

# *African Diasporas and the Atlantic*

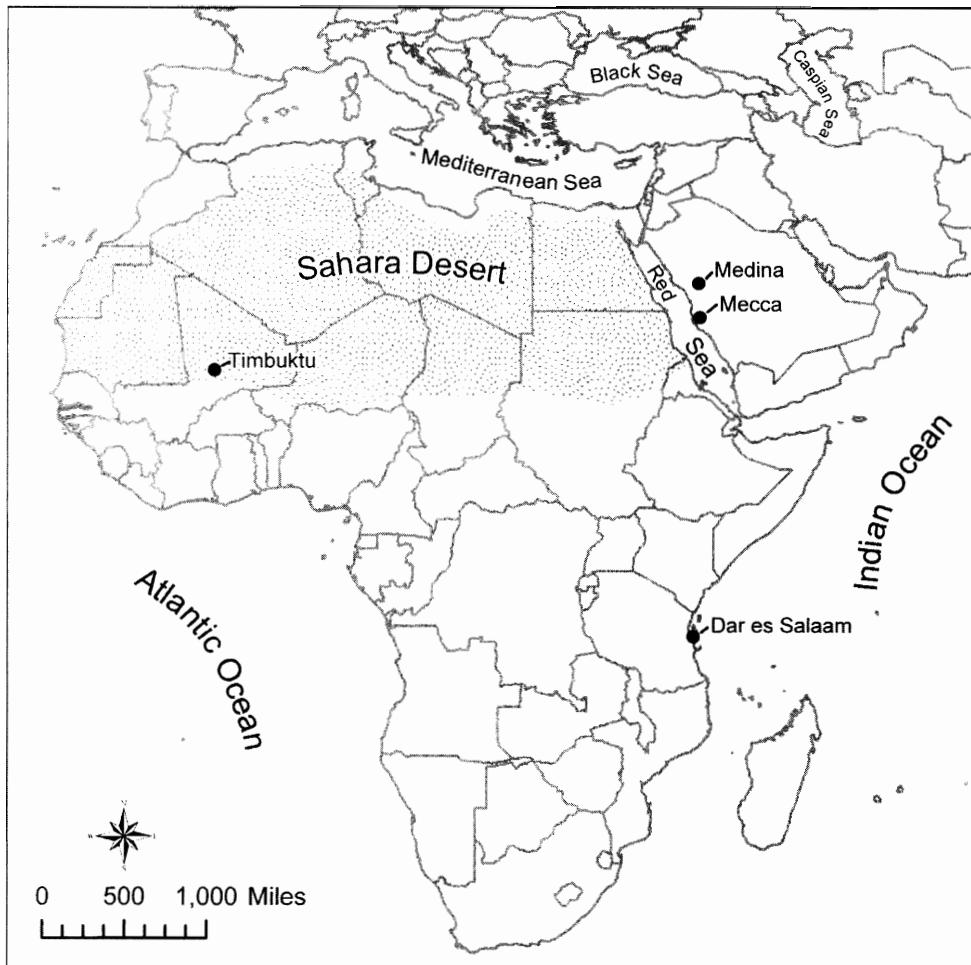
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## THE PROBLEM OF DIASPORA

As a cursory consultation of any library catalog quickly confirms, the African diaspora as both concept and field of study is overwhelmingly defined by Atlantic scholarship. This is paradoxical in two respects. The Atlantic is one of three broad regions of African dispersion outside the continent. Between 650 and 1900 C.E., a comparable number of sub-Saharan Africans left their homes for destinations in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean as they did into the Atlantic (see table 1).<sup>1</sup> Second, African diaspora, a relatively new concept, is widely thought to have been introduced into academic discourse through a conference paper delivered in 1965 by George Shepperson.<sup>2</sup> The conference in question united scholars of African history to consider intellectual problems in their fledgling field. It was held at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, a port on the Swahili coast of the Indian Ocean (map 1). From antiquity to the nineteenth century, Africans entered the Indian Ocean and its Red Sea extension as slaves from the continent's eastern seaboard. First articulated at an African center of research and among scholars who taught about the departure of slaves into the Indian Ocean from their own shores, Shepperson's notion of African diaspora found its intellectual home an ocean away, in Atlantic America.

Although this paradox is curious, the reasons for it are apparent. In his disquisition on the African diaspora, Shepperson had the Atlantic foremost in mind. "From 1511, when the first fifty negroes were brought to the West Indian islands, to 1888 and the total abolition of slavery in Brazil," he wrote, "this dark-skinned diaspora, due to the slave trade, has chequered the Caribbean and North, South and Central America with peoples of African origin." Shepperson was not incognizant of sub-Saharan Africa's trades across the Indian Ocean and Sahara; rather, he discounted them as essential to thinking about African diaspora. One important reason for this was his perception of the differential treatment of slaves in Africa's dispersions. "Arab slavery was often felt less harshly by the negro than the European slave trade across the Atlantic," he reasoned, "especially in the days of the 'Cotton Kingdom' in the United States of America. . . . Whatever conclusions are ultimately reached . . . the period of almost four hundred years of the European enslavement of Africans remains the heart of the African diaspora."<sup>3</sup>



**Map 1** Africa

Writing in the 1960s, Shepperson and his colleagues may also have privileged Atlantic dispersion because of the pressing importance of struggles over civil rights. For many, engagement in American racial politics focused intellectual efforts on the uniqueness of Africans' experiences in the Americas, qualifying Atlantic dispersion for primary diasporic status. Scholars had Georgia on their minds. By contrast, the dispersion of sub-Saharan Africans into the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean has been "known and ignored, dismissed and described," by those interested in African dispersion.<sup>4</sup> From its earliest expression and shaped by American politics and dubious reasoning about treatment, the African diaspora was to favor Atlantic flows of African people, narrowing theories of diasporic experience to Africans and their descendants in the Americas.

That the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean are poorly represented in recent writing on the African diaspora can also be attributed to the varying demographic legacies of global African slavery. Comparatively speaking, there are today few populations of

identifiable sub-Saharan descent and culture in the Mediterranean to account for the flow of Africans into that region over many centuries. Some such communities are to be found, though in very modest numbers, inhabiting “virtually all the countries of the western Indian Ocean littoral,” principally Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, and the Mascarene islands (Mauritius and Réunion).<sup>5</sup> Where such populations do exist, intellectuals of self-identifying African derivation who would publicly interpret African histories and identities in dispersion or press political claims on behalf of ex-slaves and their descendants—as they have in the Americas—are either practically nonexistent (the Middle East) or merely inchoate (India and the Mascarenes).<sup>6</sup>

Where the descendants of Africans are found today in Africa’s diasporas beyond the Atlantic, as in Iran, their political and racial consciousness is strikingly different from that of their counterparts in the Americas. “Hence, there are no active ‘constituencies’ that create a demand to have their slave or slaveholding past investigated, so that they can come to terms with it.”<sup>7</sup> Given the relative invisibility of contemporary diasporic communities beyond the Atlantic and a lackluster scholarly interest in African dispersion there, Atlantic patterns of forced migration, demography in host societies, and racial consciousness have been accepted as a standard for African diaspora. Atlantic scholars of dispersion have tended to take as their starting point the abundant modern diasporic populations of the Atlantic and pursue their experiences back in time, inappropriately claiming those experiences as *the* history of African diaspora. Including the experiences of Africans in sites of exile beyond the Atlantic will permit an understanding of African diaspora in its full diversity, contextualizing Atlantic-centered paradigms.

In part, however, the African diaspora remains primarily a matter of Atlantic concern because scholars of Africa in North America and in much of Europe and Africa eschewed a global approach to the study of the African continent. In the United States, intellectual developments in the study of Africa at historically white institutions were shaped in response to Cold War struggles over global influence and manifested in the creation of Title VI National Resource Centers for African studies at more than fifteen universities nationwide. Postwar intellectual directions in African history in the United States and beyond developed in response to the Atlantic-focused work of scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Melville Herskovits. As Africa emerged from colonial rule, African scholars and many of their European and American colleagues sought to create an autonomous history for the continent uninfluenced by external constituencies. Many felt global approaches were overly diffuse and premised on research in European languages. As a result, the characteristic intellectual emphases of the period were inward looking, with a concern for basic research in Africa, on continental African subjects, and employing African languages. African history was to center on the continent, not stray outside its borders.<sup>8</sup>

In particular, most researchers shied away from engagement with slavery or the external slave trades in which Europeans were not implicated. Slavery became a contentious and difficult topic.<sup>9</sup> Despite notable exceptions, among which is the work of Joseph Harris and Philip Curtin, African history both focused and narrowed the research agendas of many scholars, impeding an earlier examination of the role of Africans in global diasporas.<sup>10</sup> Scholars of the Atlantic slave trade, among others, have criticized these developments.<sup>11</sup> For his part, George Shepperson viewed the study of African diaspora as a necessary antidote to “tendencies towards the isolationist,

restricted spirit in African historical study.”<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, the history of slavery and African dispersion in the Atlantic are today among the chief intellectual forces broadening the scope of African history.

Other reasons for the dominance of the Atlantic in African diaspora studies suggest themselves. The sustained outpouring during the past thirty years of research on the Atlantic as an arena of transnational history has little parallel in either the Sahara or the Indian Ocean. Early synthetic works on these regions, like Braudel’s *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen* or Auber, Toussaint, and Chaudhuri’s early histories of the Indian Ocean, offered little regarding Africa or its slave trades.<sup>13</sup> Despite a recent and exciting outburst of research on slaving and African diaspora in the Indian Ocean, the same problem remains true of most new syntheses in both regions.<sup>14</sup> “Slavery in Muslim societies has figured only marginally in comparative studies on slavery,” notes Ehud Toledano, one of the few to tackle the “sensitive topic” of slavery in Ottoman history. One of the reasons for the relative invisibility of servile histories in Islamic societies, he suggests, is the complexity of slavery in the area.<sup>15</sup>

Two others are academic boundaries and embarrassment about slavery. The trans-Saharan trade spanned West Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East, overlapping regions that have developed disparate modern historiographies and methods of graduate training. John Hunwick writes of a persistent propensity in the Mediterranean Islamic countries not to lay claim to slavery as a heritage. European slaving is seen as a more appropriate subject for inquiry. Silence on slavery serves to preserve the Arab world’s diplomatic, cultural, and religious relationships with the modern countries of Africa from within whose borders slaves once derived.<sup>16</sup> But the Middle East’s tradition of circumventing discussions of African slavery also arises from a reluctance on the part of descendants of slaves to identify with African ancestry. Africans have long been associated in Middle Eastern thought with disbelief (*kufr*), the primary Islamic justification for enslavement. To locate one’s ancestry in infidelity and the related stain of slavery can result in profound shame.<sup>17</sup> The “history of silence” that Hubert Gerbeau once wrote characterized slaving in the Indian Ocean describes with equal accuracy the trans-Saharan trade into the Mediterranean lands of Islam.<sup>18</sup>

## THE DISPERSIONS

The dispersion of sub-Saharan Africans about the oceans bounding their continent over the past 1,500 years is a legacy chiefly of forced migration. Until the abolition of Africa’s external slave trades, only a small proportion of Africans voluntarily traveled the oceans and the Sahara to settle *permanently* in North Africa and lands beyond the continent. That “most migration before 1500 was voluntary in a fundamental way,” as David Eltis has argued, does not reflect specifically African experiences.” The many *temporary* migrations of Africans as merchants, seafarers, scholars, and pilgrims over the centuries do not modify this proposition. Africa may be unique among the continents in its sustained history of forced migrations. To assess the volume, locations, and significance of African dispersions in history is to track each of Africa’s external slave trades and to examine the conditions of life and labor that Africans encountered in their many places of exile.

Both the Indian Ocean and the Sahara were important corridors of trade and communication well before Europe's maritime revolution. Trade in slaves along the coasts of the Red Sea between the Horn of Africa and Egypt dates to at least 5,000 years ago. Knowledge of how to navigate the seasonally alternating monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean developed shortly thereafter. By at least 2,000 years ago, ships laden with goods, people, and ideas utilized the monsoons to travel between the east coast of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Persian Gulf, and Indian subcontinent. The first-century C.E. author of the *Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* reported a trade in African slaves from Red Sea shores into surrounding regions of the Indian Ocean. A century later, Mediterranean merchants had learned enough of the western Indian Ocean and its trade in slaves that Alexandrian astronomer Claudius Ptolemy set out the contours and major ports of the East African coast to the Ruvuma River. Evidence for the earliest export of slaves from the Swahili coast dates to the eighth century.<sup>20</sup>

Despite indications of horse and chariot traffic across the Sahara more than two thousand years ago, it was not until widespread use of the domesticated Arabian camel early in the fourth century C.E. that trade became practical and significant. Camels transformed the desert into a "sea" capable of supporting regular "navigation" and commerce. "The caravan routes which crisscrossed the deserts like so many slow sea-passages across the stony and sandy wastes of Africa," Fernand Braudel wrote poetically, "created a fantastic network of connections."<sup>21</sup> The revolution of camel-borne trade in gold, salt, and other products fostered the rise of states along the southern fringe of the Sahara Desert. Slaves figured in this commerce from its earliest periods but became especially important as West African states from about the tenth century C.E. sent out armies to capture or extract captives as tribute from subjected provinces. Those not set to labor locally were marched northward across the desert in caravans guarded by camel-riding merchants. Some slaves were exchanged at oases along the way. Captives who survived the hazardous journey to the northern edge of the desert were either sold in North Africa or set aboard boats bound for more distant Mediterranean markets. For many Africans forcibly crossing the Sahara and entering the Indian Ocean, the journey out of sub-Saharan Africa entailed a Middle Passage by both land and sea (this was true also in the Atlantic).

While commerce and slaving across the Indian Ocean and Sahara increased significantly during the Islamic era—and especially after 1000 C.E.—each system pre-dated Muhammad's flight to Medina in the early seventh century.<sup>22</sup> The Prophet's birthplace at Mecca lay near the crossroads of the Sahara and Indian Ocean systems of trade, and slaves were a common and accepted feature of Arabian life at the time of Muhammad's revelations. By conquest and persuasion, Islam spread outward from the Hijaz along prevailing commercial routes. The rise and spread of the Islamic empire spurred economic integration and expansion in the areas of its conquests. As a result, new uses for slaves were added to old ones.<sup>23</sup> Most demand in the Mediterranean after Arab conquest was from Islamized areas, though a certain percentage of African slaves crossing the Sahara entered Italy and Provence as well as Islamic Spain.<sup>24</sup> While demand from the world of Islam was not always responsible for Indian Ocean trade (some slaves went to the Mascarenes, Hindu India, China, and Southeast Asia), most slaves from about 1000 C.E. to the end of the trade were conveyed across the Sahara and Indian "oceans" by Muslim merchants, marketed to Muslims, and employed in societies where Islam was a key force.<sup>25</sup>

**TABLE 1 The External Slave Trades of Sub-Saharan Africa, 650–1900**  
(volumes in thousands)

Period	Atlantic	Sahara	Indian Ocean <sup>a</sup>	Total	Annual average volume	Atlantic as % of total
650–1000		1,320	600	1,920	5.5	
1001–1400		2,520	1,200	3,720	9.3	
1401–1500	81	430	300	811	8.1	10
1501–1600	328	550	300	1,178	11.8	<b>28</b>
1601–1700	1,348	710	300	2,358	23.6	57
1701–1800	6,090	715	600	7,405	74.0	82
1801–1900	3,466	1,205	900	5,571	55.7	62
650–1900	11,313	7,450	4,200	22,963	18.4	49
1401–1900	11,313	3,610	2,400	17,323	34.6	65

<sup>a</sup>Red Sea and East African external trades combined.

Sources: Trans-Atlantic: Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2000), table I.1, 1Y, and table 3.1, 47. Trans-Sahara: Ralph A. Austen, “The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census,” in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, ed. Jan S. Hogendom (New York, 1979), table 2.8, 66. Red Sea and East African trades are combined as the “Indian Ocean” in this table, but I cite the sources separately. Red Sea: For data to 1800, Austen, “The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade,” table 2.9, 68. For the nineteenth century, Ralph A. Austen, “The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea Coasts): A Tentative Census,” *Slavery and Abolition* 9 (1988): 33. Indian Ocean: For estimates to 1700, Austen, “The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade,” table 2.9, 68. For the eighteenth century, Lovejoy, *Transformations*, table 3.7, 62. For the nineteenth century, Edmond Martin and T. C. Ryan, “A Quantitative Assessment of the Arab Slave Trade of East Africa,” *Kenya Historical Review* 5 (1977), table 4, 79; Austen, “The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa,” 29; Lovejoy, *Transformations*.

Table 1 sets out currently accepted estimates for the volume of sub-Saharan Africa’s external slave trades from 650 to 1900 c.e. No scholar has ventured to quantify the slave trades prior to 650, although, as I have mentioned, some Africans forcibly departed the continent in antiquity.<sup>26</sup> Readers should note that this is the first time figures for all three trades have been assembled in a single table, for scholars are reticent to imply that estimates for the trans-Sahara and Indian Ocean trades are equivalent in margin of error to those for the Atlantic. They are not. Whereas the volume of the Atlantic slave trade is estimated from a comprehensive collection of direct evidence consisting of ship-by-ship data on the number and demographic mix of captives carried on 27,233 slaving voyages, trans-Sahara and Indian Ocean estimates are “based mainly on observations by European travelers and diplomats which are concentrated in the period after 1700” and on projections from slave censuses, as is the case for the Mascarenes.<sup>27</sup> For periods before 1600, after which estimates become more accurate, Paul Lovejoy suggests we consider both the trans-Sahara and the Indian Ocean figures “a convenient measure,” as midpoints in a possible range extending both appreciably higher and significantly lower.<sup>28</sup>

Estimates for the trans-Sahara trade are based on the work of economic historian Ralph Austen. While some components of this commerce are being examined, relatively little new work has been published on its overall volume. Much unexploited documentation concerning trade across the Sahara is waiting for researchers literate in Arabic, Turkish, and vernaculars and willing to tackle the abundant but widely scattered manuscripts pertaining to it, including those in private collections and libraries in desert-edge towns like Timbuktu, Mali, or in locations across the former Ottoman

Empire.<sup>29</sup> The trans-Saharan slave trade is the least-studied component of Africa's external traffic and the subject of considerable debate. Future research in primary materials may revise the estimates for its volume either upward or downward.

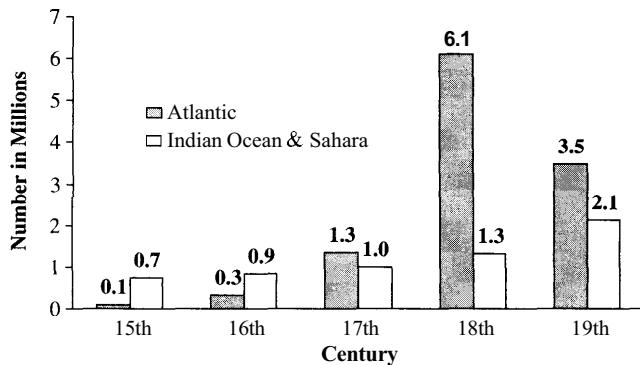
The Indian Ocean figures derive from the work of multiple scholars and are probably more reliable. Voyage-based data on the number and port origins of slaves as have been compiled for the Atlantic are not available for the Indian Ocean. Census, tax, and customs records for studying the slave trade into the colonial Mascarenes from the late seventeenth century do exist but are far less complete than those for the Atlantic. In part, and especially for the island of Réunion, some public records relating to slavery have been deliberately destroyed.<sup>30</sup> Even so, it may be possible in the future to assemble volume, sex, age, and ethnic data for some voyages to the Mascarene islands. In the case of slaves transported about the Indian Ocean by crews and captains indigenous to the area (the so-called *dhow* trade, which preponderated by volume), few documents are likely ever to come to hand. Despite these impediments, there is currently much new research being undertaken on the volume and directions of slave trades into and around the Indian Ocean. When final results are tabulated together, the new aggregate numbers will almost certainly revise those in table 1 upward, at least from the sixteenth century on.<sup>31</sup>

Of all Africa's external slave trades, the Atlantic is the most widely researched and best documented.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the others, it operated during a relatively short period from the fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, opening well after and closing significantly before both the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades. In fact, 85 percent of the transatlantic slave trade by volume occurred between 1700 and 1867, just over a century and a half. During more than 1,200 years, by contrast, the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades together delivered over 11 million persons beyond sub-Saharan Africa, roughly equaling the Atlantic commerce in volume. Relatively few slaves annually entered the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean systems during the earliest times of their operation, but a steady stream over an extended period belies substantial growth in their final centuries. Taken together, the two slave trades beyond the Atlantic nearly tripled in volume from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, rising from an estimated 730,000 to over 2.1 million in this interval (see fig. 1).

During the five centuries over which the Atlantic slave trade operated, that trade represented 65 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's external exchange of slaves, with the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades together making up the other 35 percent. Put in different figures, for every 100 persons removed from Africa by the Atlantic slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, fifty-three left sub-Saharan Africa into the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean during the same period. The volume and diverse patterns of Africa's dispersions beyond the Atlantic are often eclipsed by an exclusive preoccupation with the Americas. Viewing the Atlantic within the global dispersion of Africans will help delimit the unique dimensions of African diaspora there.

## DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES

If the principal themes in Atlantic dispersion are community formation and race consciousness, a more inclusive interpretive framework will emerge from a focus on diasporic experience in its several varieties. The way slaves were employed in host



**Figure 1** Atlantic and Other Slave Trades from Africa, Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries.

Source: Table 1.

societies influenced the sorts of diasporic communities they forged or whether they were able to create communities at all. A distinguishing characteristic of slavery in the western Atlantic was the extent to which masters exploited the economic potential of their African captives. Almost as a rule, slaves were set to the production of staple crops on rural estates or to hard labor in mines and other profit-generating enterprises. Above all, slaves were factors of production, though they also brought social and political prestige. In the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, slaves were directed chiefly to urban locations where they entered domestic units as wives, concubines, household helpers, and laborers, or government service as administrators, servants, and soldiers. Relatively few captives were set to agriculture. Slavery in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean was more a form of conspicuous consumption and an extension of government than an investment in production. During the seventeenth century, the wealthiest masters rarely owned more than 100 slaves.<sup>33</sup> Subsequent centuries evinced a tendency toward enlargement, but slaveholding in Africa's diasporas beyond the Atlantic was roughly comparable to that in the early colonial Chesapeake: slaves were unevenly distributed, and the majority of slaveholdings were small.

Large units of government (*kul*) slaves defied the slaveholding norm, particularly in the servile armies that supported central governments from Morocco to Mogul India.<sup>34</sup> In India, such military and administrative duties were common for African captives, while elsewhere they were merely one employment among a broader range of servile occupations.<sup>35</sup> Theoretically kinless and without vested interests, slave soldiers, servants, and administrators were renowned for loyalty to their political masters. Born about 1550 in Ethiopia, Shambu was enslaved and exchanged several times, serving in Yemen for a period and ending his life in India, where he was known as Malik Ambar. Shambu-Ambar loyally served two leaders in the Deccan and became widely known there as a heroic resister against Mogul encroachment.<sup>36</sup> There are many such tales of elite slaves' individual success in military or administrative positions across the Islamic world. Among the trusted slaves who managed extended court households (*harems*), African eunuchs were highly valued and extremely expensive.<sup>37</sup> African slaves in the Islamic world mingled among the free citizens of towns and cities, creating for themselves

lives of relative autonomy that typify urban servitude. Yet most slaves, unlike Shambu-Ambar, never rose from their lowly social positions.

The most notable exception to the patterns outlined in the preceding paragraphs was slavery in the salt marshes of southern Mesopotamia during the eighth and ninth centuries C.E., where gangs of African captives and other servile laborers were set to land reclamation and the construction of irrigation canals. These slaves were once thought to have derived primarily from the Swahili coast, but many hailed from lands farther north instead. They were known as the Zanj and arrived in large numbers, living separately from their masters. As is typical of large concentrations of new captives, the population was not self-reproducing, and many did not speak Arabic. The Mesopotamian Zanj joined with other slave and nonslave laborers in a Kharijite-inspired revolt of social dimensions that resulted in the occupation of Basra and a fundamental challenge to the rulers of the 'Abbasid caliphate. Some thereby gained their freedom. During the eleventh century, up to 30,000 African slaves were employed in agricultural pursuits along the coast of what is now Bahrain.<sup>38</sup> Beyond the Persian Gulf, African slaves were among those laboring the medieval sugar estates of the Mediterranean and tending the coastal date plantations of the Batinah in Oman from at least the ninth century to the nineteenth.<sup>39</sup> The Mascarene islands with their slave majorities, commercial agriculture, diverse set of staples, resident Francophone planters, broadly dispersed slave owning, and task systems of labor were a curious hybrid of the colonial Caribbean and Chesapeake.<sup>40</sup>

The differing age and gender compositions of African populations entering the external slave trades are essential to assessing the subsequent experience and consciousness of Africans in the regions of their arrival. For the Atlantic slave trade (between 1663 and 1864), a major database reveals that 64.6 percent of forced migrants were male and 25.1 percent children.<sup>41</sup> Although males clearly predominated, Africans came westward across the Atlantic in proportions more resembling free migrant families than indentured laborers (who were overwhelmingly adult males). Comparable gender and age data for the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades are not available, but narrative accounts consistently report a majority of females in each. Most scholars writing on the flow of Africans into Islamic regions assume that at least two females arrived for every male, but this is likely an overstatement.<sup>42</sup> However, the proportion of children entering Africa's slave trades into the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean was clearly higher than that of victims in the Atlantic commerce. Although the proportion of children in all of Africa's trades tended to rise over time, the gender structure of the slave trade into the Atlantic was generally the converse of that into other regions.<sup>43</sup>

Judging by these divergences in demography, one might hypothesize that slave populations in Islamic regions experienced growth and were able to form stable communities (rates of natural reproduction are directly related to the proportion of women in a population). The social roles and legal rights of servile women in much of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, however, produced an altogether singular outcome. The laws and customs relating to slavery as interpreted from the Koran produced analogous results in lands as dispersed as the Hijaz, the Maghreb, Oman, the Persian Gulf, and North India. In all these regions, slave women were prized by free men as wives and concubines, while free women sought female slaves as attendants and household laborers. In Islamic practice, the wedlock of any free man with a slave he owned was prohibited; he was first required to manumit her. Children resulting from such marriages were born

free, for offspring acquired the status of their mothers. Children issuing from unions between slave concubines and free men were also considered free. At the same time, slave concubines who bore children to free men were themselves to be manumitted on the death of the child's father. In the Americas, equivalent practices of marriage and manumission were usually publicly shunned or disallowed by law.

Additional manumission practices reinforced these widespread marital and childbearing patterns. Manumitting one's slaves was considered a pious act and encouraged by the Koran. On their deathbeds, slaveholders frequently manumitted slaves but sometimes also granted the favor while still alive. As a result, rates of manumission in the Islamic world were comparatively high by Atlantic standards. The incessant drain on the slave population through marriage, concubinage, and selective manumission annually brought many Africans into the free population. Their modes of exit from slavery linked them into the culture, religion, and kin structures of their masters. African slaves in towns and cities of the Islamic world sought one another out and formed loose associations, but communities fashioned by such informal means rarely persisted beyond the first generation—they were sustained primarily by the influx of new slaves.<sup>44</sup> Rather than forming separate diasporic communities that persisted through time, Africans brought their practices and customs into the dominant culture. In such cases, it is compelling to think of the lasting influence of African diaspora in terms of cultural transmission rather than community formation and racial consciousness.

Under domestic-Islamic regimes of slavery, free and slave men of African origin found it difficult to acquire African wives; children born to African women tended to be of mixed race, free, and oriented to the slave-owning society. A cultural breach opened between African men on the one hand and African women and their children on the other, as their age and gender linked them to masters' households and social groups in contrasting ways. Whether through incorporation (women and children) or through exclusion and the withering away of separate communities (men), over a generation or two slaves and their descendants in most Islamic lands shed much that was distinctively African about their culture and modes of life. Traces remain, and scholars have much yet to learn about the dynamic between diasporic cultural forms and the incorporative mechanisms of Islamic societies. If both Atlantic slave systems and those in the Islamic regions were constrained continually to import slaves to sustain their servile populations, they did so for entirely different reasons (such as death in the Atlantic or manumission elsewhere).

Exceptions to the norms guiding diasporic demography set out here could be found about the Islamic world. In Iran's province of Baluchistan, for example, local practices discouraged marriage with Africans. Ethnically endogamous practices tended to favor the development of identifiable and enduring diasporic African communities consisting of both men and women.<sup>45</sup> Such numerically anomalous pockets of African communities could be found scattered from India to Morocco but mostly in the hinterland and away from cities. In the countryside and out of the limelight, African captives often grew grains and tree crops (dates and olives) or were involved in other productive enterprises. In certain rural areas, they were forced into a stratum of servile laborers, housed separately from masters, and retained their phenotypic and cultural distinctiveness as Africans, as in the case of Iranian Baluchistan or 'Abbasid Mesopotamia. Here, Atlantic-type patterns of dispersion and community could be found but without a pronounced racial consciousness and African identification.

Where slaves provided labor for profit-making enterprises, such as on Omani date plantations, their chances of maintaining African practices and a distinct identity were also strong. William Palgrave noted in the mid-nineteenth century that one-quarter of the population of Oman consisted of freed African slaves and their descendants who lived in distinct communities of African culture.<sup>46</sup> Traces of such communities can be found today in Muscat (Oman) and other regions where Africans were employed as productive labor.<sup>47</sup> If African diasporic communities tended to be fragile and short lived in the cities and ports of the Islamic world, they were more enduring in the smaller towns and rural settings of agricultural labor.

In the Americas, by comparison, lower rates of manumission and comparatively effective ideologies of exclusion based on notions of race emphasized the foreignness of African captives. Here, and especially in the British Atlantic, even where interracial sexual contact was common slaves tended to be barred from their masters' kin groups and social institutions, except at the outset or on frontiers. Offspring resulting from the often predatory unions between slave women and free men remained slaves, for children always followed the status of their mothers. Slaves in the Americas were usually housed separately from their masters and sought sexual partners among fellow captives. A potent impediment to sociopolitical advancement by comparison to the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (excepting the Mascarenes), exclusion in the Atlantic generally fostered development of distinctive and lasting diasporic communities. There were exceptions to this norm, particularly in Spanish America and to a lesser extent in the French Caribbean. In Argentina, for example, the African American communities of Buenos Aires "disappeared" in the nineteenth century, reproducing a typically Islamic pattern but by different mechanisms.<sup>48</sup> The important point is that while the Black Atlantic was the peculiar outcome of American racisms in their various forms, both community formation and dissolution were typical of African diasporic experiences from one end of the dispersion to another.

It is true that slaves and ex-slaves in the Islamic world were generally dishonored and subject to much prejudice based on the hue of their skin.<sup>49</sup> For the Maghreb, John Hunwick argues that much Islamic law respecting capture of slaves was disregarded, for darkness of skin became synonymous with enslavability.<sup>50</sup> But even if at times and places Africans in dispersion beyond the Atlantic were the target of race ideologies that linked status to genealogy, these ideologies seldom effectively excluded them from the societies of their masters by means of systematic practice or homespun legislation, for the basis of law and practice everywhere—at least in principle—was the Koran. Ideologies of exclusion were weaker in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean as compared to the Americas; they were unstable and more prone to breakdown over time precisely because slaves were sought primarily for intimate and domestic roles. Although frequently opposed by masters, slaves' quests for personal advancement through the social and religious institutions of the dominant society were seldom successfully blocked.

Consider Islam itself. Enslavement of non-Muslims was justified by unbelief and generally regarded as a religious apprenticeship, the introduction of infidels to the community of believers. Islamic masters seldom sought to prevent slaves from adopting their religion, even sending some to Koranic schools where they learned to read. Many slaves had converted even before their arrival at Islamic destinations. The practice of baptizing captives

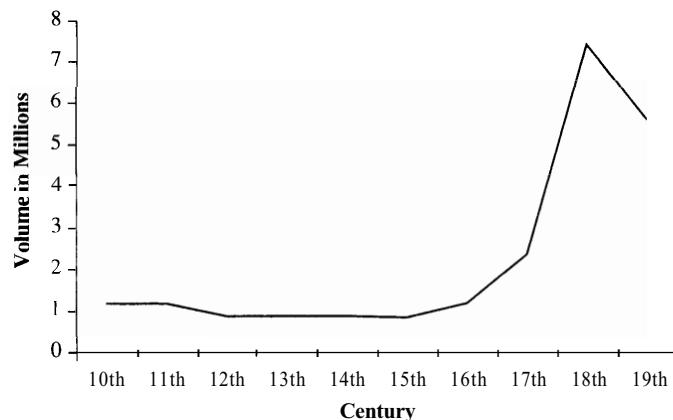
entering Catholic colonies, where masters early conceived of slavery **as** a means for saving the heathen, resonates with the Islamic ideal of slavery as conversion. In the Protestant Atlantic, by contrast, masters were generally hostile to evangelization among slaves, at least until the nineteenth century. In principle, slaves and ex-slaves were to be admitted to Islam as spiritual equals of their masters. In practice, bondsmen and freed Africans often had to struggle to claim their place in the mosques and the social institutions of the towns.<sup>51</sup> Despite the principle, Islam was not *equally* open to masters and slaves.

## THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN AFRICA

Up to now, I have discussed only the scattering of Africans beyond sub-Saharan Africa. Yet Africa's three external slave trades were linked to the employment of slaves within the continent. Because they possessed a "well-developed system of slavery, slave marketing, and slave delivery that preexisted any European contact," writes John Thornton, Africans responded to the earliest Portuguese demands for slaves with alacrity. "The Atlantic slave trade," he concludes, "was the outgrowth of this internal slavery."<sup>52</sup> The preexistence of the Indian Ocean, trans-Sahara, and domestic African trades made the Atlantic commerce possible, and each in turn contributed to the rising importance of slavery within Africa. Not all captives were sent into external exile. "Wherever slaves were exported," Paul Lovejoy has argued convincingly of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, "they were often used domestically in large numbers." By the seventeenth century, when it first exceeded Africa's other external slave trades in volume, the Atlantic commerce required a significant number of new enslavements within Africa to sustain it.<sup>53</sup> Similar linkages characterize Africa's other external trades.

The connection between internal and external slave trades presents scholars of the African diaspora with two challenges. The first is conceptual. The full title of George Shepperson's foundational essay on the African diaspora was "The African Diaspora or the African Abroad." By "abroad" Shepperson meant outside continental Africa, eliminating "internal" forced migrations from the diaspora he sought to define. Since the publication of Shepperson's paper, as I have argued, historians of the African diaspora have hewed closely to this restricted and flawed definition: a continental identity did not emerge in Africa until the late nineteenth century at the earliest. During the slave trades, Africans were "abroad" whenever they departed from their place of nativity. Despite the rise of a continental identity in the modern period, the same remains largely true today.

The second challenge is an empirical one. As virtually all experts agree, as many or more captives as were ejected from the continent were retained within sub-Saharan Africa itself.<sup>54</sup> In his study of the demography of enslavement, Patrick Manning, for example, found that "the slave population in Africa was roughly equal in size to the New World slave population from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. . . . After about 1850, there were more slaves in Africa than in the New World."<sup>55</sup> Herbert Klein has similarly written that the number of slaves held in Africa during the early eighteenth century was on the order of 3 to 5 million. "By 1850" he notes, "there were more slaves in Africa than there were in America—probably now numbering close to 10 million."<sup>56</sup> The combined volume of sub-Saharan Africa's external slave trades can be taken as a rough approximation of the number of new slaves captured and retained within Africa



**Figure 2** Volume Trend of Africa's Combined External Slave Trades, Tenth through Nineteenth Centuries. Source: Table 1.

(see fig. 2). The sum total of Africa's internal and external slave trades, then, is likely double that of its external commerce, on the order of 40 million or more (more than 20 million exported, as shown in table 1; a comparable number retained). Taken together with those killed in the process of capture and transportation, the numbers are staggering.

As in all systems of slavery, captives in Africa were moved from kin, nation, or state to place of servitude. The value of slaves was determined not solely by age, gender, physical condition, intrinsic abilities, and training but also by distance traveled. This could be hundreds of miles. Slaves must be "nationally alienated" and are strangers in the societies of their masters.<sup>57</sup> Africa is no exception. As all slavers knew, the best way to crush a captive's spirit was to remove him or her as far from home as possible. Persons captured in the interior might equally likely be sent off into external as internal exile; the process of capture and natal alienation were similar for those departing the continent or remaining in sub-Saharan Africa. Many captives served months, even years, in African slavery before being sold by design or a twist of ill fate into an external trade. The rest never departed sub-Saharan Africa.

Patterns of capture varied by place, method, interaction with external slave trades, and sex of the victim, but despite regional variations, most captives retained within sub-Saharan Africa were female. In some places, the number of slave women was on a parity with slave men; in others, women outnumbered enslaved men by more than two to one.<sup>58</sup> Typical sex ratios of African slave populations probably lay somewhere between these two examples. Many men were killed in the violent confrontations that resulted in enslavement. In more "peaceful" forms of capture, such as kidnapping and enslavement for debt, men were less frequently targeted and generally not as vulnerable as women and children. Female slaves, too, were valued for their roles in farming and household economies and as wives and bearers of children.<sup>59</sup>

At Africa's west coast, Europeans seeking captives for transportation to the Americas demanded more men than women. Although they generally achieved this goal, they were constrained by their African suppliers to accept more women than they preferred, particularly along the Gold Coast and the Bight of Biafra. In these regions, nearly as

many females as males entered the Atlantic slave trade. Senegambia lay at the other extreme. From its shores, nearly three-quarters of slaves entering the Atlantic were male. Senegambia supplied both the trans-Saharan and Atlantic slave trades; its merchants solved the double demand by conveying many of its servile women northward into the Mediterranean and most of its men into the Atlantic.<sup>60</sup> Similar interactions between Atlantic and trans-Saharan trades endured into the nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

More than any other region of dispersion, Africa was a land of diversity in slavery and diasporic experience. There were nearly as many types of slavery in Africa as languages. In many societies, captives entered individual households as supplemental kin, participating in the labor of cultivation, in domestic industry, and in local politics. This “lineage” or “kinship” slavery, as it has been called, enlarged social groups through the incorporation of dependent foreigners. Lineage slavery could be found in both Islamic and non-Islamic African societies. Ideologies of exclusion were particularly weak in lineage slaveries, for one of the purposes of acquiring strangers was to make them kin.<sup>62</sup>

From about the tenth century, the West African savanna and the East African littoral from the Red Sea to northern Mozambique entered the Islamic world. In sub-Saharan Africa’s Islamic regions, however, slaves were far more involved in commercial agriculture than they were in other areas of the *dar al-Islam*. Slaves were positioned on agricultural estates as early as the twelfth century by rulers and military leaders of medieval sudanic kingdoms. But not all productive African slavery was Islamic. Commercial agricultural systems employing slaves proliferated during the era of the Atlantic slave trade, especially during the nineteenth century, when slaves cultivated staple commodities for sale on domestic and international markets in disparate regions of the continent. There were plantations of cloves, millet, sesame, and coconuts in Zanzibar and along the East African coast; of grains in the Sokoto caliphate of the West African savanna; of groundnuts in parts of Senegambia; and of oil palms in the Niger River delta. The markets served by these plantations reached from India to the Americas.<sup>63</sup>

From the incorporative ethos of kinship slavery to the opposing tendencies of labor, exploitation, and exclusion in plantation agriculture, Africa was a laboratory for different forms of slavery. In the most general sense, Africa’s diverse forms of slavery lay at several intermediate locations on a continuum of forms of servitude between the Middle East and Indian Ocean’s domestic slaveries at one end and the western Atlantic’s economically rationalized slave plantation regimes and exclusionary ideologies of race at the other.<sup>64</sup> The exception to this geographic model would be African lineage slavery, which was probably even more incorporative than that found in most of the Islamic world. Africa belonged to the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean; its internal slaveries were informed by the uses to which captives were put in each of the broader systems that bordered and overlapped it.

If we turn to the principal variables affecting diasporic experience in host societies, sub-Saharan Africa again demonstrates a wide diversity. Ideologies of exclusion that mark slaves as foreigners varied from the weak to the strong. Race was seldom a tool successfully wielded by African masters (there were exceptions), but exclusion could be signaled by language, dialect, body scarification, hairstyles, cultural practices, and hues of skin. In systems of kinship slavery or where the function of enslavement was the expansion of a lineage through the incorporation of strangers, markers of exclusion could fall away quickly. The societies in which slaves were employed in production

tended to throw up the most exclusionary ideologies, such as the plantation systems of Zanzibar or those of the Sokoto caliphate. In parts of these regions, distinct communities descending from former slaves and masters exist today.<sup>65</sup> Such African systems most closely resemble Atlantic societies, where ex-masters and ex-slaves remain separated culturally and politically. But even where slaves were not employed in large-scale production, such as along the rivers of southern Somalia, contemporary communities of ex-slaves whose culture and consciousness differ markedly from those of the dominant society remain.<sup>66</sup>

The residential disposition of servile groups within Africa exerted a significant influence on if or how diasporic communities and consciousness developed. When they were newly captured or labored on plantations and mines, slaves tended to form an economic class distinct from that of their masters and were housed in separate quarters. The slave villages of nineteenth-century West Africa are a classic example. As French forces conquered much of the West African interior during the early years of the twentieth century, more than a million slaves fled their places of confinement.<sup>67</sup> Most escapees had been captured in their lifetimes and sought to return home, but only some were successful. In many locations across the continent, on the other hand, the lines between former masters and slaves have blurred, depositing a fuzzy memory of slavery into the new society that resulted and creating hybrid communities. Historians of African dispersion must take account of all these variant forms of diasporic experience.

## A MULTIFACETED DIASPORA

The problem of the African diaspora in contemporary thought is the problem of exclusion. Taking the part (the Atlantic dispersion) for the whole (the African diaspora) not only privileges certain diasporic experiences and structures over others but also renders the diasporic lives of Africans in Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean invisible in the rich and varied global drama of African captives' dispersion and social rebirth. Atlantic forms of diasporic experience (distinct and lasting communities, racial consciousness, identification with Africa, intellectual elites, and Africa as imagined and claimed origin) are one manifestation of the African diaspora, an important one to be sure. To broaden our vision from this variant, we need to focus on the diversity of experiences—community formation, dissolution, and amalgamation—in Africa's many dispersions. Looking at African diaspora beyond the Atlantic helps set the Atlantic diaspora in context and recognize its unique characteristics. It also serves as a corrective to myopic vision. A comparative approach reminds us that whatever our primary focus, new perspectives can be gained through broader thinking.

In this chapter, I have identified different streams of African forced migration and modes of social rebirth. Much remains to be done. And although slavery accounts for most flows of Africans to 1850, other voluntary and refugee migrant streams have become important since then and should be taken into account.<sup>68</sup> More Africans have been killed and displaced in the past thirty years as a result of regional wars on the continent, for example, as ever departed sub-Saharan Africa into external trades. According to major news organizations, the conflicts in Algeria, Angola, Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda have resulted in 8 million deaths and 17 million displaced since

about 1975. New dispersions are continually in the making. Whatever their particular manifestations over time, all African dispersions have a diasporic component consisting of demographic structure, interaction with host society, and cultural expression. And each, in its uniqueness, informs the legacy of Africa on the move in good circumstances and in bad, each diasporic in its own characteristics and each demanding the attention and respect that the uprooting and reroooting of Africans in our time merits.

## Notes

- 1 François Renault estimates the Sahara and Indian Ocean trades at 14 million, some 3 million higher than that of the Atlantic. François Renault, “Essai synthèse sur la traite transsaharienne et orientale des esclaves en Afrique,” in *La dernière trait*, ed. Eric Saugera (Paris, 1994), 23.
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- 3 Ibid., 152, 157.
- 4 Michael Naylor Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London, 2003), 3.
- 5 Edward Alpers, “Recollecting Africa: Diasporic Memory in the Indian Ocean World,” *African Studies Review* 43 (2000), quotation at 84; Joseph Harris, “The African Diaspora in World History and Politics,” in *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, ed. Sheila Walker (Lanham, Md., 2001), 105–6.
- 6 For India, see Vijay Prashad, “Afro-Dalits of the Earth, Unite!,” *African Studies Review* 43 (2000): 189–201.
- 7 Ehud Toledano, “The Concept of Slavery in Ottoman and Other Muslim Societies: Dichotomy or Continuum,” in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa*, ed. Edward Philips (London, 2000), 162.
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- 15 Toledano, “The Concept of Slavery,” 159.

- 16 For an example of this silence in print, see Ministry of Information, Sultanate of Oman, *Oman in History* (London, 1995), 491–509.
- 17 John Hunwick, “The Same but Different: Africans in Slavery in the Mediterranean Muslim World,” in *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam*, ed. Eve Troutt Powell (Princeton, N.J., 2002), xi–xiii.
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