and 18th centuries in comparison to the Dutch. Whereas the VOC was content to allow private persons to do most of the trading, the British East India Company (EIC) was actively
involved in the slave trade as a “corporate state willing and able to exercise a comparatively high degree of centralized control over its far-flung operations” (Allen, 2015:29).

Several features stand out from French involvement in the Mascarene slave trade as is demonstrated by Allen (2015). Firstly, captains with apparent knowledge of the regional slave trade were involved in multiple slaving voyages. As we will see later, this was also the case for VOC skippers in the Indian Ocean world. As with Dutch slaving in the Indian Ocean basin, slaves were almost always part of a mixed cargo. Both metropolitan (Nantes, Bordeaux, Lorient for example) and colonial (Port Louis) French mercantile interests were involved in this trade.

Machado writes of the slaving activities carried out by Gujarati merchants in Mozambique. Initially the slaves were used as labourers in the docks carrying goods from vessels from Diu and Daman. Slaves sent to Daman were sometimes sent on to Goa, and those sent to Diu were mostly transported to north-west India (Machado, 2003). Specialised Gujarati slave traders would often partner with Portuguese merchants. The growth of the slave trade to Portuguese India was interconnected with the demand of Brazilian slave traders who wanted to avoid British anti-slaving activities in the Atlantic Ocean in 19th century.

South Asia
In South and Southeast Asia, the VOC encountered ancient slave owning societies. “European colonial powers ... were forced to tap into and negotiate with existing slaving networks in order to supply the labour demands of their colonies” (Major, 2012:50). As elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, enslaved people being transported in this part of the Indian Ocean world were a part of the mixed cargo carried by the ships they found themselves on (ibid; Campbell, 2004).

In Colombo the majority of slaves were sourced from the Malabar Coast and to a lesser extent from the Coromandel Coast of India, Bengal and Batavia. Slavery in Colombo was an urban affair with enslaved persons working mostly in the homes of Company employees and wealthy residents (Raben, 1996).

Indian slaves were exported by European powers to their colonies in the eastern and western Indian Ocean colonies (Boomgaard, 2004; Major, 2012). The Dutch and Portuguese formed alliances with local Indian groups who carried out raids to supply their European partners (Major, 2012). Another means by which to obtain slaves was during times of little when individuals would give themselves or family members over, children included, into slavery to improve their chances of survival (Allen, 2015; Major, 2012). Traders often used the excuse that they partook in the Indian slave trade as a means to save the destitute, however some enslaved people had “traumatic histories of kidnap, enslavement and transfer by family members, bawds, pimps and procurers” (Major, 2012:64) which countered this narrative.
Southeast Asia

The VOC did not itself control the slave trade in Southeast Asia. The Company aimed primarily at monopolizing pepper and other spices in the 17th century, and in the 18th century, luxury textiles, coffee and tea. The VOC was content to leave this trade to ‘private enterprise’, albeit under certain restrictions (Van der Kraan, 1983).

Both VOC employees and private traders, Asian and European alike, were involved in the slave trade to Batavia. Batavia was also a port of transhipment of slaves to other Company ports (Raben, 1996). Such movements of enslaved persons make it difficult to trace their geographic origins as only their port of departure was recorded, however individuals could have made migrations to different entrepôts before arriving at Batavia (Raben, 1996). In the 18th century the bulk of imported slaves came from Bali and Sulawesi with a substantial number coming from the Indian subcontinent (Raben, 1996). Imported slaves in Indonesia were also from Madagascar and the Philippines (Boomgaard, 2004).

The two major players in Maluku trade were the Chinese and the Bugis. After the trade in spices, slaving was the next most important trade in from the 17th century onwards (Andaya, 1991). Most enslaved persons were captured in village raids. As in Bengal, India and other Asian and African societies, the arrival of European powers changed the nature of and intensified the slave trade (Andaya, 1991; Major, 2012; Sutherland, 1983; Van Galen, 2008).

In Bali there were a multitude of ways that one could become enslaved, be it debt, sale by a male relative or capture by a raiding enemy to mention a few (Van der Kraan, 1983). As in Maluku, Chinese slave traders were the major players in the export of Balinese slaves, and in the 17th and 18th centuries the main flow of this traffic was to Batavia (ibid).

Characteristics of VOC settlement and slavery in the Indian Ocean

This subsection attempts to place The Cape of Good Hope in the wider Dutch Indian Ocean world and tries to elucidate the nature of slavery and how it affected the lives of the enslaved. There are some similarities between the different settlements. For instance, the access to networks that marriage to indigenous women could afford European men. Sometimes relationships between free and enslaved could be close and affectionate resulting in manumission. These multi-ethnic port cities with high enslaved to European ratios allowed for relative freedom of enslaved persons not least of all because of the many economic activities that they were involved in and the independent networks they could cultivate. Relationships developed across ethnic and class lines all while the Company attempted to control those under its jurisdiction. Enslaved persons followed similar paths to enslavement in South and Southeast Asia. The Dutch made
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their mark where they could, and otherwise adapted to local conditions. Schnurrmann describes
the four characteristics of Dutch colonialism in Asia:
1. Establishment of settlements where they exercised military power and held commercial interests.
2. Establishment of trading posts to satisfy the demand for goods in both Asia and Europe.
3. Dependence of presence and economic activities on local powers.
4. Finally, the Dutch formalised their occupation and settled permanently.

For the most part slaves in the Indian Ocean world worked as domestic servants to the free
European and Asian residents in port cities (Van Welie, 2008). This is a similar model to that
followed early at The Cape of Good Hope before the agricultural sector overtook services as
the greatest absorber of labour.

The Cape of Good Hope

Between the years 1652-1795, The Cape Colony was governed by the Dutch East India Company.
What was initially a refreshment stop for company ships on their way to and from the Far-East
soon became a cosmopolitan settlement with resident Africans, Europeans and Asians. There
were several categories of people recognized by the company. These were Europeans/burghers,
free blacks, slaves and Hottentots/Boesjeman (Khoisan). The Company used ethnic categorisation
for social control in other regions too.

In early Cape Town the most significant differentiating factor was whether one was a
Christian or not. Both in Southeast Asia and The Cape these dichotomies made it difficult for
slaves to negotiate slavery as “Concepts of ethnicity and identity for Southeast Asians were fluid
and changed over time and place...People...used...several...markers of identity without being
contradictory, embracing instead the malleable notion of ethnicity from their region of origin”

“Slavery in South Africa...began in an urban context” (Shell, 1994:xxxi), but in time changed
from the domestic type “to a more rurally based plantation system” (Shell, 1994:140). There
were four types of slaves at The Cape: those that belonged to the Dutch East India Company;
those that belonged to the Company officials, those that belonged “to the burghers-free, settled
and semi-nomadic patriarchal farmers” (Shell, 1994:xxxii) and finally those that belonged to
the vrije zwarten (free blacks), former slaves. The burgher slaves were the majority at The Cape
while those belonging to free blacks were in the minority.

The free black community at The Cape proportionally bought and freed more slaves
compared to other slave-owning communities (Shell, 1992). Some Europeans, particularly
widows, did make “manumission sales” in order to free long-serving and loyal slaves with whom
they had grown close (ibid). In Galle too, these close ties are evident from the wills of slave
owners who manumitted some of their slaves and left them with an inheritance (Wagenaar, 1994).

At The Cape there developed “The extended, matrilineally interrelated Cape family” (Shell, 1992:9) amongst the settlers. Moreover, early on at The Cape, many marriages occurred between free European settlers and Cape-born (possibly) slave women whom they manumitted. The next most common marriage was to women from the Indonesian Archipelago, followed by Bengali women and finally the least common marriage partner for a European man was the “full breed” African woman (Shell, 1992). These women and their children would be absorbed into European colonial society.

Despite these trends, family and community formation for slaves at The Cape was difficult, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the male to female slave ratio was highly skewed (Ross and Holtzappel, 1986; Shell, 1994). Secondly, the slave population was heterogeneous and had no language, culture, or religion in common. Thirdly the slave holdings were often small (Ekama, 2012) and isolated, making it physically difficult to forge ties. On the other hand, “Company slaves were from the same language group, the same religious background, the same geographic areas...” (Shell, 1994:49), family and community formation would have been easiest for this group of slaves (Newton-King, 2012).

Roman-Dutch law also made family formation difficult for enslaved and formerly enslaved. Legal marriage was between two consenting adult Christian persons. Save for company slaves, enslaved persons were often not baptised. Moreover, slaves and free blacks often turned to Islam as a faith (Malherbe, 2006) as the church would not welcome them. These factors made European-styled marriage inaccessible to the majority of people of colour at The Cape during the Dutch colonial period. It comes as no surprise that many people of colour were in relationships that the Company described as cohabitation. Despite these obstacles, as we have seen, free black women did marry Europeans and later we shall see evidence of a fledgling free black community in which respectability was held dear.

In Malan’s recreation of Cape households from probate documents, it becomes clear that free and enslaved lived in close quarters in mid eighteenth-century Cape Town (Malan, 1998). Of the four households she recreated she found that in one six-roomed house lived two free and two enslaved people. In one five-roomed house lived a free woman and her three slaves. Two nine-roomed houses were home to five free alongside thirteen enslaved and six free alongside eleven enslaved respectively. Shell too sites instances in the written record where slave women are said to have slept in the houses of the slave owner (Shell, 1992).

The proximity between enslaved and the slave-owning class was not just physical. Newton-King (2012) writes of the “vertical ties” that slaves and former slaves cultivated and maintained with high-ranking VOC officials and their families. These ties were at times very intimate and
probably facilitated manumission for company slaves who were often seconded to work in the homes of these high-ranking officials. Slaves and former slaves also maintained family and friendship ties, even across oceans. These kinship networks were characterised by letter writing, gift giving, and even small-scale trade.

Robert Ross (1980) has written about the occupations of the enslaved persons at The Cape during the Company period. Those persons owned by the Company were engaged in a variety of activities including administrative work, trades such as carpentry and pottery, and general unskilled labour. There were also the Asian convicts, so called kaffirs, who worked under the Fiscaal as assistants in law enforcement. Privately owned slaves acted as household servants performing chores such as cooking, child care, collecting water, getting rid of filth and fetching wood. Skilled privately-owned slaves worked as craftsmen and could earn wages for their masters. Other slaves could earn koeli geld for their masters peddling goods on the streets.

At The Cape “the task of the courts of law, inter alia, was to maintain [the] necessary subordination of underlings and superiority of masters” (Ross, 1980:6). The VOC instituted the Court of Justice to act as the highest legal authority in the colony and kept a police force (Ross, 1983). In the countryside the burghers would assemble themselves into commandos to deal initially with stock theft by the San and later to capture runaway slaves (Ross, 1980). Violence was the main tool used by the slave-owning class to maintain control at The Cape. The Company’s often brutal punishments for slave challenges to its authority included impalements, branding, whipping and disfiguration. The burghers also used violence against their slaves and sometimes the punishment meted out led to the death of the slave. Killing or maltreating a slave could lead to the forced sale of all an owner’s slaves (Shell, 1992).

South Asia
The Dutch captured Ceylon and thus the monopoly in fine quality cinnamon from the Portuguese in 1658 (Jacobs, 2006). In Ceylon the VOC had Asians, Eurasians and Europeans under its rule. Due to the large population and area under its administration the company governed by “a system of indirect rule” (Wagenaar, 2014:143). The Company relied on local chiefs who acted as administrators to facilitate resource exploitation and taxation of the local population. Many VOC stations were established along the coast, but the Dutch never controlled the entire island, many parts of which belonged to the king of Kandy (Jacobs, 2006). In the eighteenth-century, these strange bedfellows, the VOC and the king of Kandy, had a relationship which saw the local population ruled over by indigenous rulers who were appointed by the VOC (ibid). This and other concessions were made by the Company to minimise resistance and facilitate business. A conflict with Kandy came about when the Company abandoned this delicate diplomatic balancing act thus jeopardising the cinnamon trade (Gaastra, 2003).
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Luckily for the Company, the caste system in existence in South Asia and the associated obligations to it as “Lord of the Land” meant that the collection and processing of valuable commodities for its benefit was quite easy (Wagenaar, 2014:144). Slave labour in the domestic sphere was as common in Ceylon as elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia. Enslaved persons came from a wide variety of origins such as Bengal, Bali, Arakan and Madura. Although Europeans lived in the urban settlements of Galle, Colombo and Jaffna, and the Company instituted typically Dutch institutions such as the orphan board and the Dutch Reformed Church, the long-term impact of the Dutch in Ceylon was minimal (ibid).

Ekama illustrates how slaves were a part of a diverse underclass in Colombo and forged ties with free and enslaved alike (Ekama, 2012). One of the reasons that enslaved people had the opportunity to interact and form these relationships was the relative freedom of movement they enjoyed in the port city. The existence of these ties is illustrated by free people from all walks of life standing surety for emancipated slaves, and free and enslaved collaborating in committing crimes such as theft.

Singh (2007) gives us a glimpse at life in a VOC settlement on the Malabar Coast of India in the late eighteenth-century in which more than half the population was enslaved. The majority of households were medium-sized (one to ten people) and could consist of the owner’s nuclear and extended family, servants and slaves. For the most part slaves were part of the domestic sphere and interacted a great deal with the mistress of the house and her children. The importance of *mestizo* women in Fort Cochin society is evident from Singh’s work:

In many families, descent could be traced through local-born mestizo women. They played an important role in the establishment of family ties and networks of the servants of the company in Malabar, especially for the middle-income households (Singh, 2007:113).

In Fort Cochin, in particular, as at The Cape, the VOC preoccupied itself with the categorisation of people in its sphere of influence. People were categorised based on economic status, rank within the VOC, and ethnicity. In Ceylon categorisation by the company had implications for dress and whether or not one served in the burgher militia (Wagenaar, 2014).

**Southeast Asia**

Batavia was established as an administrative centre, a rendezvous for VOC ships and transhipment port in 1619 after a violent take-over of Jacatra (Jacobs, 2006). Batavia was the cosmopolitan headquarters of the VOC in The East with resident burghers, Chinese, *mestizos*, Malays, Balinese and enslaved. "Domestic slaves...originated from Malabar, Bengal, Sumatra, Bali and above all Sulawesi. On average, three thousand slaves were imported into Batavia
annually” (Blussé, 1988:19). The VOC in Batavia joined indigenous trade networks but could not compete successfully with the Asian merchants who operated on a smaller scale and could adapt quickly to market forces (Jacobs, 2006). The Company responded by instituting a pass system and taxing Asian trade activities to generate revenues (ibid). Unlike in other Indian Ocean settlements where the VOC preferred to remain as politically neutral as possible, the Company was actively involved in Javanese politics (Gastra, 2003).

“Fear was inherent in colonial societies. Much of this was an ‘official anxiety’, fostered by the authorities against anything threatening to uproot the achievement of their aims” (Raben, 1996:161). As a result of this fear, no doubt stemming primarily from the small European population in the midst of a much larger Asian one and the existence of powerful neighbouring Asian states, the Company was in perpetual conflict mode and instituted such measures as control of movement in Batavia, registrations of residents, segregation and co-option (Raben, 1996).

As elsewhere, the paths to slavery in Southeast Asia were numerous: debt, conflict, kidnapping and natural or manmade disasters (Boomgaard, 2003). In the 17th and the better part of the 18th centuries slaves constituted a large part of the population of VOC settlements in Southeast Asia (Blussé, 1998; Reid, 1983; Van der Kraan, 1983). Boomgaard characterises three types of servile labour in Java:

slaves, who can be bought and sold, serfs, who can neither be traded nor leave their masters, and debt bondmen and bondwomen who in principle can regain freedom by paying off their debts (Boomgaard, 2003:87).

In Batavia as in Cochin, mestizo women played an important role. The Company realised early on that marriage of its European servants to local women would lead to the settler community required for Batavia to thrive socially and economically (Blussé, 1988). These mestizo women were European by virtue of marriage to a European but they retained East Asian customs such as chewing betel and using parasols (Gelman Taylor, 2009). Migrant Chinese also married local women, particularly Balinese women who were formerly enslaved (Blussé, 1988). The mestizos and especially the Portuguese-speaking Mardijkers became the population groups upon which the VOC chose to rely in political and military affairs (Blussé, 1988). The latter group consisted of manumitted Asian slaves and their offspring whose name stems from the Malay word, merdeka, meaning ‘freedom’.

Slaves in Southeast Asia took part in equally diverse occupations as at The Cape (Reid, 1983), working as artisans, coolies, sharecroppers, fishermen and prostitutes (Boomgaard, 2004). It is clear that slave owners viewed the enslaved as assets (Campbell, 2004) which they were
“able to render into a liquid asset if need” (Shell, 1992:292). At times, however, it did not prove economical to own slaves who suffered from high mortality (Boomgaard, 2004).

Slaves were also a status symbol; the more one had and the better they were clad the greater the status of their owner. Slave ownership as a show of status existed in South (Singh, 2007) and Southeast Asia (Boomgaard, 2004; Hussin, 2007; Reid, 1983; Sutherland, 1983). “As in the Southeast Asian pattern everywhere, however, the most common purpose of European slaves was for domestic service” (Reid, 1983:17).

Knaap and Sutherland’s (2004) work on Makassar, which the VOC founded as a garrison town to protect its monopoly in spices in Maluku, sheds some light on the slave trade in the region. Slaves and rice were consistently exported from the VOC port city with enslaved persons being transported by private contractors supplying Batavia. These contractors were European and Asian alike however, the burghers were the more active in the slave trade. Their human cargoes originated from a variety of different places including Makassar, Bugis and Sumbawa.

We learn of the free and enslaved of Melaka from Hussin (2007). They too represented a broad ethnic spectrum, most originating from the Archipelago with some having been transported from Bengal, the Malabar Coast and even Mozambique. The free population of Melaka was also multi-ethnic, consisting of a European minority ruling over an Asian (Malays, Chinese, Kelings and Moors) and Eurasian majority. Melaka was a city of contradictions: on the one hand it was segregated along ethnic lines, but “More importantly, cultural barriers were being continually challenged especially by intermarriages, but also by friendships...forged by individuals of different ethnic backgrounds” (Hussin, 2007:289).

**Slavery at The Cape under the British**

With time several changes were made at The Cape once it became part of the British Empire. During the transitional period, 1795-1814, the short-lived Batavian administration (1803-1806) was once again replaced by a British administration in 1806. During this period, the Netherlands had changed its name from the Republic of the United Seven Provinces to the Batavian Republic after the heroic Batavians who had fought the Romans. The Batavian Republic was in fact a satellite state dependent on France. This period did not see drastic changes in the lives of the enslaved as is evidenced by both administrations’ continued support of the master-servant status quo (Freund, 1979). This support persisted despite Britain’s abolition of the oceanic trade in enslaved persons in 1808. The Cape economy was heavily reliant on coerced labour, and the British did not want to antagonise the slave owners who also owned the means of production (ibid).
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1823 saw the beginning of a decade-long policy of amelioration with regard to the enslaved, so as to lay the foundation for a free labour market (Dooling, 1994).

The frankly stated purpose of the slavery reform laws was to prepare the slaves for eventual emancipation...Slaves were granted the right to marry and create families, and to earn money to purchase their freedom, among other provisions designed to foster self-discipline and initiative in a class of soon-to-be-free workers (Mason, 1994:53).

The laws enacted challenged the paternalistic world view of the Cape slave owner (Mason, 1994). Limits were put on the amount of labour that an owner could demand from a slave as well as on their ability to punish their slaves. The office of the Guardian of Slaves was created in 1826 through which slaves could lodge complaints against their owners. This led to a rise in legal cases brought forward by enslaved against slave-owners and the scope of the complaints as compared to the Dutch period. The enslaved used their strengthened legal standing to keep their families together and improve working conditions (Dooling, 1994).

It was also during the period of amelioration that a rise in manumissions is evident, particularly among urban slaves who had more opportunities to build social networks and earn money, factors that increased access to freedom (Bank, 1994). 1829 saw the passing of ordinance 19 which allowed for enslaved persons’ marriage and outlawed the separation of mothers and their young children (Malherbe, 2006).

The anti-slavery movement was not only motivated by the view that slavery was immoral, but also by the liberal belief that it was an inefficient form of labour relative to wage labour which allowed for mobility and offered incentives for work performed (Elphick and Shell, 1979). John Fairbairn, a Cape liberal, may well have opposed slavery on moral grounds, however, he simultaneously supported the slave owners’ rights as property owners who needed to be compensated for their loss of property upon emancipation (ibid).

The 1833 Abolition Act which manumitted Cape slaves simultaneously bound them to their masters for a further four years of ‘apprenticeship’ to prepare enslaved and slave-owner alike for a free labour economy (Worden, 1994). Lest we interpret British motives as altruistic, “Slaves were to be freed from bondage but not from labour” (Worden, 1994:118) for their masters. Moreover, offences such as truancy, insolence and inefficiency, antitheses of the industrious, docile and hard-working labouring class the British wished for were codified (Worden, 1994). Thus, apprenticeship served as an extension of slavery and did not make a material difference to the lives of the former slaves (Elphick and Shell, 1979; Watson, 2012; Worden, 1994).

The apprenticeship period came to an end in 1838 and led to increased mobility of freed slaves, who could choose where to live and for whom to work (Watson, 2012). Many newly freed
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slaves left the farms on which they had worked and headed to the city where they would have access to better services and wages. Some were drawn to missions where they could have their spiritual needs, long neglected by the Dutch, met and obtain land (ibid). The missionaries had more than proselytising in mind,

the missionary enterprise...demands the support of the merchants; for wherever the gospels is preached, a market is opened for British manufactures; for civilization ever accompanies the gospel; and civilization and the use of various commodities manufactured in our native land generally go hand in hand. (Thomas Lawson, 1841 in Watson, 2012:82)

The honour and respectability lost in subjugation could be regained through Christianisation and adoption of its values (Elbourne and Ross, 1997). The missions at The Cape were places where Khoikhoi and former slaves could find solace, settle or congregate, engage in economic activity, find shelter from sexual exploitation, become literate and build communities. Literacy gave access to the franchise (ibid). Another contributor to gaining respectability was the Marriage-Order-in-Council passed in order to legitimate children born to slaves under different arrangements. This order made it possible for couples to enter into legal marriages without a religious ceremony (Malherbe, 2008).

Enslaved Africans on ships captured by the British after they outlawed the oceanic slave trades were known as “Prize Negroes” (Saunders, 1984:36). They provided another source of unfree labour. By 1815 there were 2000 such freed slaves at The Cape who were then “apprenticed” for fourteen years without pay before being released to earn a living for themselves. For the most part Prize Negroes were secured for domestic work at The Cape as emancipated Cape slaves refused to work in this capacity for their former masters (Saunders, 1984). Prize Negroes were also sourced from St. Helena and the Eastern African Coast. After their release they joined the free blacks of The Cape who would later be known as ‘Coloureds’.

All these developments must be seen in light of the British metropole losing its taste for slave labour due to public opinion and the belief that free labour was more efficient and ultimately cheaper than maintaining an enslaved workforce (Northrup, 1995). The demand for labour had not abated, a smooth transition was necessary from enslaved to free labour. A new labour system was required that was more palatable to the metropole and allowed for mobility to satisfy the demand for labour wherever it arose in the Empire.

The answer came in the form of indentured labour. The British had attempted several indentured labour experiments before the successful migration of large numbers of Indian labourers to toil in the sugar fields of Mauritius in 1835. Contrary to popular belief, the first time free non-European indentured labourers were transported to a British settlement was in 1806
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When 200 Chinese arrived in Trinidad (Northrup, 1995). In 1810, 53 Chinese labourers arrived in St. Helena, this was the beginning of a migration that would result in a Chinese population of 643 by 1817 (Allen, 2014). Racial stereotypes were behind the choice of Chinese labourers over other nationalities. Not only did these attempts predate the Mauritian case, they also did not involve Indians, who would later be the major group involved in this system (Allen, 2014).

Conclusions

The main purpose of this historical review was to place the colonial Cape in the wider Indian Ocean and VOC worlds. When it comes to slavery and European involvement in it, the hope is that the reader has seen how the VOC connected The Cape to old slave trading societies resulting in the multicultural city we know today. What is missing from the literature is an indication of the effect that enslavement had on enslaved persons, particularly as individuals. This is a direct result of the nature of the sources available to historians as they privilege information that was important to the company, not keeping record of the mundane lives of slaves.