

Cloves, Slaves, and British Imperialism: The Rise and Fall of Omani Plantation Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Zanzibar

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In the early nineteenth century, a new slave system emerged which would be all but completely eliminated less than one hundred years later. Following the subversion of the Dutch monopoly of clove production in the Malay Archipelago in the 1820s, plantation slavery aimed at clove production erupted throughout Zanzibar, an Omani-controlled archipelago in East Africa. By the 1850s, exportation of cloves had increased to fifteen times the size of which it had been just thirty years earlier.¹ However, this success was not set to last. Cracks emerged in this system by mid-century as the result of the confluence of factors like political instability, price fluctuations, and the availability of arable land. While efforts to produce cloves for export continued, Omani plantation owners had to further weather increasing European, particularly British, imperialism as well as natural disasters. In this essay, I analyze plantation slavery in Zanzibar from two different, yet related angles. First, I will examine how this slave system developed and collapsed in such a relatively short amount of time. In doing so, the seemingly unique case of nineteenth century Zanzibari slavery elicits comparisons and contrasts with a variety of other historical slave systems, especially that of elite domestic slaves in the late Ottoman Empire and plantation slavery in the antebellum Southern United States. In light of these comparisons, we can see how both economic and domestic slavery must be seen as two interconnected forms of slavery, particularly in the Zanzibari context. Moreover, this case study will make clear how international abolitionist efforts worked in tandem with European imperialism.

Geographical Background

Located on the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman has been a major participant in Indian Ocean trade for millennia. Its current capital, the city of Muscat, served as a main port for “[s]ailing vessels traveling between East Africa and India..., while much trade from Turkey, Persia, and other areas near the gulf” passed through the city.²

¹ Frederick Cooper, Table 2:1 Clove Exports of Zanzibar, 1839-1856, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 52; Abdul Sheriff, Table 2.3 Cloves: production, export, and prices, 1830-79, *Slaves, Spice and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (London: James Curry, 1987), 62-3.

² Cooper, 30.

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Shortly after the death of Muhammad, Omani Arabs not only converted to Islam, but were part of one of the earliest sects, the Khawarijites, to break from the orthodox Rashidun Caliphate (632-661) in 657. Over time, this group formed into the Ibadi denomination of Islam which remains dominant in Oman today. According to the Ibadi tradition, Omanis “denied the right of hereditary succession to the Caliphate and argued that only the community of the faithful [the *‘umma*h] could elect a leader.”³ As such, the political and spiritual leadership of Oman coalesced around the leadership of an Imam (from the Arabic *‘imam*, denoting a spiritual leader of a community). The Imamate of Oman continued to rely upon maritime trade as the staple of its economy which, as will be discussed below, brought it into conflict when European powers established themselves in the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century.

Over two thousand miles away, south of the Horn of Africa, sits the Zanzibar Archipelago. Currently a semi-autonomous region of Tanzania, the archipelago consists of two large islands, Unguja and Pemba, along with many smaller islands. Unguja, commonly referred to as Zanzibar, is the largest and main island of the archipelago. Pemba is the second largest island, located to the northeast of Unguja. Throughout this essay, I will use Zanzibar to refer to the entire archipelago while using the names of the individual islands of Unguja and Pemba when referring only those islands specifically. The earliest extant record of Zanzibar in history comes from the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (c. 100-300 CE) written in Koine Greek by a sailor traveling between the Red Sea and India.⁴ However, for much of Zanzibari history up to the tenth century, records are either sparse or non-existent until the writings of the Arab traveler al-Mas’udi who described the Zanzibar Archipelago of already containing a sizable Arab Muslim population.⁵

Oman in East Africa

Given the mercantile nature of Omani history, it is unsurprising that its connections with East Africa reach far back into history. However, the aforementioned arrival of the Portuguese in East Africa at the end of the fifteenth century irreversibly changed the trajectory of Omani and Zanzibari history. Throughout the sixteenth century, the Portuguese established themselves along the coast of east Africa, eventually setting up a trading post on Unguja. Later headquartered in Mombasa, the

³ Cooper, 28.

⁴ Norman R. Bennett, *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar* (London: Methuen & Co., 1978), 3.

⁵ Bennett, 5.

Portuguese exerted their power over the region through the end of the seventeenth century.⁶ Similarly, in 1507, the Portuguese captured Muscat and held it until Imam Sultan bin Saif of the Ya'arubi dynasty regained Omani control of the city.⁷ The Omanis continued to vie with the Portuguese for control of the western Indian Ocean and, in 1652, attacked Portuguese holdings on Zanzibar after the Zanzibaris requested their aid. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Omanis, now led by the al-Busaidi dynasty, solidified their hegemony over Zanzibar which became their main outpost in East Africa.⁸

Pre-Nineteenth Century Omani Slavery

Prior to the nineteenth century, it was rare in Omani society to use slaves for economic purposes, such as harvesting or producing goods for export. The only major export of this period was dates which did not constitute a large portion of the Omani mercantile economy, but also were not labor intensive to harvest. These factors led to the use of tenant farmers to work the date groves as this was ultimately cheaper than importing slaves for this purpose.⁹ Instead, domestic slaves formed the majority of slaves in Omani society. These slaves may have been used for menial tasks, but this work was largely non-intensive. As such, Frederick Cooper notes that, "slaves were as much an item of consumption – as domestics of living displays of wealth – as of production."¹⁰ Thus, the existence of domestic slaves not only performed household duties, but were intrinsically connected to wealth and economic status.

Among these domestic slaves, the status of the *suria* demonstrates the logic behind Omani slavery as well as a useful comparative to other slave systems. The *suria* were female domestic slaves who performed functions similar to concubines except that their express purpose was to produce children for their master who would be considered legitimate and be fully assimilated into the household.¹¹ The distinction between a *suria* (from the Arabic root s-r-r from which the Arabic word umbilical cord (*surur*) is also derived) and a concubine is important as Saada Omar

⁶ Bennet, 9-10.

⁷ Bennet, 11.

⁸ Bennett, 12-13. For reasons of brevity, I am limiting my analysis to just the Zanzibar Archipelago despite the fact that Omani holdings in East Africa also extended along the coast. For a timeline of al-Busaidi rulers of Oman and Zanzibar, see appendix A. The al-Busaidi also marks the shift from the imamate tradition in Oman to an outright sultanate which remains to today ruled by Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Busaidi.

⁹ Cooper, 36.

¹⁰ Cooper, 37.

¹¹ A glossary of terms used in Omani and Zanzibari slavery is provided in appendix B.

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Wahab emphasizes that the two played different roles within Omani society. Concubines were “extra-legal wives who were possessed by a man of high social status only,” while *suria* “established cohabitation with the slave masters as secondary wives with certain legal rights and social status.”¹² Upon given birth to a child by their master, a *suria* became known as an *umm al-walad* (literally mother of the child), and could not be sold or pawned and would be manumitted upon her master’s death. The child of a *suria* was considered equal to that of a child borne by a wife and was subject to the same rights and inheritance laws of the master’s other children.

The *suria* system also demonstrates the variety of sources for Omani slaves but also the difference of value placed on a slave’s ethnic origin based on price differentials. Central African slaves sold for the lowest prices, while Abyssinian or Circassian slaves fetched the highest.¹³ Cooper argues that this “price differential is clear evidence that Arabs were color-conscious,” but children borne by *suria* were considered legitimate regardless of the mother’s ethnicity. Such ethnic preference for slaves is also seen in the late Ottoman Empire. As Myrsini Manney-Kalogera notes, the vast majority of concubines (*odalık*) in elite Ottoman households were of Circassian or Georgian origin while female domestic slaves with non-intimate duties (*cariyes*) came from a wider variety of backgrounds, particularly Africa.¹⁴

The Clove Production and Plantation Slavery in Zanzibar

Prior to the nineteenth century, cloves production only occurred in the Malay Archipelago, specifically the Moluccas (Maluku) islands. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, VOC) established a monopoly over clove production by preventing the exportation of clove seeds which kept the Moluccas islands as the sole producer of cloves until the late eighteenth

¹² Saada Omar Wahab, “*Suria*: Its Relevance to Slavery in Zanzibar in the Nineteenth Century,” in Abdul Sheriff, et al., *Transition from Slavery in Zanzibar and Mauritius: A Comparative History* (Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2016), 98.

¹³ Cooper, 35.

¹⁴ Myrsini Manney-Kalogera, “The Beautiful Camellia and the Vile Adventuress: Female Slavery, Patronage, and Society in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire” (class paper, University of Arizona, 2019), 12-13. However, the foreign origin of *odalıks* within the Ottoman Empire is contrasted by the acquisition of elite male slaves from sources within the empire. See Andrew Wickersham, “The Elite Slaves of the *Kayser-i Rûm*: Contextualizing the Ottoman *Devşirme* and *Kapıkulları* within Roman and Byzantine Imperial Slave Traditions” (class paper, University of Arizona, 2019), 10n51.

century. In the 1770s, clove seeds were smuggled out of the VOC-controlled Malay Archipelago to the French island colony of Mauritius (Isle de France) in southern East Africa. Located east of Madagascar, Mauritius proved to be a poor location for growing cloves as the climate was ill-suited for them and frequent hurricanes substantially reduced what little harvest that could be had. Shortly after the turn of the century, cloves were introduced to Zanzibar, which had a more suitable climate, and by the 1820s, clove plantations in Zanzibar were established, exporting cloves throughout the Indian Ocean.¹⁵

Unlike date farming, clove harvesting was labor intensive work which led Omanis to develop a plantation system using slaves, known as *shamba* (the Swahili word for plantation) slaves, primarily from mainland Africa. The harvests occurred twice a year; the main harvest was in November and December with a smaller harvest between July and September. The delicate nature of clove trees as well as the short-ripened period during which they had to be harvested led to an extensive work load for the *shamba* slaves. Their work day lasted about eight to nine hours with their work week expanding from five to seven days a week. The *shamba* also worked on the drying process to prepare the harvested cloves for export which took an additional six to seven days. Given these parameters, clove harvesting required fast, careful, and skilled workers. To encourage a good harvest, Omani slave owners primarily relied upon positive incentives. Most of the *shamba* were paid for the extra two days a week they were now working as well as being paid based on how many cloves they properly harvested. During the off-season, the *shamba* engaged mainly in work involving the upkeep of the clove farms as well as harvesting other goods for export or local use like grain, coconuts, and other indigenous fruits. Unlike during the clove harvests, they only worked five days a week, having Thursdays off to work for their own subsistence as well as not working on the Islamic holy day of Friday.¹⁶

Throughout their work, the *shamba* were supervised by the *msimamizi*, who were often landless Arabs on large plantations or were trusted slaves or freed slaves on smaller plantations. These overseers often came from the *wakulia* group of slaves who had either been brought to the islands as

¹⁵ Peter J. Martin, "The Zanzibar Clove Industry" *Economic Botany* 45, no.4 (October-December, 1991): 450; Vijayalakshmi Teelock and Abdul Sheriff, "Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean World," in Sheriff, et al., 37. For more regarding VOC control of the Malay Archipelago as well as slavery in this region, see Dean Messinger, "Slavery, Dependency, and Obligation in the Early Modern Malay Archipelago: Towards a Refashioned 'Slave Mode of Production'" (Class paper, University of Arizona, 2019).

¹⁶ Cooper, 156-9.

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children or had been born there (*wazalia*). This differentiation between the *shamba* and *wakulia* slaves not only denoted the degree to which the *wakulia* were trusted over the *shamba*, but also reflexively demonstrates how the degree to which a slave was integrated in Omani society on Zanzibar. The *wakulia*, “one who grew up here,” and *wazalia*, “one who was born here,” were regarded more highly than the *shamba*, who often came from the mainland as adults and thus were not assimilated to the same degree as the *wakulia*. The degraded position of the *shamba* was further expressed in one of the terms used for them, *watumwa wajinga*, which translates directly to “stupid slaves.”¹⁷

It is also important to note the distinction made within Omani slavery in Zanzibar between *shamba* and domestic slaves. While male slaves also served as domestic slaves, further divisions within the Omani slave system can be seen in the case of female domestic slaves. For the most part, these slaves were divided into two main categories, the *mjakazi* and the *suria*. The former performed traditional household duties while the *suria*, as previously mentioned, performed a concubine-like role in aiding the growth of their master’s family. In Zanzibar, as Omani men arrived to begin a potentially lucrative life as a clove plantation owner, the need for *suria* intensified as they “had left the majority of their biological relations in Oman” and sought “to establish ‘new families’ in Zanzibar.”¹⁸ Because of this, the divisions within the *suria* system itself as well as the ethnic distinction between the *suria* and other domestic slaves appear to have become more extreme.

In the first case, the ethnic origins of different *surias* was reflected in the prices for which these women were sold. While local or sub-Saharan African women sold for low prices, Abyssinian women sold for two to five times the price. Indian or Circassian *surias* were the most expensive and, thus, were usually only bought by the Omani upper class and rulers.¹⁹ In the second case, the difference between the *mjakazi* and the *suria* is best exemplified through the case of Maryam binti Abdallah, a slave from Abyssinia:

¹⁷ Cooper, 161 and 219; G. A. Akinola, “Slavery and Slave Revolts in the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the Nineteenth Century” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no.2 (June 1972): 216-219.

¹⁸ Sarah K. Croucher, “Clove Plantations on Nineteenth-Century Zanzibar: Possibilities for Gender Archaeology in Africa” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 7, no.3 (2007): 311. See also Croucher, “A Concubine is Still a Slave”: Sexual Relations and Omani Colonial Identities in Nineteenth-Century East Africa,” in *The Archaeology of Colonialism: Intimate Encounters and Sexual Effects*, eds. Barbara L. Voss and Eleanor Conlin Casella (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 67-84.

¹⁹ Wahab, “*Suria*,” in Sheriff, et al., 101-2.

[Maryam] had been raped by a Nubian slave dealer who brought her to Zanzibar when she was only 12 or 13 years old. She suffered internal injuries that made it impossible for her to bear children. She was bought by the Sultan as she was very beautiful. The Sultan intended to make her one of his *surias*, but her injuries made this impossible. Therefore she became one of the hand-maidens of Seyyid [His Grace] Ali bin Said bin Sultan, living in the palace along with other slave girls.²⁰ Thus, a *suria's* worth was directly related to her reproductive capacity. While Maryam represents just one *suria's* case, it demonstrates not only how *suria* were valued but also the fluidity through which a female slave could pass between the roles of a *suria* or a *mjakazi*. Many *suria* took the opposite path of Maryam, often starting out as *mjakazi* and, later, rising to the status of a *suria*. For some of these women, this involved being purchased as young pre-pubescent girls to work as *mjakazi* until reaching puberty upon which they would become a *suria*.²¹ Thus, it would be remiss to study these categories to the exclusion of each other.

In viewing how slavery in Zanzibar combined the older Omani domestic system of slavery with a new economically based plantation system of slavery, I do not intend to view them in a mutually exclusive dichotomy. This problem has been previously discussed by Manney-Kalogera regarding female domestic slaves in the late Ottoman empire. As such, understanding the relationship between the domestic and economic slaves requires “exploring slavery’s social function” and “encompass the reciprocity of the social ties that develop between slaves and their masters.”²² At the same time, this analysis builds off of the work of Angela Corsa who, in discussing the Incan *mit'a* system, argues that it “should not be interpreted as degrees of servility, but rather positions that awarded more or less access to privilege.”²³

Cracks in Zanzibar Clove Production

The introduction of cloves to Zanzibar brought about what one French observer deemed a ‘clove mania.’²⁴ Because clove production had been exclusively carried out in the Dutch Malay Archipelago prior to the nineteenth century, cloves could be exported for very high prices. The

²⁰ Wahab, “*Suria*,” in Sheriff, et al., 101.

²¹ Wahab, “*Suria*,” in Sheriff, et al., 102.

²² Manney-Kalogera, 1-2.

²³ Angela Corsa, “Andean Women in the *Mit'a* and the *Acllacona* during the Inca Conquest” (class paper, University of Arizona, 2019), 2.

²⁴ Teelock and Sheriff, “Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean World” in Sheriff, et al., 37.

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fertile land of northwestern Unguja was quickly cleared of indigenous crops like coconuts to make room for larger and larger clove plantations. Between 1839 and 1856, the volume of clove exports grew fifteen times larger from approximately 9,000 *frasilas* (approximately thirty-five pounds) per year to 142,857 *frasilas* per year.²⁵ However, this great success came with a massive drop in the price of cloves by the 1850s. Because clove production in Zanzibar had effectively broken the Dutch monopoly on cloves, the international market had become saturated and, by 1856, the price per *frasila* of cloves halved and the profits of the Omani plantations stagnated.²⁶ This price drop was exacerbated by the dwindling amounts of arable land available which fetched higher and higher prices.²⁷

Further disruptions to clove production arose in 1856 when the long-ruling Sultan Said bin Sultan died, sparking a succession crisis that divided the empire between Zanzibar and Oman. Thuwaini and Turki, based in Oman, and Majid and Barghash, based in Zanzibar, each set out to claim their father's empire. Starting in 1844, Said indicated he wanted to divide his holdings between two of his sons, but actual plans for this partition never came to fruition.²⁸ By 1859, the succession crisis had devolved to the point that the British government in India intervened. As "the virtual kingmaker," the British supported Majid as the first independent Sultan of Zanzibar while Thuwaini was installed as the Sultan of Oman.²⁹ Barghash, however, did not accept the British machinations and openly rebelled against Majid's rule. With the aid of the British, Majid ended his brother's rebellion and Barghash spent two years in exile in Bombay (Mumbai).³⁰

British intervention in Zanzibar, however, had begun much earlier than 1859. Until the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), Omani sultans had successfully played the British and French off of one another to maintain their own imperial independence in East Africa and the Persian Gulf.³¹ As part of the 1814 Treaty of Paris, the British received

²⁵ Cooper, Table 2:1 Clove Exports of Zanzibar, 1839-1856, 52; Sheriff, Table 2.3 Cloves: production, export, and prices, 1830-79, 62-3.

²⁶ Cooper, Table 2:1 Clove Exports of Zanzibar, 1839-1856, 52; Sheriff, Table 2.3 Cloves: production, export, and prices, 1830-79, 62-3.

²⁷ Cooper, 59.

²⁸ Sheriff, 209-10.

²⁹ Sheriff, 211; M. Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: Roots of British Domination* (London: Routledge, 1992), 185-6.

³⁰ Bhacker, 187-8.

³¹ Bhacker, 30.

control of Mauritius from the French.³² This treaty thus aided the British in expanding their power over East Africa but, importantly, it also included a provision in which “France and Britain agreed that the slave trade was repugnant” and “to unite their efforts at the approaching Congress [of Vienna, 1815] to induce the Christian powers to proclaim a universal cessation of the slave trade.”³³ British abolitionism, then, formed a major impetus for intervention in Omani affairs in Zanzibar. In 1821, Sultan Said bin Sultan signed the Moresby Treaty in which he agreed to prohibit the export of slaves to European and American colonies in the Indian Ocean.³⁴ In 1845, Said signed the Hammerton Treaty which expanded upon the Moresby Treaty, prohibiting the export of slaves from the sultan’s African holdings to Arabia. However, like the Moresby treaty, it did not address domestic slaves.³⁵ The last in this sequence of major treaties, the Frere treaty, was signed in 1873 and completely abolished the shipment of slaves via the sea and gave the British the right to inspect ships coming to and leaving Zanzibar in order to enforce this treaty.³⁶ These efforts worked in tandem with missionary efforts to free slaves, particularly that of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) based in Mombasa. The CMS took it upon themselves to deal with the issue of freed slaves, and founded Freretown just outside of Mombasa as a freed slave settlement following the model of Liberia and Freetown in West Africa.³⁷ While it had a minor effect on slavery in Zanzibar, the existence of Freretown did encourage some slaves to flee, or attempt to flee, from their plantations to freedom and a few minor slave rebellions erupted as well.³⁸ Thus, we can see how British abolitionist efforts in Zanzibar worked in tandem with their missionary and imperial enterprises in the region.

Finally, clove production took yet another hit in 1872 when a hurricane hit Unguja, destroying over half of the clove plantations on the island.³⁹ As a result, the number of plantations on Pemba grew as an attempt to counteract the effects of the hurricane. However, it took fifteen

³² Satyendra Peerthum, “Fit for Freedom:’ Manumission and Freedom in Early British Mauritius, 1811-1839,” in Sheriff, et al., 72; Nwulia, 11.

³³ Nwulia, 11.

³⁴ Sheriff, 29; Moses D.E. Nwulia, *Britain and Slavery in East Africa* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1975), 42-3.

³⁵ Bennett, 51; Nwulia, 60.

³⁶ Bennett, 97; Cooper, 270.

³⁷ Akinola, 224; Nicole J. Crisp, “Written by Himself’: Slave Narratives and Anglo-American Abolitionism,” (class paper, University of Arizona, 2019), 5-6.

³⁸ Akinola, 224-225.

³⁹ Martin, 451.

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years for clove production to reach its pre-hurricane levels in 1887.⁴⁰ Further, the devastation of the hurricane caused conflicts to arise between the Omani plantation owners and the Indian merchants who financed them. Instead of Omani merchants being the primary exporters of cloves from Zanzibar, Indian merchants stepped into this role, further dwindling the profits of the plantations for the Omanis.⁴¹

The End of Plantation Slavery in Zanzibar

By the close of the nineteenth century, clove production peaked again. The price of cloves had risen following the 1872 hurricane and the shift to Pemba was successful as it accounted for up to three-fourths of clove exports from Zanzibar.⁴² Yet, this peak in clove production was matched with a peak in British imperialism in East Africa. In 1884, the German Colonization Society was founded and set its eyes on East Africa as a prime target for colonization as well as counteracting British hegemony in the region. The Society received the backing of Otto von Bismarck's government in 1885 and reorganized as the German East African Company. The Company's consul in Zanzibar, Gerhard Rholf, reminded the current sultan, now Barghash bin Said, that in 1870, at the beginning of his reign, he had sought to become a German protectorate to counteract British influence over Zanzibar. Once Barghash admitted to making this proposal, raising German hopes for the colonization of East Africa, he "lost control of events."⁴³ The imperialist aims of Germany and Britain threatened to erupt into outright conflict until October 1885 when an agreement was reached between the two European powers which allowed the Germans to establish custom houses in Dar es Salaam and other locations on the East African coast while the British upheld their control of Zanzibar through the continued "independence" of the Sultanate.⁴⁴

The power of the British over the Sultanate was further exhibited in 1888 when Barghash died. Instead of allowing his son, Khalid, to succeed the throne, the British instead installed Barghash's younger brother Khalifa bin Said as sultan.⁴⁵ While initially, Khalifa's assent went

⁴⁰ Martin, 451.

⁴¹ Bennett, 108. For more on the role of Indian merchants in Indian Ocean trade, see Fahad Ahmad Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴² Cooper, 132.

⁴³ Bennett, 127.

⁴⁴ Bennett, 131.

⁴⁵ Bennett, 136-7.

unchallenged, Ali bin Said, Khalifa and Barghash's brother, rebelled against his rule later that year. The British initially continued to support Khalifa's claim to the throne until it became apparent that Ali's rebellion would not be quickly put down and that Ali supposedly supported the abolition of slavery in Zanzibar. As a result, the British began backing Ali while Germany, sensing a renewed opportunity to expand their East African holdings, backed Khalifa.⁴⁶ When Khalifa died unexpectedly in 1890, Ali succeeded him with the backing of the British. Wary of continued German imperialism, on July 1st, 1890, Ali agreed to allow Zanzibar to become a British protectorate. While the Omani population in Zanzibar were not thrilled with the prospect of British control, they were aware of "their inability to oppose the Europeans" and believed that "displacing...the hated Germans by the British was the lesser of two evils."⁴⁷

The British claimed that protectorate status awarded Zanzibar and its sultan more autonomy than it would have as a colony, but "in practical terms the status of the protectorate was little different from that of a colony."⁴⁸ With increased British power over Zanzibar came increased abolitionist efforts. Pressure from the Church Missionary Society and the British parliament mounted against the continuance of slavery in Zanzibar. Abolition also became easier to envision as, in 1896, the British quelled the final rebellion against their control of Zanzibar by Sultan Khalid bin Barghash after the less than an hour long Anglo-Zanzibar War.⁴⁹ All this culminated in an Emancipation Decree signed by Khalid's successor, Sultan Hamoud bin Mohammad, in 1897. While the decree was aimed at abolishing slavery, it came with the specific caveat that slaves must seek their freedom in court rather than becoming free solely based on the decree itself.⁵⁰

Moreover, as was the case with the prior Omani-British treaties regarding slavery, this Emancipation Decree left open a loophole for the continuance of domestic slavery, specifically the *suria*:

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

⁴⁶ Bennett, 153.

⁴⁷ Bennett, 163.

⁴⁸ Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 14.

⁴⁹ This war has since been named "the shortest war in history." Sheriff and Teelock, "Conclusion," in Sheriff, et al., 153.

⁵⁰ Mwalia, 190.

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ground of cruelty, in which case the District Court shall grant it if the alleged cruelty has been proved to its satisfaction."⁵¹

Yet again, abolitionism in Zanzibar neglected the status of domestic slaves. This, of course, is unsurprising as, in other cases, Europeans largely ignored the issue of domestic slaves and, when they did address this issue, they still did not recognize the necessity to free concubine or concubine-like slaves. As Manney-Kalogera notes, earlier in the nineteenth century, European abolitionist efforts focused primarily on female domestic slaves (*cariyes*) and not on the concubines (*odalık*) as the *cariyes'* "condition was seen by European abolitionists to be an international humanitarian issue."⁵² Moreover, even when the British attempted to emancipate the *suria* in Zanzibar, the *suria* often rejected their offer of freedom. In 1909, Slavery Decree No. 11 recognized the *suria* as slaves and, thus, promoted their freedom. However, given the decree to which *surias* were integrated within Omani households, particularly after they had given birth and become *umm al-walad*, the *surias* and their masters resisted this decree. According to Wahab, "[t]he *suria* themselves stated that it would be difficult for them to ask for their freedom, and live outside their *harem*...[I]f freedom meant that they had to leave their children behind..., they would prefer to stay as slaves for the rest of their lives."⁵³ Thus, while *surias* may have been free in the eyes of the law, their subservient status remained regardless. While it is unclear when, exactly the practice of *suria* ended in Zanzibar, it slowly diminished throughout the early twentieth century.⁵⁴

American and Zanzibar Plantation Slavery in Comparison

An obvious comparison, in addition to those made above, is between Zanzibari plantation slavery and plantation slavery in the antebellum Southern United States. Such comparisons have been made since at least the mid-twentieth century. However, Cooper notes that these early comparisons have been flawed in two major ways. First, historians of American slavery saw African slavery "as a benign foil against which the economic exploitation and inhumanity of American slavery stood out."⁵⁵ Second, Africanists had neglected to parse out how Americanists had shown "that the dichotomy between the social and

⁵¹ Saada Omar Wahab, "Emancipation and Post-emancipation in Zanzibar," in Sheriff, et al., 52.

⁵² Manney-Kalogera, 13.

⁵³ Wahab, "Suria," in Sheriff, et al., 106.

⁵⁴ Fair, 18-19.

⁵⁵ Cooper, 7.

economic aspects of slavery is false.”⁵⁶ Just as it would be remiss to reduce American slavery to simply its economic aspects, it would be remiss to ignore the domestic side of both American and Zanzibari slavery. It is also important, as Cooper reminds us, not to reduce this comparison to essentializations of economies, cultures, or religions.⁵⁷ Slavery in the United States did not take the form that it did solely because of Christianity just as slavery in Oman and Zanzibar was not the pure machination of Islam; the same holds true for any attempt to explain these two slave systems in terms of an East-vs-West divide and so on. Instead, a more thoughtful analysis is in order.

It is important to note from the outset, that plantation slavery in Zanzibar was not a direct or even indirect importation of American plantation slavery to East Africa. Plantation systems had existed in Zanzibar and the Indian Ocean prior to the nineteenth century. Dates were farmed in Oman in a plantation style, albeit largely without the use of slave labor, and coconut plantations were common in Zanzibar before and during the 1800s.⁵⁸ While US plantation studies have been situated within the broader context of the *longue durée* of plantation slavery in the Americas, more work is still needed on the use of plantations and plantation slavery in East Africa prior to the rise of Zanzibari clove production. Continuing from the economic perspective, another point of contrast between the two systems is the roles of domestic slaves and how these roles were legally codified. While domestic slavery existed in both contexts, concubinage and concubinage-like slavery was only considered legal in the Omani-Zanzibari context. As shown, the *suria* as well as concubines were legally slaves in this system and, particularly in the case of the *suria*, were intricately integrated into their masters’ households. In the case of slavery in the American South, sexual relationships between masters and slaves did exist, but did not extend to the development of a separate slave status nor to the legality of these relationships. Further, although a price differential based on the ethnic origins of slaves, particularly *suria*, denotes some sort of notion of “color-consciousness,” “the legal category of slave was not identified with any particular race” and a “two-tiered racial hierarchy” as found in the United States did not develop.⁵⁹

The end of slavery in both regions also elicits important comparisons. The path to abolitionism in Zanzibar began in the early

⁵⁶ Cooper, 7.

⁵⁷ Cooper, 11-12.

⁵⁸ Cooper, 35.

⁵⁹ Cooper, 12.

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nineteenth century, reaching fruition in the early twentieth century. Similarly, American abolitionist efforts began in earnest in the late eighteenth century, culminating in the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865.⁶⁰ However, while the end of the American Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment sought to bring about an immediate end to slavery, abolitionist efforts in Zanzibar took a slower pace. Even as late as 1897, Hamoud bin Mohammad's Emancipation Decree only granted a slave their freedom if they petitioned for it in court. However, the continuance of slavery and, as Suzanne Miers terms it, virtual slavery existed in both contexts.⁶¹ Regarding the American case, in Louisiana, for example, former slaves often worked as wage laborers or under debt bondage, finding themselves caught within a virtual slave system built on the vestiges of the antebellum South.⁶² Joshua Steele has also shown how "penal labor arose as the result of slavery's end" as "immediate emancipation forced southern society to grapple with rapidly changing racial interactions."⁶³ In Zanzibar, the slow abolition of slavery developed into forms of apprenticeship, common in post-abolitionist Africa, which often closely resembled the slave system it sought to replace.⁶⁴ Thus, while being two cases in which inherently evoke comparisons, it is important to not only keep in mind how these systems might contrast with one another but also to take care not to essentialize any single differentiating aspect of them. What is apparent, however, is the interconnected nature of economic and domestic slavery which makes an intersectional study of slavery and slave systems necessary and enlightening.

Conclusion

Thus, the seemingly short span of nineteenth century Omani plantation slavery in Zanzibar provides a plethora of avenues for historical analysis that seem almost disproportionate to its short life. The

⁶⁰ See Crisp, "Written by Himself," particularly 5-7.

⁶¹ Suzanne Miers, "Slavery: A Question of Definition," in *Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, ed. Gwyn Campbell (Oxford: Cass, 2004), 4.

⁶² See William Horne, "Negotiating Freedom: Reactions to Emancipation in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana" (master's thesis, George Washington University, 2013).

⁶³ Joshua Steele, "When Slavery Ends: The Rise of Forced Penal Labor in the Southern United States," (class paper, University of Arizona, 2019), 4.

⁶⁴ Sheriff and Teelock, "Conclusion," in Sheriff, et al., 153. Regarding other examples in Africa, see Miers, 2-4; Gwyn Campbell, "Introduction: Abolition and Its aftermath in the Indian Ocean World," in *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 11; and Satyendra Peerthum, "Making a Life of Their Own: Ex-apprentices in Early Post-emancipation Period, 1839-1872," in Sheriff et al., 109-148.

slave system that arose in the 1820s, combined elements of both domestic and economic slavery which further enhances our ability to see the two as connected, and sometimes intersecting, categories of slavery. Beyond this, it provides an example of the late remnants of slavery as it developed during the rise of European abolitionist movements. As such, it not only demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of these movements, but also how these movements worked hand-in-hand with European imperialism. European, specific British, attempts to end the slave trade in the western Indian Ocean as well as the use of slave labor in Zanzibar itself shows how Europeans conceptualized slavery in the 1800s, namely by privileging the abolition of economic slavery over domestic slavery. Further, this case demonstrates how, in the nineteenth century, slavery on a small archipelago of islands both effected and was affected by shifts in the growing global economy and political atmosphere. As such, the uniqueness of Zanzibari plantation slavery in world history is also its greatest strength from a comparative perspective as it both supports and undercuts various paradigms of slavery and slave systems in world history.

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APPENDIX A – Al-Busaidi rulers of Oman and Zanzibar from 1783 to 1902/1913

Reign	Oman	Zanzibar	Reign
1783-1784	Said bin Ahmad al-Busaidi		1783-1784
1784-1792	Hamad bin Said		1784-1792
1792-1804	Sultan bin Ahmad al-Busaidi		1792-1804
1804-1806	Salim bin Sultan and Said bin Sultan		1804-1806
1806-1856	Said bin Sultan		1806-1856
1856 – Rule of Oman and Zanzibar splits between Said bin Sultan’s sons			
1856-1866	Thuwaini bin Said	Majid bin Said	1856-1870
1866-1868	Salim bin Thuwaini		
1868-1871	Azzan bin Qais		
1871-1888	Turki bin Said	Barghash bin Said	1870-1888
1888-1913	Faisal bin Turki 1891 – Oman becomes a British protectorate	Khalifa bin Said	1888-1890
		Ali bin Said	1890-1893
		1890 – Zanzibar becomes a British Protectorate	
		Hamid bin Thuwaini	1893-1896
		Khalid bin Barghash	1896
		Hamoud bin Mohammad	1896-1902

APPENDIX B - Glossary of Omani and Zanzibari Slave Terms

Kadamu (Swahili) - Second-head overseers of the *shamba slaves*, part of the *msimamizi*

Mjakazi (Swahili) - A female domestic slave, not a part of the *suria* system

Msimamizi (Swahili) - domestic slaves or landless Arabs appointed as overseers of the *shamba slaves*; divided into two categories *nokoa* and *kadamu* who were first- and second-head overseers, respectively

Nokoa (Swahili) - First-head overseers of the *shamba slaves*, part of the *msimamizi*

Shamba slaves (Swahili) - slaves who worked on the plantations'; most commonly *watumwa wajinga*

Suria (Arabic) - from the Arabic root s-r-r from which the Arabic word umbilical cord (*surur*) is also derived; female domestic slaves who performed functions similar to concubines except that their express purpose was to produce children for their master who would be considered legitimate and be fully assimilated into the household; upon giving birth, *suria* would become known as *umm al-walad* and then could not be sold or pawned and would be manumitted upon her master's death

Umm al-Walad (Arabic) - literally "mother of the child," *suria* who had given birth to a child by their master; this status denoted that they could not be sold or pawned and would be manumitted upon her master's death

Wakulia (Swahili) - literally "one who grew up here, slaves imported as children; assimilated into the Omani system

Watumwa wajinga (Swahili) - literally "stupid slaves," adult slaves recently imported from the African mainland and not assimilated into the Omani system

Wazalia (Swahili) - literally "one who was born here," subgroup of the *wakulia*; those who were born into slavery in Zanzibar

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