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Indians and Commerce in Western Madagascar, 1865-1895

Introduction

This paper outlines the background and analyses the role of the Indian mercantile community in West Madagascar in the second half of the nineteenth century. In so doing, it attempts to set their activity within the context of the Indian community and trading developments in the Western Indian Ocean as a whole.

Indian Trade in the Western Indian Ocean: Background

1. The Monsoon System

Roughly triangular in shape, the maritime commercial system of the Western Indian Ocean connected Bombay, Muscat and Zanzibar, with extensions to the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Mozambique, the Comoro Islands and North West Madagascar. A related but subsiduary trading network linked the north west coast of Madagascar with the northern and eastern coasts of the island. The rhythm of maritime trade was shaped by the monsoon system. The Indian Ocean was a region of unique seasonal (monsoon) winds and few entrances; prior to the ninetweenth century, the sole western entrance was via the Cape of Good Hope, whilst of the entrances from the Pacific, only four to five were used.[1] Monsoon winds dominated the region between the equator and the Tropic of Cancer, and from the east African coast to the Sea of Japan. Although the south west monsoon blows from April to october and the north east from October to May, the changeover in direction takes one month, so that only four months of regular wind per season can be guaranteed. In addition, certain areas, notably the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Malacca Straits, are exempt from the effects of the monsoons. Moreover in the region south of the equator north of the 28th parallel and between Madagascar and Australia, the south east trade winds blow perennially, whilst south of the 28th parallel, the prevailing winds are westerly. Thus The monsoon system ensured that the ports to the north of Zanzibar, lying as they did within the zone directly governed by monsoon winds, were more favoured in terms of trans-oceanic trade than those to the south of Zanzibar that lay on the periphery, or beyond the reach, of the regular monsoon system and therefore of regular maritime communication with Arabia and India.[2]

2. Europeans & the Decline of Indian Trade, 1500-1815

Indians from the Malabar coast had participated in Western Indian Ocean trade since time immemorial[3], but their trade declined following the arrival of Europeans in the region from the end of the fifteenth century. From that time, two major trade networks existed in the area; one based on the Europe-India trade, and the other, older one, on inter-regional trade. However, Indian commercial activity in the Indian Ocean was adversely affected by the aggression of the Portuguese from the start of the sixteenth century and by the mercantilist conflict for India by the British and French that characterised the eighteenth century, and which climaxed in the Revolutionary and Naoleonic Wars. These factors, accentuated by the spread of piracy in the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, severely curtailed the Indian presence in the maritime trade of the region.[4]

3. Pax Britannica and the Indian Commercial Revival

A spectacular resurgence of Indian maritime trade followed the establishment of British global supremacy after its defeat of France in the Napoleonic Wars. The first consequence of British domination was the suppression of pirates and the spread of Pax Britannica in the Western Indian Ocean - deemed essential to safeguard the British maritime route to India. Piracy had been suppressed by the early 1820s in the coastal waters off north and east Madagascar and the Mascarenes, and in Arabian and Persian waters by the following decade.[5]

A second result of British paramountcy was the adoption of free trade as British industry no longer felt the need for the protective measures of mercantilism. The implication for the Indian Ocean was the abolition of the British East india Company monopoly. This in turn benefitted smaller companies and individual traders, including those from Malabar.[6] From the 1820s, taking full advantage of the new conditions of liberty of commerce and the security emanating from Pax Britannica, Malabar traders re-established their maritime commercial network and trading colonies, expanding across the Persian and Arabian coasts and, under the protection of the Omani power, down the East African coast.

4 Indian Expansion within the Omani Empire

Indian traders, chiefly from Kutch, Probunder and Surat, had long traded in the Persian Gulf area where they established trading colonies. By the start of the nineteenth century the most important of these colonies was at Muscat where Indian traders obtained the confidence of the Sultan as financiers and - for Banians -controllers of customs. Under the informal protection of Britain, the Sultan expanded his commercial influence down the east African copast. When in 1840, he transferred the seat of government to Zanzibar, the Indians followed him. The Sultan had no desire to establish a land empire. Rather he ruled in a loose sovereignty over Arab settlements in the main ports of East Africa north of Cape Delagado; Mogadishu, Mombasa, Tanga, Pangani, Kilwa and Zanzibar.[7] Zanzibar was, from the 1830s, the undisputed distributative centre for this 'southern network' of East Africa. In the 1840s, the first Europeans to be attracted to the commercial rise of Zanzibar, found British Indians there playing the dominant role as capitalists, wholesalers and retailers.[8]

The organisational and capital resources of Indian traders emanated from their company headquarters on the Malabar coast. The most prominent Indian traders operating in East Africa were the Hindu 'Bhattia' or 'Banians'.[9] The Banians derived from a group expelled from Cambaia who fled to Gujerat and to Mecca, where the majority remained, although some also travelled as merchants to Demaum and Diu. The Banian merchants of Diu were in 1686 granted the monopoly of Mozambique-Diu trade by the Viceroy of India. Banians, members of a Brahmin caste, never married outside their own group. They also seldom settled permanently in East Africa. There were important exceptions, however. For instance, a group of Banian Indians had, from the close of the 17th century, lived on Mozambique Island where, in 1807, they were 254 in number.[10] The two other main trading castes active in East Africa were the Bhora and Khoja who, unlike the Bhattia, were accompanied by their families.[11] The number of Indians resident in Zanzibar increased from c.1,000 in 1847 to 6,000 by 1860.[12] However, the Khoja were predominant on the equatorial mainland, and the Bhora in the coastal ports of Galla and Somaliland in North East Africa, and on the north west coast of Madagascar. Like their Hindu compatriots, they generally retained their claim to British nationality.[13] In total, only 76 Indians in the whole of the Sultan's East African territories opted for Omani citizenship.[14]

The Indian Mercantile Community in Madagascar

Although the Swahili coast, notably Zanzibar, remained the centre of Indian trade and investment, their influence spread rapidly south of Zanzibar from the 1840s, into Mozambique, to the Comoro islands and North West Madagascar which was thus integrally locked into the Western Indian Ocean commercial network. The west coast of Madagascar was split into two commercial regions, respectively north and south of Cape St. Andre. To the south, trade was initially largely unorganised, foreign traders negotiating directly with local chiefs, whilst in the northern commercial sector, foreign trade was dominated by the *Silamo*, comprising *Karany* and *Antalaotra*, Muslim traders of Indian and Arabic origin respectively. The *Antalaotra*, a generic term for Muslims of Swahili-Arab origin formed colonies during the ninth and tenth centuries on the north-west coast, notably at Langany in Mahajamba Bay and at

Sahadia at the mouth of the river Manambolo, as well as on the north-east coast, at Vohimara, Mahanara, Sahambava, Lokoho and Antalaha.[15] They were followed by the Karany, Muslim Indians from Bombay and Gujerat, from about the twelfth century.[16]

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Antalaotra were subdivided into the *Hounzati*, a group living in Iboina but originally from Malindi, and the *Mozanghi* of Mahajanga. Mahajanga thus formed the centre of activity of the Indian trading community in the early nineteenth century. Most of the *Karany*, or Indian community in Madagascar, were 'Khoja' or 'Bohra' Shia Muslims. Frere wrote of them in 1873:

> 'In Madagascar and elsewhere the Indians assured me that though their oldest house was not more than sixty years standing, their caste had traded to the coast for ages previous...In Madagascar they assert that they have been, for at least a century, settled ay Nosi Beh and other ports, and that they [ie. the Bohras and Khojas] preceded the Hindoos on the African Coast'.[17]

Mahajanga boasted a population of 6,000 Arab and Indian traders and their families at its commercial zenith in the 1780s and 1790s, but they were largely dispersed by the Merina conquest of 1824 so that by 1869 only 700 to 800 *Mozanghi* families remained.[18] Nevertheless, the commercial expertise of *Antalaotra* leaders like Mose Sama enabled them to make a quick recovery, for they became valued by the Merina governors of the port, as by local Sakalava chiefs into whose familes they frequently married, and whom they influenced to adopt Islamic customs.[19] However, they strength as middlemen was due chiefly to their close alliance with the Indian traders who supplied them with credit.[20]

The Credit System

1. Creditors and Debtors

As capitalists, the Indians financed most inter-regional trade of both a maritime and overland nature, in the islands, and lands bordering, the Western Indian Ocean. In the first instance, their credit system worked to benefit fellow caste members and other Indians. Members of the different Indian trading castes cooperated closely in business affairs. Agents of the large India based companies almost inevitably advanced money to individual Indians venturing into the regional trade of the Western Indian Ocean. Most Indian traders arrived from Kutch with very little capital, and were through their popverty forced to live extremely frugally - on an estimated $25 per annum in the 1850s compared to European agents of O'Swald who lived on $300 a year.[21] They obtained easy credit on the one hand because kinship and caste ties were so strong as to act as a form of collateral, and on the other because individual agents played an entrepreneurial role in steadily advancing the frontier of Indian trade into areas where, if trade proved profitable, the established companies could later found a trading post.[22] Indeed, with backing from Zanzibar, and ultimately Bombay, small Indian traders quickly dislodged in these regions existing Arabic and créole middlemen who could summon neither the capital nor organisational resources of the Indians.[23]

They also advanced credit to foreigners. This was most apparant in Zanzibar where, incorporated into the Sheikh's administration, they not only financed most Arab and European trading ventures in the area, but also farmed the Omani customs and acted as advisers to the Sultan. In the absence of banks, and given the length of time to communicate with Europe, their role in providing credit proved crucial to the survival of foreign firms like O'Swald who frequently found themselves critically short of cash. In general, cash was despatched from Europe at the end of the north east monsoon, but whereas it arrived in time to purchase skins, orchilla and cloves, it meant that by the end of May, when caravans started to arrive with ivory, and cowries were plentiful, the cash reserves of European firms were often exhausted. Had they not been able to procure funds from Indian financiers, they would have lost the trust of the Indian middlemen. In their turn, the ability of the top Indians to

extend credit was dependent upon the money supply in Zanzibar.[24] In 1873, when the Bhattia firm of Jeyram Sewjee was farming Omani customs on the Swahili coast (at Zanzibar, Kilwa and Mombassa), the British Consul estimated the total British-Indian capital invested in Zanzibart at over £1.5 million. Of the £434,000 invested in East Africa by one Indian firm alone, an estimated £60,000 had been advanced to the Sultan, £200,000 to leading Arab slave dealers and £140,000 to European and American traders.[25] Indeed, such was the importance of the Indian élite as bankers and financiers that the Indian rupee slowly superceded the Maria Theresa dollar and other currencies in Zanzibar.[26]

A similar trend was evident, albeit on a lesser scale, in Madagascar where, for example, in 1871, Daoso, head of the Indian merchant community in Mahajanga, undertook the building of the port's Customs house at a cost of $107.[27]

European firms were also a major source of credit for smaller Indian traders. European firms proved willing to advance credit partly because the Indians as middlemen possessed a near monopoly of the import-export trade of the region and to have refused credit in the absence of banks - the first bank in the region accessible to Indian traders was opened in Zanzibar in 1880 and no bank credit was extended until 1884 - would have damaged their own interests. Also, the Indians proved highly trustworthy. For instance, O'Swald, who was initially dubious, and worked on the basis of 3 per cent commission through a European agent of a Liverpool firm who knew the local language and also Indian customs, soon started extending credit to Indians in Zanzibar. Until 1871, not one of his Indian debtors defaulted. As O'Swald's agent, Schmeißer, commented in 1850:

> Die Baniane hier sind so ehrlich in ihrem Handeln, daß, wenn sie bei irgendjemand Betrug sehen, es durchaus unmöglich ist, mit ihnen Geschäft zu machen. Die Ehrlichkeit dieser Leute geht soweit, daß man kaum nötig hat, etwas schriftlich mit ihnen abzumachen[28]

The same picture emerges of the creditworthiness of the Indian mercantile community elsewhere in the region, in Mozambique[29] and in Madagascar.[30] By contrast with the Indians in Madagascar, nine Merina and two European traders defaulted on loans extended by O'Swald on the east coast of Madagascar in the between 1875 and 1890. In all cases, O'Swald discovered it extremely difficult to recover loans - whether working through the French or Merina judicial systems.[31]

The Indians in turn used the credit advanced to them by Europeans to advance credit to local suppliers in the region. In Madagascar, the *Karany* advanced credit to the *Anatalaotra*, Sakalava, Merina and even Mascarene traders, arranging 'loans, advances and mortgages, on every kind of property, real and personal, and on various kinds of security; by advances of goods for trade etc'.[32]

2. Nature and Terms of Credit

In East Africa, Indian financiers charged interest on their loans. In 1851 this amounted to 1 per cent per months, was reduced in 1853 to 0.75 per cent, and until 1890 it never fell below 7.5 per cent per annum.[33] Because of the length of time taken for trade caravans to travel to and from the East African interior, foreign firms were obliged to grant Indian middlemen six months credit.[34] Moreover, in contrast to the credit extended in Madagascar, and to that given by Indian financiers, such credit was extended interest free.[35]

A case study of O'Swald's activities in Madagascar reveal that on the north west coast, he extended credit to both local Europeans, chiefly Réunionnais planters and shopkeepers, and to Indian traders. To the Europeans, credit mainly took the form of provisions and building material, usually to a value of lbetween $2,000 and $3,000, repayable within 2 to 6 months in cash or kind. To Indians, the amount extended was generally less than $1,000, although upto $20,000 or more was extended to his chief Indian commercial agents. Indians normally received 6 months credit, although it was extended in periods of general economic difficulty, such as 1884, to nine months. In all cases, interest was charged at 9 per cent per annum.[36] Raminosoa claims that on the east coast, Merina traders obtained easier credit from O'Swald than from French

traders. Whereas the latter gave $40 (fr.100) payable in 90 days, O'Swald extended $200 (fr.1,000) payable in the same period. He also adopted the system whereby 80 per cent of the loan was repayable in dollars and the remainder in kind.[37] The agents through whom European firms traded with Madagascar worked generally on a commission basis. Thus the son and namesake of the Indian trader who had worked for the American firm of Bertram and Arnold Hines, Sheik Adam bin Ibriheme, was by 1878 acting as the agent for O'Swald in Mahajanga, purchasing chiefly wax and rubber for a five per cent commission (2.5 per cent each on sales and purchases). He was willing to work on the same basis for Arnold, Hines and Bertram.[38]

Throughout the region, the main form of credit was imported merchandise, mainly textiles, guns and ammunition. The Karany also in some instances provided India built ships.[39]

The Changing Geographical Focus of Indian Trade/Credit Distribution in Madgascar

1. Mahajanga

Although they evacuated Mahajanga, their centre of operations, following its conquest by the Merina in 1824[40], the *Silamo* recovered much of their influence from the mid-1820s as the Merina came to value their political and commercial expertise. In order to facilitate their operations in Merina controlled territory, many Karany, whilst retaining British nationality, also took out Merina citizenship.[41]

In the early nineteenth century, Mahajanga was the dominant port on the west coast of Madagascar as it possessed good anchorage and lay at the mouth of the Betsiboka which was navigable for 80km and provided the gateway to the important inland market of Imerina.[42]. Between September 1832 and September 1844, of the 45 US vessels which sailed into Zanzibar having visited Madagascar with ports of call specified, 82 per cent arrived from Mahajanga, four (8.9 per cent) from Nosy Be, and two (4.4 per cent) from other bays on the north-west coast; only two originated from ports not on the north-west coast (St Agustin and Vohimara) - the latter being the only east coast port specified. The whalers account for Nosy Be, St Augustin and Passandava Bay as ports of call - only one whaler having put in at Mahajanga which thus emerges as almost the sole Malagasy entrept for American merchant vessels trading with the region at that epoch.[43] Such was Mahajanga's importance, that the American houses appointed resident American agents there.[44] It would appear that, prior to the 1830s, Mahajanga was the main American entrept in East African waters, for ivory amongst other mainland African products was shipped there for transhipment.[45]

2. The Rise of Nosy Be, c.1845-1860

Mahajanga prospered until the 1840s, when its commercial importance declined sharply in favour of the French offshore island of Nosy Be. The first reason for this was that in September 1842, queen Ranavalona I raised export duties in the few Merina controlled ports of the west coast from 5 to 10 per cent ad valorem to equal east coast rates.[46] This meant that the Mahajanga price of cattle, a staple export commodity, was $10-11, twice that of Nosy Be.[47] The second reason for Mahajanga's demise was the 1845-53 ban on Europeans trade in imperial Merina ports. A crew member of an American merchant vessel visiting Mahajanga in March 1849 commented that only ships flying the Arab flag could trade in the port and that 'The town has not much the appearance of thrift or business...We sold but little cargo here, it being prohibited from landing by the late laws of the Country'.[48]

Thus the major entrepot on the north-west coast shifted away from Mahajanga, and its upriver collection centre of Marovoay, to Nosy Be which - except during the Sakalava uprising from 1848-9 - acted until the 1880s as the collecting point for goods from the independent Sakalava coast.[49] The island of Nosy Be possessed numerous commercial advantages. Not only did it lie a short distance away from the north west coast of Madagascar, but was also on the direct maritime route from Madagascar via the Comoro Islands to Zanzibar, 450 km to the north east.[50] It also possessed excellent harbourage. A visiting American seaman commented of it in 1849 that: 'The location is one of the finest that I have ever yet seen, the anchorage good and sheltered by high ranges of mountains that prevent the Monsoons from blowing with there [*sic*] full force'.[51]

Secondly, the major German firm of O'Swald, and the large American houses sought an outlet there. Zanzibar was, from the mid nineteenth century, 'flooded' by European firms. Established companies included the American firms of Bertram and Arnold Hines, and the Hamburg company of Hertz. A third Hamburg firm, Hansing, and three French firms, Vidal Régis and Rabau frères all opened branches in Zanzibar in the early 1850s and they were joined by the Marseille firm, Roux de Fraissinet, in 1867.[52] As Mozambique, the major alternative as a distributive centre for Madagascar, was like Mahajanga plagued by the imposition of high duties - 15 per cent at Mozambique Island and an additional 31.5 per cent for trade with other ports in 1845,[53] O'Swald and the American firms were attracted to Nosy Be which was a free port.[54]

Whereas since c.1830 the Americans had worked through their own agent, Marx, at Mahajanaga,[55] from 1845 they landed their goods at Nosy Be, leaving them in charge of *Silamo* agents, who subsequently transported them to Mahajanga.[56] The same trend was evident when American traders returned to the region following the end of the American Civil War in 1865. Thus Bertram and Arnold Hines, who initially hired the services of an Indian, 'Sheik Adam bin Ibriheme', from 1877 used the Nosy Be based Arab, 'Silliman [Sulleiman] bin Dowd' as their agent for their West Madagascar trade, whilst lower down the west coast, all of George Rope's agents were *Karany* by 1888. Similarly, O'Swald from 1869 ran its commercial operations in western Madagascar through Nosy Be-based *Karany*.[57]

3. The West Coast of Madagascar, c.1860-1883

Such was the *Silamo* dominance that they earned the antipathy of créole traders like Edmont Samat who described them as a 'caste maudite qui entrave beaucoup les Européennes qui habitent ou qui passent sur cette cte'.[58] As a result, Mascarene créole traders like the Samat and Rossier brothers concentrated on challenging the *Silamo* monopoly on the west coast. Their commercial penetration south of Cape St Andre started in the 1840s,[59] and they soon established a firm base at Maintirano. Long a major slave and arms entrepot, it also developed in the 1870s as a major export centre for ebony, with direct maritime links to Mozambique and Nosy Be.[60]

European and American firms also wished to bypass the Karany of whom an American commercial agent commented in late 1878: 'those "Bohoras"...seem to be one family, and it would be cheaper, and better in every way to have our own man here.'[61] In 1878-9, following a cholera epidemic which devastated successively Zanzibar, Nosy Be and Mahajanga, many Bombay-based Indian firms went bankrupt, thus allowing European and American merchants the chance to consolodate tentative efforts made in the 1860s to establish direct commercial contact with the Sakalava coast.[62] Thus, in 1878 Geo. Ropes also opened an agency in Maintirano.[63] Lower taxes and closer access to transshipment centres like Nosy Be, Mozambique and Zanzibar made West Madagascar, as opposed to East Madagascar, a viable source of valuable woods, the trade in which attracted to west Madagascar firms like Oswald of Hamburg, Ropes of Boston, Hines of New York, and the Marseilles firm of Roux de Fraissinet, as well as Cape Town merchants and agents of the main steamer lines servicing East Africa.[64]

In response to these moves, the Antalaotra and later their Karany allies also advanced their trading frontier south down the west coast, pushing Mascarene traders moved still further to reach and greatly stimulated the slave export trade from St Augustin Bay.[65] By the 1880s, the Karany trading frontier had caught up with the Mascarene traders.[66] The Karany also quickly reasserted their dominance over the Americans and Europeans. A lack of unity amongst 'white' traders ensured that the *Karany* who, by marketing as 'standard' (ie. 30 yard), cloths only 25-26 yards long, had captured most of the cotton import trade from the Americans by the 1880s.[67]

4. Mozambique, c.1883-90

From the late 1870s, there began another shift in the focus of distribution of Indian trade with Madagascar, away from the island's west coast to Mozambique. The first reason for this was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 which meant the advent of regular steamer lines linking the region directly with Europe. These lines were directed to Zanzibar and the Mascarene Islands as primary destinations, but they also linked the two, with ports of call at Toamasina, Diego Suarez, Nosy Be and Mayotta. The Messageries Maritimes line also ran a monthly service between Nosy Be

and Nosy Ve.[69] In addition, the DOAG, established in 1885 with a monopoly of the trade of German East Africa, in 1890 opened a branch at Mahajanga. Thereafter, many DOAL ships, returning from East Africa to Germany, called at Mahajanga, Analalava and Nosy Be.[69]

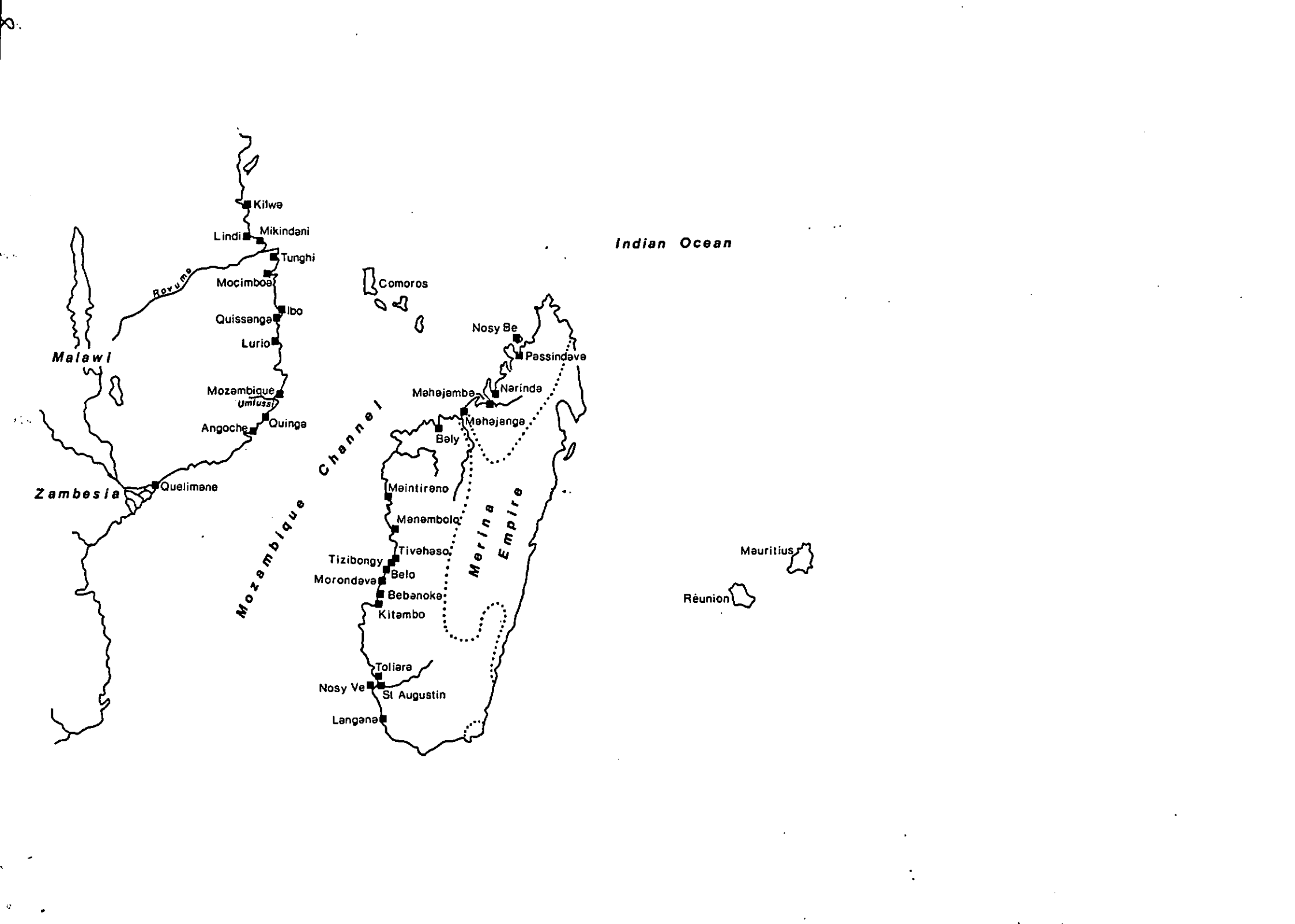
The advent of European steamship lines encouraged Mascarene traders to settle or establish agencies in the ports served by the steamers, providing additional competition for the Indians. Also, steamships had an obvious advantage over dhows in the region for they could operate throughout the year and were not dependent upon trade winds which, for example, made November to January the heaviest shipping season for the dhow trade between North West Madagascar and Zanzibar.[70] However, the advent of steam was not totally disadvantageous to the Indians whom it freed from the necessity of conducting their European and American business through resident foreign agents, as they could henceforth deal directly with the steamship companies.[71] Secondly, although steamships were more regular in their service, their freight charges were considerably more expensive than those charged by dhows. In mid-1884, for example, an attempt by American and European companies to cooperate in a price war against the *Silamo* collapsed. This in itself was partly a reflection of the increased European competition: From 1881-85, the number of German firms competing in the region increased from 2 to five,[72] and at the same time, Registe & Co. of Marseilles, expanding from Mozambique, initiated a price war with his European and American competitors.[73] Thus, taking advantage of the bankruptcy of Roux de Fraissinet of Marseilles, its chief European rival in Nosy Be, the Hamburg firm of Oswald raised its steamer freight rates.[74] O'Swald's charges remained lower, however, than Messageries Maritimes who operated in the region from c.1885.[75]

Secondly, the 1880s witnessed a general deterioration of security and trade on the west coast. One major reason for this was the steady colapse of Merina authority on the imperial periphery from 1882 which induced Sakalava and Bara warbands to launch increasingly daring slave and cattle raids onto the plateau. Such fierce rivalry developed between suppliers of slaves for export that all contemporary accounts refer to a state of perpetual internecine warfare in central, southern and western Madagascar from the late 1880s.[76] At the same time, Sakalava attacks on foreign merchants continued, with the result that both legitimate and illicit commerce suffered.[77] Thirdly, French authorities started in the 1880s to punish non-French trade by the imposition of a series of taxes in their Malagasy possessions. The imposition of taxes by the French authorities in occupation of Mahajanga in 1884 led to a steady exodus of Indian commercial agents from the port.[78] At the same time, the French also removed Nosy Be's status as a free port: One American firm there was obliged to pay $1,500 p.a. payable in French francs.[79]

Thus the focus for the trade of Madagascar switched to Mozambique, where Indians had long held a quasi monopoly of foreign trade, and where the Portuguese authorities were notoriously lax in regard to injunctions issued to them to suppress the slave and arms trade. Mozambique, between 200 and 350 miles distant[80], was from at least the late 1870s the chief distributive centre for slaves and arms to Madagascar.[81] In addition, it served as a distributive centre for Malagasy produce. Thus Ropes, who established an agency there in the late 1870s, shipped his produce from Maintirano and other west coast ports to Mozambique for transhipment to Union Co. steamers.[82] Also, in the 1880s, Registe & Co. of Marseilles expanded from Mozambique to take over the Malagasy trade of Roux de Fraissinet, the fellow Marseille house that went bankrupt in 1883.[83]

6. Nosy Ve c.1890-95

By 1890, British interest in Mozambique had become so intense that the focus of trade again changed, this time to the tiny island of Nosy Ve, close to Toliara, in the south west of Madagascar. Foreign traders had started to frequent St Augustin and established agencies at Nosy Ve and Toliara from the mid-nineteenth century.[84] The attraction of the south-west was the availability there of slaves, cattle and, from 1861, of orchilla weed.[85] This movement to the extreme south west was assisted by the emergence from the 1870s of Natal as a major trading partner of south west Madagascar: In the period 1878-81 a total of seven Natal merchants, the chief of which was McCullins, were trading with Madagascar. Their main interest was in


Indian Ocean
Kilwə
Lindi
Mikindəni
Tunghi
Rovuma
Mocimboa
Ibo
Quissanga
Lurio
Malawi
Mozambique
Umlussi
Angoche
Quinga
Zambesia
Quelimane
Comoros
Nosy Be
Passindave
Mahajamba
Narinda
Mahajanga
Baly
Mozambique Channel
Maintirano
Menambolo
Merina Empire
Tivahaso
Tizibongy
Belo
Morondava
Bebanoke
Kitambo
Toliara
Nosy Ve
St Augustin
Langana
Mauritius
Réunion

Malagasy cattle to replace South African stock depleted by cattle diseases and natural blights. The pastoral Bara and Sakalava proved only too willing to divert cattle from the traditional export routes to the north and east, to the main ports of Toliara, St. Augustin, Belo-Tsiribihina and Soalara. Cattle mortality on the ten day return trip was nine per cent in the period 1878-81.[86] However, many agents maintained on the west coast of Madagascar by Natal cattle traders were *Silamo* and doubled as agents of the slave export trade.[87] Indeed, even before the 1883-5 War the *Karany* had developed strong trading links with the Cape Colony and Natal,[88] and following the war, the Karany were largely responsible for the growing trade between Madagascar and Cape Colony, Natal and British India.[89]

However, the rampant insecurity on the Malagasy mainland, whilst intially boosting the arms and slave trades, had by the late 1880s undermined both legitimate and clandestine commerce in the region. By 1894, it was remarked that 'l'intérieur des terres est absolument fermé aux Européens'.[90] As a result, foreign traders in the region, led by Mascarene créoles, established a persistent call for French military intervention. Following the French takeover of Masdagascar in 1895, French forces restoreed order in the South West and by 1899 all foreign traders had transferred their agencies from Nosy Ve to Toliara.[91]

Boats

On the Swahili coast, coastal traffic and shipments from the mainland to Zanzibar, were managed by locally built and Swahili manned 'mtepe', that varied between 12 and 20 tons. As the coastal traffic was not dependent upon the monsoons, it continued throughout the year - thus enabling stocks to be built up in Zanzibar to await the arribval from late January of ships from the north. However, the economy of Zanzibar depended in large part upon the monsoons and dhows. In theory, traders could make successive use of both monsoon winds, but in general they only undertook one journey, the 2,200 miles from the Persian Gulf or India to Zanzibar, per year. Dhows from the north left India at the end of December, Arabia from mid January and the Red Sea from the end of January, by which time the first ships from India and Arabia were reaching Zanzibar.[92] The first of such boats reached Mozambique by by March. Cargoes were unloaded and, until mid-April, shipments were despatched to southern Mozambique ports. At the latest return cargoes reached Mozambique Island by the end of August, and Zanzibar from mid-September, to be shipped back on the south west monsoon to India.[93]

This 'Northern' network experienced little variation for it was governed by regular monsoon winds.[94] However, in the transition months, notably September-October and March-April, the winds could be tricky. Currents running in the same direction as the monsoon wind averaged 1.5 to 4 miles per hour, so that fast sailing boats like the dhow could travel upto 6 miles an hour, or 160 marine miles each day.[95] The 'Southern' network, which included the lands bordering on the Mozambique Channel, experienced more variable winds and currents, although in 1843, it was noted that Johanna was connected by regular dhow and 'chelinga' sailings with Bombay, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique and Delagoa Bay.[96] The distance from Madagascar to points on the African mainland varied; Nosy Be, three days dhow sail from Mahajanga, was 4-8 days sail from Zanzibar,[97] whilst Toilara was a minimum of 5 days sailing distance from Natal. The trip from Africa to the east coast of Madagascar took roughly double the time.[98]

The usual type of ship used in the Indian/Arab trade of the Western Indian Ocean was the dhow - also called 'dhonis' in West Madagascar.[99] Dhows generally ranged from 40 to 200 tons, were from 20-30 metres long and possessed 2-3 masts with lateen or fore-and-aft sails. Most European firms operative on the west coast of Madagascar worked through *Antalaotra* middlemen who used dhows of between 150 and 200 tons, although some were larger.[100] Dhows were cheaper to run than the larger legitimate European and American ships, for the crews comprised slave labour and owners paid no liability premiums as no-one in Zanzibar would insure their vessels.[101] In 1899, for example, freight aboard dhows cost (in 1899) $2-3 (fr.10-15) per metric ton (1,000 kg), compared to the $4-9 per ton charged by the French steamer, the 'Mpanjaka', which however was much faster than the dhows.[102] This was particularly the case with the older Indian craft. Although they rarely took an active role in the actual

shipment of slaves, they provided slaving ships; old India-built ships that had made their last 'respectable' voyage with the annual flotilla from Western India to Madagascar and Mozambique were relegated to the slave trade where risks were high, it being noted that 'cheap and old vessels are preferred; they have an almost equal chance of making the voyage before a regular trade wind and, if captured, are a smaller loss'.[103] To evade capture, the captains of dhows used a variety of flags. The Turkish flag was the most widely utilised in the Red Sea and off the coasts of Persia and Arabia.

Most captains of merchant ships in the region were Muslims. The transport of goods along the Swahili coast was mainly in the hands of Swahilis and Omanis.[104] Further south, of the 30 different captains of vessels registered at Inhambane in the years 1856, 1858 and 1859 that were involved in intra colony shipping, five (16.67 per cent) were Portuguese and one an American. The remaining 80 per cent possessed Islamic. Many ships registered at Inhambane also carried traders, most of whom were of Indian or Arabic origin and who were variously described as 'Banian', 'Mouro' (lit. 'Moor' or 'Saracan'), 'Gentio' (lit. 'Pagan' or 'Heathen') and 'Parsee' (lit. adherents of Zoroastrianism, a Persian sect which fled to India from Islamic persecution in the 7th and 8th centuries).[105] Apart from the captain, the dhow generally carried crews of upto 14 African slaves.[106] In terms of human cargo, they could carry from 60 to 300 slaves.[107]

Commodities and Prices

1. Commodities

As Creditors and Traders, the Indians dealt in the staple commodities of Western Indian Ocean commerce.

Imports

The chief legitimate import in the region was textiles (American 'blue', British and Indian cloths), followed by ironmongery, beads, cutlery, alcohol and mirrors.[108] A case study of Inhambane in the 1850s reveals that cloth comprised 92.86 per cent of all listed cargoes imported via Mozambique. 67.65 per cent of cargoes that included cotton pieces were imported indirectly into Mozambique Island via Zanzibar and to a lesser extent from the Comoro Islands and Madagascar (17.65 per cent) - indubitably by Indians. Only 8.82 per cent of cottons were imported directly into Mozambique from America. However, American cotton pieces comprised only 44.62 per cent of all cloth cargoes imported into Mozambique Island, compared to 40 per cent of indisputably Indian origin, and 15.38 per cent of unknown origin. It is therefore not certain that American cottons had superseded Indian cloth in the Mozambique market by 1860 as on the Swahili coast.[109] Certainly by the 1880s American cotton pieces had become more highly valued in the interior than cloth of Indian manufacture.[110] Other goods imported from Bombay by Indians included flour, doors, sculpted furniture; and from Zanzibar: dates, spices, camel butter, rope and toys.[111]

Firearms, gunpowder and ammunition comprised the major clandestine import into East Africa and Madagascar, and was directly linked to the slave export trade for, with the exception of the Merina government, who wished to stockpile arms in case of a European attack, they were in demand chiefly by slave raiders. In 1878, it was estimated that the west coast of Madagascar would take 25,000 lb. of gunpoweder, packed in 5 lb. bags contained in 5 lb. kegs, which would retail at $0.14 a lb., $0.2 cheaper than on the Mozambique coast.[112] Arms were supplied mainly from America and Europe, but also from Natal to Madagascar.[113] In a décret dated 10 October 1894, the French authorities forbade the import and transferance of firearms in the colonies of Nosy Be, Diego Suarez and Sainte Marie (Nosy Boraha). Foreign firms established in these ports, like O'Swald, obeyed, but continued to import arms into other regions of Madagascar.[114]

Exports

The main legitimate goods exported from the Swahili coast were ivory, copal, cloves, pepper, coconuts, and sesame seed,[115] and from Mozambique; ivory, beeswax and rice. The chief demand for ivory was in Gujerat.[116] The staple legitimate exports from West Madagascar were cattle, hides and ebony,[117] whilst legitimate exports of

secondary value included wax, rubber, orchilla and - largely for the Indian market - tortoise shell[118]

The western plains formed the largest grazing grounds in Madagascar for cattle which, alongside cattle products like hides, horns and tallow, constituted possibly the most important legitimate export from the independent west coast of the island. European and American purchasers competed particularly fiercely for west coast hides;[119] those from Mahajanga were poisoned and salted (Toamasina hides were salted only), then sent to Zanzibar to be garbled with arsenic, dried and stored prior to shipment to Europe or America.[120] US-bound hides were shipped to tanneries based near Salem where leather constituted the oldest industry.[121] O'Swald treated and tanned his skins on site in Madagascar prior to export to Hamburg where they fed the shoe, treads and upholstery industries.[122] From the mid-nineteenth century, the coast below Cape St. André also became an important source of hides, Maintirano hides, described in 1878 as 'the very best equal to the best Tamatave',[123] being exported to Nosy Be, and to Mozambique.[124] At the close of the nineteenth century, skins were being shipped from Majunga at the rate of 1,800 per month and from Morondava and Maintirano (combined at 1,000 per month).[125]

Live cattle were also exported to the Mascarenes and, from 1875, to Natal, where they assisted in replenishing livestock that was regularly hit by disease. Agents maintained on the west coast of Madagascar by Natal cattle traders like McCubbin often doubled as agents of the slave export trade - many of them being British Indians.[126]

Ebony was shipped from the west coast of Madagascar, notably from Maintirano and [Morondava?], to Zanzibar via Nosy Be, chiefly by O'Swald and Roux de Fraissinet in 1878. Swahili and Indian traders from Zanzibar sold their ebony to de Fraissinet, rather than bring it to Hathorne, the agent at Zanzibar for Arnold Hines and John Bertram because of the lower purchasing price offered by the latter.[127] In 1899 a monthly average of 20 tons of ebony was exported via Mahajanga.[128] Other woods exported included hard woods, such as pallisander and rosewood that, like ebony were, were much valued in cabinet making, while sandal wood was used for the manufacture of perfumes and in pharmacy.[129]

Madagascar: Exports to British India, 1897 ($)[130]

		(percentage)				
Raw Sugar	2,326	(20.37)	Rice	594.8	(5.20)	
Precious Woods	2,047.4	(17.93)	Gold Powder	457.2	(4.00)	
Salt	2,030	(17.78)	Wooden Beams	203	(1.78)	
Gold & Silver Money	1,430	(12.53)	Fats	103	(0.90)	
Shells	1,318	(11.54)	Dried/Smoked Fish	34	(0.30)	
Cattle	863	(7.56)	Gum	10	(0.09)	
TOTAL	11,416.4					

Clandestine exports from Madagascar comprised in the main gold and slaves. Gold was exported illegally by foreigners because the imperial court, which attempted to enforce a purchasing monopoly, offered too low a buying price. Gold was measured in Malagasy ounces, represented by the weight of a Mexican dollar (approximately 0.958 of a troy ounce). From 1890-94 the official buying price fell from ten dollars to between $8.25 and $7.22 an ounce. This represented approximately half its value on the black market where gold was purchased at well below, and resold for just below, its open market value of between $17 and $17.50 per ounce.[131] The Indians purchased much gold on the black market, reselling to Europeans or shipping to India; in Bombay in 1899 it enjoyed a premium of 6-7 per cent above the European price.[132]

Since the Frere report of 1873, much historical attention has focussed upon the role of Indians in the East African slave trade. The *Banians* were the chief financiers of the slave trade on the Mozambique coast after 1840, whilst in

Madagascar the Antalaotra, with Karany backing, managed a two-way slave traffic, buying from the Sakalava for export to the French plantation islands and also importing from the Mozambique and Zanzibar coasts to supplement the regional French trade and supply the internal Malagasy market. As Frere commented generally of the slave trade to Madagascar in the early 1870s:

> 'After landing their Indian supercargo with the import cargo of cloth etc, at Madagascar, they [ie. the Arabs] stand over to the opposite Portuguese coast, pick up a small cargo of slaves at the outposts with which they return to Madagascar, making sometimes more than one trip of this kind before it is time to return northwards. These dhows are said frequently to put into the Comoro islands for water and provisions, and sometimes clandestinely part with some of their slaves there; but they generally put into the Sakalava ports or unfrequented harbours which abound on the Madagascar coast'.[133]

By the late 1880s an estimated 90 per cent of arms and slave dealers on the west coast were British Indians. There is also evidence that by the late 1880s they were involved in the export of slaves from Portuguese East Africa.[134]

It has traditionally been considered that the slave export trade from Mozambique declined sharply following the virtual closure of the Brazilian market in 1850, British pressure in the late 1850s to ban the shipment of *colonos* to the French plantation islands of Réunion and the Comoros, and the intensification of British anti-slave trade patrols in the 1870s.[135] Recent work has demonstrated that the Mozambique slave export trade remained vibrant until the late 1880s, mainly due to the demand for slaves from the Indian Ocean Islands, notably Madagascar to which possibly 12,000 slaves were shipped annually from Mozambique in the 1880s.[136] However, most of these slaves originated from the Shire-Lake Malawi region, and were exported primarily from northern Mozambique entrepts, notably Ibo, Santo Ant"nio and Quizungo, although slaves were also shipped from Quinga, Angoche and Quelimane in the late nineteenth century.[137]

2. Payment and Profit

Payment

The system of payment for slaves illustrates an important aspect of the exchange and credit systems in Madagascar. Until 1820 Mascarene traders paid for their slaves in cash (the Maria Theresa dollar), arms or cloth. From 1820 cloth and arms were by far the most important forms of payment for slaves, although the *Antalaotra* on the north-west coast, whilst importing cotton cloth and slaves in exchange for 'legitimate' staples, insisted on dollars when selling slaves to Mascarene traders.[138] However, arms were by far the most important form of payment for Malagasy slaves on the west coast south of the Manambolo River. For instance, 81 per cent of the price paid for slaves in Toliara in the mid-1880s comprised gunpowder and arms, and approximately $50,000 in arms and $7,000 in cotton piece goods was imported annually into St Augustin Bay to pay for slave exports.[139]

Profit

The chief *Silamo* made huge profits from their trading ventures, it being noted of Mahajanga in 1843 that 'The wealthiest residents are descendants of the Arabs, from Johanna, Zanzibar, and the coast of Africa'.[140] For instance, a certain Mohammed Desharee possessed 'four wives, two hundred slaves, five hundred head of cattle, two plantations near Majunga, and one in Johanna' whilst his house, 'a large bamboo building thatched with palmetto, and whitewashed outside' had its interior walls 'covered with Chinese plates, American looking-glasses, Arabian fans, flags of different nations, Chinese pictures, old copper plates with inscriptions, Egyptian relics and charms, and various other curiosites'.[141]

However, in contrast to the Arabs, many Indian traders active in the region despatched their profits to India. This was particularly characteristic of the Hindu 'Bhattia' or 'Banians' never brought their families with them to East Africa, so worked with the aim of repatriating profits to India to which they intended eventually to return.[142]

F\ Epilogue

In 1873, Frere noted, that British Indian investment in the slave trade not only created an embarrassment to a British government, but the latter's measures to abolish it might lead to the diversion of the trade of the region into foreign hands:

> Our subjects have come to the East African coast and got implicated in this criminal Traffic, because they were our subjects; under no other flag could they have come in such numbers, and so monopolised trade... Under these circumstances, the effect of holding British subjects, who advance goods and money to Arab merchants, guilty of participating in the Slave Trade would be to drive the legitimate trade of the East Coast of Africa exclusively into the hands of Americans, Germans, and others, over whom we have no control. We shall lose the trade and gain nothing'

Frere's fears were unjustified. Unlike the Arabs, the Indians had no lasting interest in the slave trade as such. They were neither agents of the slave traffic nor were they plantation owners in need of cheap servile labour. As capitalists and merchants their interests lay rather in the advance of trade wherever it earned a secure and profitable return. As early as the 1870s they recognised that British anti-slave trade activity, and the internal disruption to the trade caused by warring factions in East Africa and Madagascar, was posing a major threat to their commercial interests. Thus, despite some initial protests, they accepted that the slave trade must end. The British had after 1815 provided the framework of security required for the renaissance of Indian trade in the region, so Indian traders hoped that the onset of colonial rule would likewise restore secure conditions for economic activity. Their position as capitalists was for most of the nineteenth century unassailable in a region devoid of stable banking organisations. Western banks subsequently dominated major fields of investment, but the role of the Indian as local money lender and his dominance over certain trading commodities, notably textiles, was undiminished.[143]

Although the abolition of slavery in Madagascar in 1896 undermined the basis for the slave trade and thereby crippled many *Antalaotra*, Mascarene and Merina traders whose capital was tied up in slaves, the financial and organisational resources of the *Karany* enabled them to make a successful wholesale transition to legitimate commerce. For this they earned the wrath of the Mascarene community which had hoped to reap the benefitsof the French intervention.[144]

G\ Summary

The rise of Indians to commercial predominance in West Madagascar was founded on a strange combination of British protection, the slave trade, and organisational strength. intimate relations with large Bombay-based companies and close cooperation with other Indian traders in the area guaranteed the *Karany* sufficient capital and flexibility to survive trade fluctuations and constantly expand their commercial frontier. This formed a sharp contrast to their Arab, créole and European competitors who, with few exceptions, lacked substantial financial backing.

Moreover, although the abolition of slavery in Madagascar in 1896 undermined the basis for the slave trade and thereby crippled many *Antalaotra*, Mascarene and Merina traders whose capital was tied up in slaves, the financial and organisational resources of the *Karany* enabled them to make a successful wholesale transition to legitimate commerce. For this they earned the wrath of the Mascarene community which had hoped to reap the benefits of the French intervention.[145]

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