

**Spaces Surrounding Freedom:
Enslaved Women's Resistance and Agency on the East Coast of Africa in the 1890s**

A Thesis present by

Madison McEwen

to

the Department of History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree with honors

of Bachelor of Arts

The State University of New York at Buffalo

Buffalo, New York

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Ndubueze Mbah

May, 2018

Table of Contents

I Introduction	2
Sources and Methodology	
II Chapter 1: Recovering and Defining Enslaved Women’s Consciousness: Negotiations on the Plantation Slave System	18
III Chapter 2: Hidden Voices: Enslaved Women at the Time of British Abolition	33
IV Chapter 3: Emancipation and New Forms of Dependency	42
V Conclusion	53
VI Bibliography	55

Introduction

The East Coast of Africa had a long history of trade and commerce dating back to the first millennium CE. It would come to be known as the Swahili Coast due to the development of the Swahili civilization that grew out of the interactions between Arab traders and Africans already living on the coast.¹ Arab and Indian traders relied on the monsoon wind system to travel to the East Coast of Africa and stayed on the coast until the southeast monsoon winds took them back to Persia and the Arabian Peninsula.² Later on in the twelfth century, the Indian Ocean trade routes extended to reach Oman.³ The Omani presence along the coast bolstered trade and solidified a cultural connection between the East African coast and the Islamic world. The Portuguese arrived in the fifteenth century and destroyed much of the city-states and Islamic culture that had developed along the coast.⁴ The Omani drove out the Portuguese at the end of the seventeenth century.⁵ The Omani ended up dominating the cultural sphere of the East African Coast and reinvigorated the Indian Ocean trade routes that the Portuguese had largely weakened.⁶ The Omani sultan, Sayyid Said, ruled Oman from Zanzibar by making the island its capital in 1840. The sultan established clove plantations as the major export crop and Zanzibar became a major player in international trade.⁷ Beginning in the nineteenth century, the slave trade in Zanzibar was the major contributing factor to the island economy, so much so that seventy-five percent of the population was made up of slaves.⁸ The nineteenth century expansion of Swahili slavery and slave trade coincided with the growing British missionary and imperial presence in the region, because of British desire to maintain control over trade in the

¹ Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society*,

² Nurse and Spear, *The Swahili*, 1.

³ Nurse and Spear, 2.

⁴ Nurse and Spear, 3.

⁵ Edward Alpers, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 45.

⁶ Nurse and Spear, 4.

⁷ Alpers, Edward, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*, 49.

⁸ R.W. Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1976), 38.

Indian Ocean. The British presence in the region was solidified through its legal attempts to abolish the region's slavery system. In 1897, the British Parliament abolished slavery in East Africa in response to a growing British moral consciousness against the inhumanity of the slave trade, but to also maintain its lucrative imperial presence through its establishment of an administrative authority.⁹

British abolitionism encouraged the dismantling of the Swahili system of slavery even though enslaved women were consistently challenging the system of slavery in their daily lives before the advent of the movement. British abolitionism was rooted in humanitarianism and imperialism, which unknowingly, but consequently bolstered the power structures of patriarchy, class, and subordination that allowed slavery to exist. British abolitionists' intended impact on the Swahili slavery system was ineffective because the combination of a misinformed humanitarian strategy coupled with an imperialistic agenda did not adequately subvert the system of slavery. Colonial abolition, in many instances, did not account for the internal dynamism of African societal structures, and the 'freedom' that the colonial actors were attempting to provide was in many instances not necessary to enslaved persons, who valued the security of integration into existing kinship and lineage structures over Western conceptions of individual liberty and freedom. Through acts of covert and overt resistance, enslaved women effectively subverted the Swahili slave system to achieve outcomes that positively impacted their own livelihoods.

Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff's *Slavery in Africa* has shown that the Euro-American conception of racialized chattel slavery does not adequately define African kinship slavery, which is rooted in the wealth in people that is characteristic of dependent kinship relationships.¹⁰ The authors argue that the Western perspective defined slaves as a separate class of individuals

⁹ Abdul, Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar* (London: James Currey Ltd, 1987), 201.

¹⁰ Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 3-5.

who were seen as mere property and in a situation in direct opposition to individual freedom. Miers and Kopytoff situate this point of freedom to be the distinguishing factor that needs to be redefined in the case of slavery in Africa.¹¹ Defining slavery according to its innate opposition to freedom ignores much of the characteristics of kinship slavery in Africa including the options available to slaves to buy slaves themselves or instances where slaves choose to remain part of their owner's estate instead of choosing complete autonomy. The use of freedom as a defining characteristic misconstrues the nature of slavery itself, the authors argue, because it leads scholars to define African slavery as more benign compared to American chattel slavery.¹² This idea of benign African slavery stems from Western ideas about freedom applied to the African context and from biased colonial accounts.¹³ Miers and Kopytoff work to sort through the broad examples of slavery on the African continent in an attempt to give a nuanced definition of African slavery.

Miers and Kopytoff emphasize the importance of looking at kinship slavery, lineage wealth and domestic slavery as crucial elements of slavery that get overlooked when the definition of slavery gets defined by the dichotomy of the slave being free or not free. Kinship slavery in Africa was based upon the kinship structures that allowed kin groups, in some instances, to pay a debt by giving up the rights of an individual within one's kin group.¹⁴ These authors continue to define slavery in terms of marginality where it was more critical that African slaves integrate themselves into their new societies to regain a sense of "belonging" within kin structures. This sense of belonging stems from the idea of integrating "outsiders" into kinship structures to bolster the number of dependents for a community to have. This makes the

¹¹ Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, 5.

¹² Miers and Kopytoff, 6.

¹³ Miers and Kopytoff, 6.

¹⁴ Miers and Kopytoff, 9.

separation from kin and the loss of identity that comes with that a major component of African slavery.¹⁵

Paul Lovejoy's work, *Transformations in Slavery* builds on the work of Miers and Kopytoff by emphasizing key characteristics that define African slavery. Lovejoy acknowledges the outsider status that most slaves possessed and expands on this idea by explaining how this outsider status made it easier for slave owners to control their slaves. When slaves were taken captive and brought to a new society they did not share the same language, culture, or religion as their new owner's society, making it more difficult for the slave to navigate unfamiliar circumstances without any support structures.¹⁶ Identity is a central theme in defining what it means to be enslaved. Lovejoy makes it clear how the masters denounced the true identity of a slave in an attempt to maintain control. In addition, slaves cultivated their identity through the relationships they formed with one another in order to create space for semi-autonomous means of social reproduction.¹⁷

Frederick Cooper challenges Miers and Kopytoff's definition of slavery in Africa by situating slavery as a historical process that is constantly shifting and operates on a spectrum. Cooper makes it clear that even though slaves in East Africa were not seen as chattel slaves, as slaves were defined in the American South, slavery on the East Coast of Africa was not benign or nonexistent. The author emphasizes that subordination was ever present but constantly negotiated by slave masters and slaves themselves. This constant negotiation was shaped in part by personal ties of dependence slaves had to their masters but also by the slaves' ability to form individual and community identities, which affirmed their own humanity. Most

¹⁵ Miers and Kopytoff, 14.

¹⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁷ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 5.

crucially the author argues that the status of a slave was ever changing on a spectrum ranging from the following: slaves as kinsmen; slaves as dependents, with productivity and dependent status equally valued; and slaves as laborers. This spectrum argument shows how the status of slaves was constantly being shifted as the plantation system developed and slavery as an institution was constantly being renegotiated as part of the historical process.

Jonathan Glassman's work, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," sets recommendations regarding the recovery of slave consciousness.¹⁸ The understanding of slave experiences in the scholarly literature were determined by the imperialistic viewpoints that the revisionist approaches of Glassman work to overturn in favor of bring slave consciousness to the forefront of scholarly debate. Similarly to how Marcia Wright in *Women and Slavery in Africa* notes that looking at the direct actions of enslaved women gives the best insight into an enslaved woman's experiences¹⁹, Glassman uses assumptions about the enslavement process defined by the imperialistic actors taken as fact and notes the importance of challenging these assumptions that historians have misunderstood to be fact.

Glassman sees the point of enslavement as a critical period of activity that allows autonomy to be examined if the correct lens is used. This lens that Glassman is trying to rework onto the history of slave experiences is one that questions the process of slave incorporation as being absolutely true. Glassman points out that this process of African slave incorporation into kinship slavery was not inevitable even if the scholarly literature deemed it so. The phase of capture and incorporation, typically expressed in scholarly literature, ignored the instances of

¹⁸ Jonathon Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," *The Journal of African History* 32, no. 2 (1991): 283.

¹⁹ Marcia Wright, "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest among Slave Women in Central Africa, 1886-1911," in *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 263.

force used by the perpetrators and the refusal of the enslaved themselves. Force shaped the dynamic of incorporation, but when force used by slaves to resist gets ignored, the enslaved becomes subjugated and denied their rebellious consciousness in historical literature²⁰. This is the process by which slave agency gets erased from history and needs to be recovered.

This recovery of consciousness draws out the spaces enslaved persons created despite attempts by slave owners or capturers to deny them autonomy. Resistance and agency are attempts by enslaved persons to rupture the dominant ideology that was intended to define and subjugate their position.²¹ Alluding to Frederick Cooper's work on *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, Glassman questions the definition that Cooper gives regarding the "unbridgeable boundary" of slavery that the dominant group defined as absolute. Enslaved persons made daily attempts to cross this boundary recognizing the boundary's permeability and to assert their rejection of complacency to the dominant ideologies surrounding enslavement.²² It is in these gaps that enslaved persons are able to operate and where their autonomy is recovered.

The recovery of enslaved women's consciousness is critical because enslaved women's agency within the secondary source material is vastly overlooked. Enslaved women are wrongly assumed to have the same experiences as male slaves. When enslaved women are discussed in these sources, they are valued only for their reproductive capacity. In Sub-Saharan Africa this is not the case—enslaved women were valued based on their production as a worker not on their ability to reproduce.²³ By ignoring the experiences of enslaved women in the scholarly literature the full potential of understanding enslaved people's lives is not realized. Not only did enslaved women have different experiences than male slaves, they occupied

²⁰ Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes," 283-284.

²¹ Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes," 284.

²² Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes," 285-286.

²³ Claude Meillassoux, "Female Slavery" in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 49.

different spaces specifically in the domestic sphere, performed different duties, demonstrated different tactics of resistance and were valued by their owners in distinct ways compared to their male counterparts. Enslaved women were valued because of the various roles they were capable of performing, including their reproductive capabilities, the work they could perform in the home, and as caretakers for the children.²⁴ The value that enslaved women possessed was attributed to their increased visibility and interaction in the domestic sphere that made them have a more personal connection to their owner's family. Joseph Miller notes how enslaved men were easily replaceable while enslaved women were more lucrative based on the wider range of skills they possessed. For these reasons, enslaved women were able to capitalize on their distinct worth to their masters by engaging in instances of resistance that were very different from the ways enslaved men resisted.²⁵

Instead of resistance being defined as a visible rebellion by enslaved men, enslaved women expanded the spectrum of resistance performed by enslaved people to include more subtle forms of resistance. Enslaved women were able to carve out space within the households they worked in or were able to purchase their freedom in ways not available to male slaves. Joseph Miller in *Women and Slavery* includes, "forms of evasion, passive resistance, and manipulation,"²⁶ as components of enslaved women's resistance. These actions and choices were ways enslaved women disengaged with or challenged the ideologies surrounding the economic value placed upon them by their owners. The resistance of these enslaved women stems from their challenge to social norms and their decision to assert their own identity and well

²⁴Joseph C. Miller, "Women as Slaves and Owners of Slaves" in *Women and Slavery: Africa and the Western Indian Ocean Islands*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 17.

²⁵ Miller, "Women as Slaves and Owners of Slaves," 17.

²⁶ Miller, "Women as Slaves and Owners of Slaves," 17-18.

being as paramount in their daily experience. By acknowledging these subtle forms of resistance, the agency and the histories of these enslaved women can be recovered.

Martin Klein and Claire Robertson define the concepts specifically unique to the study of enslaved women. In *Women and Slavery in Africa*, the authors begin their study by attempting to understand why female slaves were more numerous than male slaves within African slavery. In an effort to explore this evidence, the authors begin critiquing the concept of marginality. Other historians have stated that marginality is something enslaved people work to counteract through integration into community and familial structures. Klein and Robertson make a critical point by emphasizing that other historians are ignoring the “lack of opposition between kinship and exploitation that allowed slavery to exist.”²⁷ The authors highlight kinship as a structure that perpetuates slavery because families would sell other family members, often women family members, into slavery to increase the wealth of their kinship groups. Kinship acculturation was a negative influence for the enslaved, in certain instances, because kinship values were some of the contributing factors to the proliferation of slavery itself.²⁸

Martin Klein and Claire Robertson also discuss the important dichotomy that is established in this field of the value of female slaves being rooted in their reproductive capabilities or their production of labor as an economic resource. The literature on this topic is divisive because there was a greater demand for female slaves in Africa than there was in the Americas. Scholars want to define the main factor contributing to this sex ratio imbalance that includes a higher number of female slaves. This imbalance in the sex ratio, that in the Americas, especially in Brazil, favored the male demographic, is either caused by the fact that enslaved women’s reproductive capability hindered sugar labor productivity or because enslaved men

²⁷ Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, “Women’s Importance in African Slave Systems” in *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 7.

²⁸ Robertson and Klein, “Women’s Importance in African Slave Systems,” 7.

were of greater economic value to slave owners. In Africa, however, the reverse was largely the case. Paul Lovejoy, for instance, attributes the higher price of enslaved women in Africa to their reproductive capabilities,²⁹ whereas Claude Meillassoux challenges this assumption by declaring that enslaved women were valuable for their economic production not their “beauty or fertility”.³⁰ Regardless, it is important to note that enslaved women were able to capitalize on their own reproductive capabilities as a source of freedom in some instances as opposed to their reproductive value always being defined by their master.³¹

Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey by Edna Bay further explores how slaves in West Africa were a source of wealth and prestige for the king and for elites. Even for powerful women like the “queen mother” who themselves owned slaves, they were able to use this source of prestige to gain followers or dependents under her protection.³² This author expands on the traditional notion of female slaves being either a source of labor or a source of reproduction and sheds light on how female slaves in Dahomey became more crucial in a social capital context because, “the truest wealth in Dahomey was not in material goods, but in control over dependents and followers: kinspeople, wives, slaves, and pawns.”³³ Edna Bay highlights how female slaves were valuable sources of social capital that negates the common dichotomy between female slaves seen only as a source of reproduction or a source of labor.

Islamic slavery impacted the lives of enslaved women because of how central it was to establishing customs surrounding female enslavement. Islam used religious values to justify the

²⁹ Lovejoy, 6.

³⁰ Meillassoux, 49.

³¹ Robertson and Klein, “Women’s Importance in African Slave Systems,” 7.

³² Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 79.

³³ Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in Kingdom of Dahomey*, 123.

continuation of slavery that had long been established in both the Middle East and Africa. Islamic slavery was a persistent way for African people to be converted to Islam thus expanding its religious influence.³⁴ Furthermore, Paul Lovejoy in *Transformations in Slavery* emphasizes the demand Islamic slavery placed on acquiring women and children. The fact that this demand was skewed towards women and children highlighted the need for domestic servants within Islamic culture. Notably, Islamic law defined the extent of emancipation for enslaved women who were domestic slaves or concubines. Often, domestic slaves or concubines gained their freedom if they bore the child of their master.³⁵ Islam worked as an underlying force that impacted the demand for enslaved women and the influenced the outcomes of their livelihoods. These historians set the foundations for understanding how enslaved women negotiated their labor production, their dependencies, and how they navigated the intersecting institutions of patriarchy, religion, class and slavery over time.

Sources and Methodology

This research uses documents from Henry Stanley Newman's ethnographic report entitled *Banani: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Zanzibar and Pemba*. He was a Quaker minister who used this ethnographic account to record what he saw on a plantation in Zanzibar to advocate for the abolition of slavery. Henry Stanley Newman gives insight into the major actors involved in the plantation system in Zanzibar and their positive or negative impacts on the British abolitionist mission. Furthermore, this report highlights instances of the daily lives of enslaved persons during the period of transition towards emancipation. In addition I turn towards the following sources to illuminate daily practices of enslaved women and explore

³⁴ Lovejoy, 15.

³⁵ Lovejoy, 16.

precisely how enslaved women navigated their circumstances: Richard Burton's *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*; Harold Arthur Fraser's *The East African Slave Trade, and the Measures Proposed for its extinction: as viewed by the residents in Zanzibar*; Robert Nunez Lyne's *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times: A Short History of the Southern East in the Nineteenth Century*; and Donald Mackenzie's *A report on slavery and the slave trade in Zanzibar, Pemba, and the mainland of the British protectorates of East Africa*. These ethnographic accounts will be mined for cultural data that exposes how this colonial actor interpreted the experiences of enslaved women, but also sheds light on the agency of enslaved women through an "against the grain" reading of the sources.

To provide contrast to the colonial sources, I turn towards Emily Reute's *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess: An Autobiography* and Lyndon Harries' *Swahili Prose Texts: A Selection from the Material Collected by Carl Velten from 1893 to 1896*. Emily Reute's account provides insight into the daily rituals of an elite Arabian princess whose family owns hundreds of slaves on the clove plantations of Zanzibar. Reute's account further explores the similarities and differences between free and enslaved women. Lyndon Harries' *Swahili Prose Texts* is a crucial source that is void of European imperial influence because it characterizes the daily life of Swahili peoples through oral accounts. These sources provide important insight and context of enslaved people that the colonial sources often misrepresent either purposefully or through false assumptions. Attempts to reach the most direct actions or words of enslaved people or the culture surrounding them provide the most fruitful insight into their daily life practices.

In addition, I use the British Anti-Slavery Society's *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, an abolitionist publication, to help me construct the dynamics that influenced the British abolitionist message leading up to the abolition of slavery along the East African Coast and Zanzibar. These

documents contain the perspectives of British abolitionists, the British colonial administration, and to a lesser extent enslaved women themselves.

The reports from the British Anti-Slavery Society published in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* offer insight into the political, legal, and social process of abolishing slavery and the slave trade on the East African Coast. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* advocated for abolition by giving examples of the inhumane treatment of slaves and by tracking the progress of abolition under all of Britain's international territories. Most critically to my research, these reports highlight enslaved women as a crucial factor in promoting the abolition of slavery and the slave trade.

This type of analytical framework of reading "against the grain" is necessary because these sources have inherent biases and limitations. For instance, the authors of these reports are attempting to cater their abolitionist message to a specific audience who were largely members of the British parliament and wealthy elites who benefited from the slave trade. The authors of these primary sources emphasized their humanitarian stance behind abolition; however, a central motive of ending slavery was an imperialistic one. The British wanted to secure trading on the East Coast of Africa and were able to insert their presence as abolitionists to achieve this goal.

Furthermore, these sources have contradictions within the sources themselves. By following the assumptions in Henry Stanley Newman's ethnographic account, it is evident that there are contradictions that make his account lack authority and legitimacy. The assumptions Newman makes about enslaved people before visiting Zanzibar and Pemba are contradicted within his own text once he encounters enslaved people and observes their experiences. These contradictions show how the common assumptions by British travelers to the region regarding

enslaved people's lack of intelligence, laziness, or primitivism were socially constructed by Western imperialistic societies.³⁶

Furthermore, the authors of these reports were largely Christian. Christian missionaries were coming to the region to record what they saw in order to receive funding for missionary work. In order for missionary funding to be sustained there needed to be a progression portrayed of the 'oppressed' being 'saved' over time through their conversion to Christianity. Throughout Newman's report the idea of a 'civilizing mission' was prevalent. Consequently, enslaved person's freedom was contingent on their ability to become civilized members of British society.³⁷ Under these circumstances, enslaved women were used as an example to the British public that exemplified the importance of having a British and Christian presence in order for these women, victimized within an "Islamic" slavery system, to be protected under the British Crown.

Additionally, the idea of freedom meant different things for an enslaved person compared to a British abolitionist writing a report. Manumission is not the only way enslaved people tried to achieve freedom in their lives. Forming family ties along with seeking "accommodations, strategic alliances, and running away,"³⁸ are all examples of this push towards freedom that were overlooked by these colonial authors who saw freedom papers as the only way to be 'free'.

Not to mention the bias inherent in secondary sources that readily assume that an enslaved person is male and enslaved women are overlooked as having the same experiences as male slaves. In addition, when enslaved women are discussed separately in these sources they are valued only for their reproductive capacity. In Sub-Saharan Africa this is not the case—enslaved

³⁶ Henry Stanley Newman, *Banani: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Zanzibar and Pemba* (London: Headley Brothers, 1898), 34, 37-38.

³⁷ Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2017), 20.

³⁸ Wright, "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest," 263.

women were valued based on their production as a worker not on their ability to reproduce.³⁹ This is true for several reasons including low birth rate, abortion, and infanticide.

These limitations stem from “reading African worlds through Western eyes.”⁴⁰ First and foremost this misconstrues the truth in history. This happens, for instance, if we were to take how a colonialist defines a term in their writing and accept it at face value. It is probable that they are minimizing the value of a situation because of bias or stereotypes or it is probable that they could expand on something disingenuously because it’s important for their funders. These instances lead to a history that is colonized. All these factors make it difficult to retrieve the voices and consciousness of enslaved women. However, these biases can be worked through by using an ‘against the grain’ reading of these documents that is informed by secondary source readings from other historians doing similar work in the field. For example, I have used Martin Klein and Claire Robertson’s *Women and Slavery in Africa* for examples of how to expose the consciousness of enslaved women from limited source material. Their example comes from Central Africa and they achieve this by searching within the sources for the most direct actions and words that come from enslaved women themselves. In addition I look at historians who study Atlantic Slavery. I use Sasha Turner’s *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* to help inform why abolitionists were focusing on enslaved female bodies in the primary source material. Likewise, I turn towards Emily Burrill’s work entitled, “‘Wives of Circumstance’: Gender and Slave Emancipation in Late Nineteenth-century Senegal,” that used colonial archival sources that convey the choices available to an enslaved woman regarding her emancipation. I attempt to look at how women are viewed within the context of colonial

³⁹ Meillassoux, 49.

⁴⁰ Andrea, Cornwall, *Readings in Gender in Africa* (Oxford; Bloomington;: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.

documents and how their choices, actions, or daily life practices will offer new interpretations of enslaved women on the East Coast of Africa.

My first chapter highlights the social customs of dependency and paternalism that shaped the basis and the continuation of plantation slavery on the East Coast of Africa. I use the analytical framework of reading against the grain to gain insight into the covert and overt ways enslaved women resisted the systems of authority in the region. Enslaved women were in a constant state of negotiation with their slave owners with the intent to carve out spaces where they could foster relationships and autonomy.

My second chapter examines the definitions of slavery on the East Coast of Africa in an attempt to distinguish between the lives of free and enslaved women. Through the themes of marriage, labor practices, motherhood, and daily rituals enslaved women's experiences are brought to light in contrast with the lives of free women. With an against the grain reading of the primary source documents, the choices available to enslaved women involving complications or regarding their freedom become more fully realized.

My third chapter analyses how enslaved women adapted their resistance strategies after emancipation to better fit their shifting needs. In addition, I highlight how domestic slavery remained an area of slavery where women were enslaved even after emancipation. Furthermore, the shifts in dependency relationships after emancipation reflected how the residues of slavery impacted enslaved and free women.

In conclusion, I emphasize the importance of shedding light on enslaved women's voices because their voices have largely been silenced due to the oppressive structures of patriarchy, imperialism, and misguided applications of American chattel slavery on African kinship slavery.

Peeling back the layers of misinterpretation of enslaved women's experiences is important work to create an authentic history of these women's lives.

Chapter 1: Recovering and Defining Enslaved Women's Consciousness: Negotiations on the Plantation Slave System

“Then I knew I had been sold again. I refused to enter the house,
but my refusals were met by force.”⁴¹

~Bwanikwa, enslaved woman Central Africa
(born early 1870s – died late 1920s)

Enslaved women navigated the complex structures of paternalism and dependency on the East African Coast through their negotiations with their slave owners that challenged their oppressive authority in attempts to mitigate the cruel and demanding aspects of slavery. The cosmopolitanism of the East African Coast, which reflected the dynamic encounters that created the Swahili civilization, developed through the growing capitalist interests in the region during the nineteenth century. The growing commercial relationships, Arabic and Swahili language systems, and the connection to international trade forged a new culture on the East African coast. The interactions between the peoples of the African interior and the traders in and around the Indian Ocean positioned the city-states along the coast and the island of Zanzibar as mediators in an increasingly interconnected and globalized economy.⁴²

The East African Coast transformed its subsistence-based economy to a merchant capitalist economy around the time of the Omani intervention at the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁴³ This transformation was solidified when abolition of the slave trade required the Omani class to find a new source of profit. The Omani turned towards the development of a plantation system that capitalized on their large landowning status. The major crops produced

⁴¹ Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (London; New York;: L. Barber Press, 1993), 164.

⁴² Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*, 1.; Definition of cosmopolitanism found in Ira Berlin, “Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African- American Society in Mainland North America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1996): 251-288.

⁴³ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*, 1.

shifted from food staples to sugar and cloves in order to accumulate new profits.⁴⁴ Instead of the export of slaves from East Africa, the trade shifted inward into the use of slaves as the source of production for the cash crops.⁴⁵

The ties to the interior and the established trade routes in the Indian Ocean provided adequate capital and markets for the growing presence of the East African coast in the international economy. Arab traders that used to be slavers began investing in land for production of the valuable clove crop. This capitalistic shift transformed the social culture of production on the East African coast by creating monetary relationships that reflected the purpose of acquiring capital instead of the previously established community based relationships.⁴⁶ This transformation on the East African Coast happened at a time when international global capitalism was on the rise. The growth of the international capitalistic system encouraged the economy on the East African Coast to move away from the merchant system centered on slavery and a ruling Omani elite.⁴⁷ The early-commercialized economy on the East African Coast was not able to withstand the pressures of a globalized system of trade. Britain's position as a globalized power transformed the East African coastal economy and integrated it within the global industrial world.⁴⁸

The institution of plantation slavery on the East Coast of Africa developed as a result of the growth of trade and the continuation of African kinship structures that defined social relationships between slave owners and enslaved persons well into the nineteenth century. African kinship structures were based on the importance of wealth and protection through people, where integration into a kinship groups offered security as well as power for individuals.

⁴⁴ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*, 55.

⁴⁵ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*, 3.

⁴⁶ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*, 1-4.

⁴⁷ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*, 78.

⁴⁸ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*, 110.

Individuals developed dependency towards the kinship structures that supplied social, cultural, and economic means of survival. When sources of systemized labor needed to be installed as a result of high demand from trade markets overseas, dependency and the separation of enslaved persons from kinship structures were exploited more intensely. This economic intensification of labor and the social norms of paternalism led to the development of the plantation system on the islands of the East African Coast in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Dependency was a key factor that generated kinship slavery as a prominent source of subordination before the nineteenth century. Subordination was instituted once a captured person was separated from their kinship structures and sold into slavery.⁵⁰ Often there was much deception in the enslavement of someone to settle a kinship debt. In one instance on the East Africa Coast, a boy first acted as a servant to a high-ranking member in society. In order to settle a debt, the high-ranking member traveled with the boy for two hundred miles under the false assumption of providing a service. The high-ranking member then handed the boy over to the family they were traveling to and at that moment the boy became a slave.⁵¹ The separation from kin structures carried out through long distance travel characterizes how kinship slavery operates. Without kinship structures to provide protection, security and community ties, an individual became vulnerable to alienation and enslavement.

More than any other category of slaves, enslaved women's experiences reveals the complexities of kinship slavery. Enslaved women went through the process of enslavement over and over again. Enslavement did not usually happen once. Oftentimes women were sold multiple times and for various purposes.⁵² Bwanikwa, an enslaved woman in Central Africa who

⁴⁹ Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (London, UK: Pearson Education, 1977), 4, 6.

⁵⁰ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, 162.

⁵¹ Zoë Marsh, *East Africa through Contemporary Records*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), 37-38.

⁵² Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women*, 156.

lived from the early 1870s and died in the late 1920s, was first taken as concubine, sold ten times over the course of multiple years. During this period, Bwanikwa attempted to escape and carved out various ways of protection for herself through efforts to integrate herself into communities.⁵³

Kidnapping, taking prisoners of war or the allusion of paid work entered women into enslavement, often under false pretenses. Once enslaved women were physically taken from their supportive kinship lineages, the possibility of return was difficult because the enslaved woman was an outsider in an unfamiliar place. The emphasis integration into the new society or kinship structure was purposeful because without protection or support from kin, gaining one's freedom was unlikely.

Enslaved women performed various forms of labor on the plantations on the East African coast. As field workers, they cultivated the delicate clove crop that dominated the economy of the island of Zanzibar.⁵⁴ Intensive labor was required for the clove crop at the time of its harvest. The harvest season was critical because the clove plant needed to be picked at optimal ripeness and could easily be destroyed if not handled carefully.⁵⁵ This labor was done all by hand and required a great amount of trust and supervision by the slave owners.⁵⁶ Supervision was composed of three tiers where an Arab on a large plantation or a freed slave on smaller plantations overlooked the entire plantation and had trusted slaves who monitored the lower levels of labor production. Slave owners were more present at the time of the harvest because slave owners wanted to make sure their slaves were not ruining their lucrative crop.

⁵³ Wright, 156.

⁵⁴ Mervyn W. H. Beech, "Slavery on the East Coast of Africa," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 15, no. 58 (1916): 147.

⁵⁵ Emily Reute, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess: An Autobiography* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 92; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 156.

⁵⁶ Reute, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*, 93.

Trust and dependency between the slave owner and the enslaved person were critical to harvesting. The labor on the plantation was difficult work, but was categorized as less intense by Western travelers to the region. This was largely due to the notion of dependency that made it seem like slaves had an independent life supported by their masters. However, slave owners used dependency to ensure the clove crop prospered at the hands of the enslaved workers while in return, the enslaved workers capitalized on the security of being a dependent by being able to carve out a stable life.⁵⁷ Dependency reflected the cultural importance of kinship structures that relied on a community of people to provide security and basic needs. The slave owners cultivated the slaves' attachment to the plantation by allowing them personal autonomy in the form of plots of land and days off.⁵⁸ In return, slaves were able to engage with their own individual choices by selling and cultivating their own crops.⁵⁹ The interdependent relationship between the master and slave was negotiable and while it favored the dominating power the master had over the enslaved person, slaves were still able to advance their rights and privileges.⁶⁰

In addition, enslaved women worked as domestic servants, concubines, or as a hired worker in a skilled job such as fishing or trading.⁶¹ Free women performed much of the various forms of domestic labor in the region. A male slave was conceived as, "a male forced to do the labor that women would otherwise do."⁶² The invisibility of enslaved women's work in primary source documents reflected a bias in the classification of what was deemed 'enslaved work'. Domestic slavery was not written about by observers as equal to that of male plantation slavery

⁵⁷ Beech, "Slavery on the East Coast of Africa," 145; Cooper, 162.

⁵⁸ Newman, *Banani: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Zanzibar and Pemba*, 36; Cooper, 162.

⁵⁹ Beech, 147.

⁶⁰ Cooper, 200.

⁶¹ Beech, 148.

⁶² Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women*, 155.

because of the assumptions within East African society that women's work was not as difficult or as inhibiting towards women.⁶³ Domestic slavery was seen as more benign and thus, in some cases, indistinguishable from the work of a freed woman.⁶⁴

In the spring of 1897, Henry Stanley Newman traveled to British East Africa and documented his time on the coast, especially on the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. His report documented the system of slavery at a critical point in the British effort towards abolition.⁶⁵ The intention of his trip was to highlight the evils of slavery in an attempt to bolster the British abolitionist message that used instances of inhumanity as a justification for British presence in the region. His commentary on the slave system of the East Africa Coast functions as an amalgamation of British imperialistic, economic, moralistic, and religious interests that shaped the ways the author informs this report. Most critically, this work offers glimpses into the consciousness of enslaved women through the cultural descriptions he presented. As an illustration, Newman told the story of a particular enslaved woman who worked within the legal system to gain her freedom papers. He wrote:

A woman came into the Court shortly before our arrival and accused a man of having unjustly enslaved her. Evidence was produced and the Woman was liberated. The man was fined forty rupees for his crime, and twenty rupees were handed to the woman as compensation for the wrong that she had suffered. She was asked shortly afterwards what she was going to do with the twenty rupees. She at once answered, "I shall buy a slave with it." This was of course illegal, but in Africa illegal things are done with impunity.⁶⁶

This passage offers insight into the consciousness of the enslaved woman from several avenues.

First, this is an account of an enslaved woman whose spoken words exemplified a critical choice

⁶³ Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women*, 155.

⁶⁴ Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women*, 151.

⁶⁵ Newman, *Banani*, v.

⁶⁶ Newman, 37.

she made. Direct actions get at the center of enslaved women's consciousness.⁶⁷ The author includes her direct words, which are striking, but also hints at the words not explicitly included. This enslaved woman accused a man of false enslavement. In other areas of this text there are passages that express how male slaves were kidnapped under false pretenses, paid for their labor for a short amount of time and then sold into slavery. This injustice was common from this report and there were other instances of conflict that arose due to the resistance from the enslaved person being captured. The conflict involved in these instances is largely silenced in the source material due to the colonial actor's limited knowledge and observance of the slave system.

Second, this passage reveals that this enslaved woman made a choice to enter her case into the legal system. This is a critical choice and from the primary source material, it is obvious that this woman feared re-enslavement and was able to obtain freedom papers through the legal system. The legal system was one of the many avenues that elite slave owners used to maintain their hegemony of power within the slave system. When enslaved people challenged the social norms of the hegemonic power they were undermining its legitimacy. While this enslaved woman did not overturn the legal system on the East African Coast, she did use the system to her advantage as opposed to letting the legal system dictate her livelihood. This example exemplifies that enslaved women engaged with the hegemonic systems in order to capitalize on them for their own individual advantage or to deny their intended importance.⁶⁸

Lastly and most crucially, this passage offers an example of an enslaved woman using her own money to purchase a slave as the first action she takes after she is no longer enslaved. This choice immediately asserts the newly freed status of this enslaved woman. Instances of

⁶⁷ Wright, "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest," 246.

⁶⁸ Cooper, 155.

former enslaved women owning slaves are exemplified across the Atlantic with the intent to show one's free status through the ownership of another. In fact, to assert a higher standing in society, an enslaved person had more incentive to purchase another slave instead of purchasing his or her own freedom.⁶⁹ However, individual freedom was not coveted on the East African Coast because forming a network of dependents provided more opportunities for leisure and showed one's own distance from slavery.

Within East African coastal society, the social customs surrounding kinship and dependency established obligations that providers and dependents had for one another. A slave master would provide protection for their slave, while an enslaved person would provide labor to their master. A slave owner was not only able to provide for themselves through the slave's labor production, but the slave owner was able to expand their own leisure time and better fulfill obligations to other family members or dependents. The expansion of free time that came with employing others to perform one's labor was a characteristic guarded by the Swahili elite who wanted to maintain leisure as a privilege.⁷⁰ Ultimately, when this enslaved woman purchased another slave, she was pushing the boundaries of the social class privileges that were safeguarded by Swahili landed elite with the intent of accessing her own version of freedom.

The slave owners on the plantations in Zanzibar and Pemba worked to keep strict control over not only enslaved person's labor practices, but over the ideologies like paternalism that allowed the slave system to remain effective. Slave owners worked to assert their system of power through coercion, violence, and the establishment of legal and social norms.⁷¹ Coercion through the implementation of violence helped slave owners maintain social order, but reflected

⁶⁹ Harold Arthur Fraser, *The East African Slave Trade, and the Measures Proposed for its Extinction: As Viewed by the Residents in Zanzibar* (London: Harrison, 1871), 47.

⁷⁰ Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Oxford;Athens;: Ohio University Press, 2001), 6.

⁷¹ Cooper, 154-155.

a deeply rooted fear of rebellion or retaliation by their labor force. While violence and coercion helped maintain perceived stability, structures of power such as paternalism established a hierarchical system of social customs within society that encouraged ideas of superiority and inferiority to flourish.

Paternalism was an aspect of East African Coastal society that was foundational to the plantation system. Paternalism was rooted in the centrality of dependency that was established through kinship structures that ensured security for dependents and prestige for patrons. The hierarchy that developed on the plantation system was based on the solidification of the dependent relationships upheld between slave master and slave.⁷² Masters gained authority when they established their superiority and maintained their obligations to their dependent slaves. There was a dialectical relationship between master and slave where each actor had obligations to the other, while at the same time both attempted to push the boundaries of these obligations to benefit his or her own circumstance.⁷³

Islam was central to East African coastal society and bolstered paternalistic structures through the conversion of slaves. Islam was a major cultural and religious characteristic of the Swahili civilization since the region first began trading with Oman and the Arabian Peninsula. Islam was wholly integrated into much of the society with accounts of the region highlighting prayer taking place five times a day throughout the city of Zanzibar. The Muslim Sabbath was one of the two days that, if slaves had days off, were allowed to cultivate their own crops and observe the day of rest.⁷⁴ There were many instances of Islamic conversion of enslaved people on the coast⁷⁵ that further solidified the equilibrium that needed to be obtained between masters

⁷² Cooper, 156.

⁷³ Cooper, 155.

⁷⁴ Cooper, 159.

⁷⁵ Newman, 59.

and their dependent slaves. Masters used Islamic conversion to establish superiority of religious culture over their slaves and if slaves accepted Islam they used it to further enrich their own personal lives.⁷⁶ While slave owners used the religion of Islam to assert the dominant religion on the coast, slave owners did not allow slaves to wear Islamic head coverings that defined the social status of slave masters.⁷⁷ This distinction emphasizes how slave owners worked to maintain their superiority over enslaved people, not just through controlling the dominant ideologies, but also through controlling the expressions of identity on the coast.

Islamic law had major impacts on slavery in the region including how slave owners were allowed to treat their slaves and how slaves were able to achieve freedom. Although not all Muslim slave owners followed strict Islamic teachings, Islam did set rules that encouraged slave masters to continue to care for slaves who weren't able to be a source of labor production due to illness or old age.⁷⁸ However, there are accounts of slave owners punishing slaves who were no longer of benefit to them and who they were unable to sell for a profit.⁷⁹ This emphasizes how obligations to dependent relationships could only go so far in a developing capitalistic economy.

Paternalism was later upheld through the British imperial system that justified their entry into the region of the East African Coast. Paternalism on the East African Coast was exemplified through British missionary writings that asserted how the superior race and religion of the British needed to 'save' and protect the enslaved people of the East African Coast.⁸⁰ Furthermore, paternalism was rooted in the assumption that African slaves were content with their inferior

⁷⁶ Elisabeth McMahon, *Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa: From Honor to Respectability* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14.

⁷⁷ Fair, *Pastimes and Politics*, 68.

⁷⁸ Reute, 225.

⁷⁹ Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women*, 50.

⁸⁰ Newman, 11.

position and that they could not be productive citizen without their masters.⁸¹ This assumption by British missionaries was furthered because British missionaries, for the most part, saw slavery on the East Coast as a benign form of slavery and commented on how the slave owners treated their slaves well. This was due in large part because the missionaries were not familiar with the entire system of slavery and how society functioned on the East African Coast.

Paternalism acted as both a system that provided security, but was maintained through violence.⁸² Obedience was a central facet that slave owners wanted to maintain and was achieved through an understanding by the slave that they would be cared for if they were injured or became sick.⁸³ There were incentives for both slave owners and slaves to perform their obligations each other. However, enslaved persons challenged their obligations of behavior by, “[staging] slowdowns, [damaging] property, [withholding] the respect the master desired...or attempts to escape or rebel”.⁸⁴ The slave owners needed to mitigate slave disobedience through a combination of providing incentivized benefits and instilling fear through punishment. The system of slavery needed daily assertions of its stability by the planter class because it was, in fact, fragile due to enslaved people’s challenges to the slave system in their daily lives.

A particular threat to paternalism rested in the experience of runaway slaves. Runaway slaves asserted that their masters did not cater to their best interests. This choice was crucial for some enslaved people, but accommodation through dependency acted as another marker of agency. Enslaved people negotiated their autonomy differently depending on their circumstance.⁸⁵ Slaves negotiated paternalistic norms when they ran away, defined a better life

⁸¹ Newman, 31.

⁸² Cooper, 200.

⁸³ Fraser, *The East African Slave Trade*, 43.

⁸⁴ Cooper, 155.

⁸⁵ Cooper, 202.

for themselves separate from that of their master's definition, and by engaging in modes of resistance that ranged from slowing production to revolt.⁸⁶

Islam was a central force that ensured slave owners maintained paternalistic power over their dependent slaves. Enslaved women challenged Islam as the dominant religion on the coast by engaging in spirit possession religious communities. Enslaved women asserted their needs through spirit possession religious communities by reversing the authority structures within their marriage and gaining access to healthcare and monetary support.⁸⁷ Enslaved women resisted their master's superiority and carved out space for their own religious inclusion when Islam did not fully accommodate their needs.⁸⁸ Emily Reute comments on women as religious actors stating, "superstition rules supreme. In cases of sickness, of betrothal, of pregnancy, on all possible occasions the help of female prophets is called in—they are required to know and to tell if the disease can be cured."⁸⁹ This shows the several ways spirit possession religious communities accommodated enslaved women in ways that Islam could not. These communities provided health care, marriage support, and maternal care for women, enslaved and free, who were not receiving adequate assistance from Islamic and patriarchal institutions.

Enslaved women were able to negotiate their positions on the plantations of Zanzibar and Pemba through various avenues. Slave rebellion constituted overt resistance that slave owners feared would compromise their obedient workforce. However, covert resistance through the singing of work songs offered day-to-day avenues for slaves to define their oppression and confront the authority structures on the plantation. Through the analysis of covert resistance, enslaved people's consciousness, humanity, and their visions of a better life capture glimpses of

⁸⁶ Cooper, 200.

⁸⁷ Margaret Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890-1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 80.

⁸⁸ Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa*, 99.

⁸⁹ Reute, 102.

their enslaved experience. While in Pemba, Henry Stanley Newman recounted the Swahili song a group of enslaved women were singing while they carried baskets and labored. Newman writes:

“The girls with their baskets of earth were singing a Swahili song gaily as they passed to and fro...It was a chorus respecting [a man], of Pemba, who in March 1896, was convicted of cruelty to a slave sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment. The chorus ran after this fashion:

‘We used to cry for mercy,
But for us there was no mercy;
Now he that had no mercy on us
Is shut up in the European’s Stone house in Zanzibar.’”

These girls were still slaves, but the masters had learned that they could not abuse them with impunity, and the girls themselves were lifting up their heads, as though conscious that the day of their redemption was drawing nigh.”⁹⁰

Enslaved women cultivated their ability to create music and express their viewpoints on the plantations through their singing of work songs. As Fredrick Cooper states, the act of creating culture asserts that enslaved women were agents of East African society who did not agree with their inferior status.⁹¹ The phrasing of this work song sung by enslaved women creates a powerful criticism of the slave system centered on the theme of mercy. The first line builds a scene where enslaved women were crying for mercy at the behest of their masters who were able to punish their slaves without regulation, likely for small acts of disobedience.⁹² The second line expands on this reality and negates any assumptions that slavery on the East Coast of Africa was benign. The second line preserves enslaved women’s experiences and declares the arbitrary nature of their enslavement. When someone begs for mercy, it is expected that the punisher will have a sense of humanity to grant that person forgiveness for his or her wrongdoings. These enslaved women are asserting in this work song that the morality of their slave owners in regards

⁹⁰ Newman, 34, 37-38.

⁹¹ Cooper, 202.

⁹² Donald Mackenzie, *A report on Slavery and the Slave Trade in Zanzibar, Pemba, and the Mainland of the British Protectorates of East Africa* (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1895), 4, 8.

to their harsh enslavement is nonexistent.⁹³ The song ends by supplying evidence that the slave owners who provide no mercy to slaves are forced to face the consequences of their inhumanity and are legally punished by being put into prison.

Secondly, this work song was sung in Swahili, which highlights how these enslaved women were integrated into Swahili society through their knowledge of the common language. The enslaved women could have purposefully chosen to sing in Swahili to send a direct message to slave owners who were particularly cruel, if the slave owners knew Swahili. In this case, the work song acted as a form of protest on behalf of the enslaved women.⁹⁴ If the slave owners did not understand Swahili or did not see the value in listening to the enslaved women's songs, then work songs acted as a space where the enslaved were able to cultivate what Sterling Stuckey calls their 'dreams of escape' or enter into spaces of leisure right under the supervision of their masters. These spaces of leisure were important for enslaved women because they provided greater freedom to make individual decisions and spend time cultivating relationships that were all characteristics that freed people held.

In addition, we gain insight into how singing was a way to build community with the other enslaved women working on the plantation.⁹⁵ Henry Stanley Newman describes the work of enslaved men who also sung work songs in "repetition" and "with heavy loads" while they labored.⁹⁶ This highlights that men used work songs, in this one instance, differently than enslaved women. Enslaved men used work songs to make their work easier and safer through the use of rhythmic song.⁹⁷ Slave work songs contributed to community building and effective

⁹³ Sterling Stuckey, "Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery," *The Massachusetts Review* 9, no. 3 (1968): 432.

⁹⁴ Stuckey, "Through the Prism of Folklore," 426.

⁹⁵ Stuckey, 433.

⁹⁶ Newman, 36.

⁹⁷ Stuckey, 424.

labor practices on the plantations of Zanzibar and Pemba, while accommodating the needs of enslaved people.

Enslaved women used various forms of negotiation and resistance to challenge the oppressive structures of the slavery system on the East Coast of Africa. Through these glimpses of enslaved women's resistance their consciousness can be recovered through their covert and overt modes of resistance. When enslaved women undermined the weakness within the slave system, they were asserting their agency and negating the assumptions that they were inferior subjects within the hierarchical social system.

Chapter 2: Hidden Voices: Enslaved Women at the Time of British Abolition

“The wife performs all kinds of friendly services for her husband... But all these services are voluntary, and by no means the duties of bondage.”⁹⁸

~Emily Reute, Arabian Princess

Enslaved women worked to create their identities and assert their own decisions despite competing actors such as British abolitionists, Omani slave owners, and freed women who attempted to define enslaved woman as inferior. The terms used to describe different types of slavery in different contexts throughout the abolition period of the East African Coast are critical to analyze in order to understand the full extent of slavery on the coast. The laws instituted by the British government asserted that the slave trade was illegal in 1873 and that slavery was abolished in 1897 on the coast. The definitions imposed by the British, governed how the colonial legal system attempted to impact the lives of slaves and formally enslaved people who were seeking legal action for issues regarding their free or slave status. These laws that had specific definitions of what constituted slavery were not fully effective in preventing the slave trade and slavery.⁹⁹ After the slave trade was deemed illegal, trade in slaves still took place, except it became smaller and more locally driven. This allowed traders to still profit from the trade in slaves without getting caught because the trade was smaller, more contained, and less likely to suffer consequences from British officials.¹⁰⁰

Enslaved women were even more critical in regards to the legalities of abolition because as Benjamin Lawrance asserts in *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake*, the British government and slave owners did not want enslaved women to be afforded emancipation or the same rights as

⁹⁸ Reute, 154.

⁹⁹ Benjamin N. Lawrance, et al., *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 32.

¹⁰⁰ Lawrance, *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake*, 35.

male slaves.¹⁰¹ This was largely the case because the British officials did not want to experience conflict with the Arab slave owners who had their own customs surrounding female domestic slavery. Because of this, new forms of slavery were disguised under different names to allow the lucrative trade and sale to continue without much impunity. As a result, enslaved women were increasingly vulnerable to wrongful enslavement. In response to this, enslaved women were able to create new ways to negotiate their freedom by using the definitions provided by the British to their advantage in legal disputes.¹⁰²

Marcia Wright asserts that there was minimal distinction between the rights of enslaved women and that of free women because both of their labor practices were similar. This made it natural for the slave to be assumed male because an enslaved man's labor was more visibly coerced.¹⁰³ This visibility of coerced labor was a characteristic of male enslavement while involuntary movement and access to work defined critical aspects of female enslavement on the East African Coast. The delineations between free labor and slave labor that freed women set, in part to assert their own freed status, determined the boundaries of slavery on the East African Coast. As Emily Reute states in her own autobiography, it was important for freed women to separate their work from the work of enslaved women.¹⁰⁴

The rights of free women are exemplified in their autonomy, decision-making, and positions of power. These various assertions of rights separate free women from enslaved women. However, enslaved women were also able to have their own autonomy and made their own decisions to a lesser extent than what was afforded to free women. Emily Reute in *Arabian Princess* highlights how free Muslim women, of higher status, were consulted to make important

¹⁰¹ Lawrance, 33.

¹⁰² Lawrance, 42.

¹⁰³ Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women*, 154.

¹⁰⁴ Reute, 154.

decisions within their households. Muslim women were selected to run the household where they made the decisions necessary to maintain the daily functions of the house and were held accountable for any problems that arose under their authority.¹⁰⁵ The rights of free women can exemplify the avenues and rights available to women in the region, while also defining the limitations placed on enslaved women because of their slave status.

Secondly, free Muslim women asserted their autonomy in marriage in several ways. Some free women did not want their husband to have another wife or take another wife after they got married. In these instances, these women created a mandated clause in the marriage agreement that prevented the husband from taking any other wives.¹⁰⁶ Free women negotiated their treatment in their marriage and would threaten to leave if their husband was not upholding his duties within the family structure.¹⁰⁷ In some instances women needed a husband or male family member present to make decisions, but in other cases women carried out transactions, and handled money and land issues with their own discretion.¹⁰⁸ Margaret Strobel in *Muslim Women in Mombasa* explores how free Muslim women deviated from expectations to perform household and monetary duties when it best fit their needs.¹⁰⁹ Upper class, free Muslim women were able to determine the extent of their authority and achieve autonomy outside of the relationship with their husbands.¹¹⁰

Most distinctively, the social statuses of enslaved and free women were determined by the type of dress they wore. Following in line with Fredrick Cooper's "creation of culture" and Sterling Stuckey's argument involving slave's resistance through their forms of expression, the

¹⁰⁵ Reute, 118-119.

¹⁰⁶ Reute, 151.

¹⁰⁷ Reute, 154.

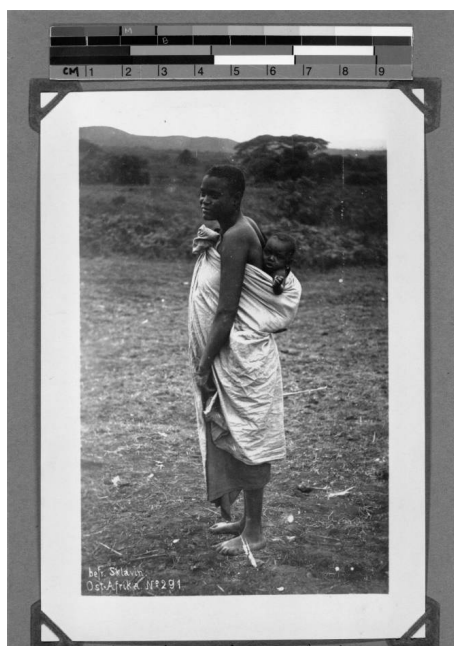
¹⁰⁸ Reute, 155.

¹⁰⁹ Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa*, 86.

¹¹⁰ Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa*, 92.

types of dress that enslaved and free women were accustomed to wearing defined their own “expressive culture”.¹¹¹ Their expressive culture was rooted in how both groups of women performed their social status and class membership. As Laura Fair discusses in *Pastimes & Politics*, enslaved women were prohibited to cover their heads and veil like elite women. In addition, they were not allowed to wear shoes and were only afforded the cheapest white cloth from America, the merikani, to wear.¹¹² An enslaved woman with her child is seen wearing this cloth below.

Figure 1 “Freed slave woman with a baby, Rungwe, Tanzania, 1894.”¹¹³



The German Moravian Church that was stationed in East Africa during the time of abolition took this photograph of a freed slave woman with her baby. It is likely that the Moravian Church was a group of missionaries to the region that used this photograph to write about their successful

¹¹¹ Fair, 64.

¹¹² Fair, 67.

¹¹³ Unknown, photographer, “Freed slave woman with a baby, Rungwe, Tanzania, 1894,” Photograph, Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1894. From International Mission Photography Archive (1860-1960): *Photographs of the Moravian Church, Herrnhut, Germany, ca.1890-1940.*

conversion tactics or their contributions to abolition on the East Coast of Africa. The freed slave woman is wearing the white merikani cloth wrapped under around her chest, under her armpit. This photograph suggests that this freed slave woman has not yet had the opportunity to differentiate herself from her enslaved past. However, the cloth underneath her merikani is dyed, suggesting that she purposefully wanted to separate her former status as an enslaved woman from that of enslaved men who were also accustomed to wearing the white merikani cloth.¹¹⁴ The merikani cloth defined assumptions about beauty, slave status, and gender at the time of abolition.

The coerced labor of slaves and the access to work for free people were very important on the East African Coast because both sources of labor maintained the lucrative slave system. There was an assumption by the British discussed in Emily Reute's *Arabian Princess* that an, "Arab woman appears more helpless and possessing fewer rights," because they were not working or providing for themselves or their family. The elite women of the Swahili Coast typically had less household work to do, but this assumption showed how valuable work was. Associating lack of productive work with a lack of rights as a woman speaks to how labor production operated as a necessary system in the region. The more work someone was able to do the less 'helpless' they were because they were producing a commodity or a means of sustainability.¹¹⁵ Looking at how enslaved people valued work, they often worked harder on the days they were allowed to work for themselves on their own plots of land or when they were working for money.¹¹⁶ The access to work was rooted in the ability to provide for oneself or to have the option to be self-sufficient was incredibly crucial in this society that required people to foster dependency and integration for continued social security.

¹¹⁴ Fair, 67.

¹¹⁵ Reute, 149.

¹¹⁶ Newman, 36.

In particular, freedom of movement defined the differences between free women's work and enslaved women's work. An elite woman's had the ability to own many slaves, which defined her position from that of a poorer woman. This distinction is important because in some instances, poorer free women had more freedom of movement than free, elite women because they were not required to veil.¹¹⁷ However, the basis of this restriction on veiling was rooted in a class distinction. Swahili elite used veiling for both men and women to signify their privilege and wealth. Even if an enslaved woman was Muslim, her low class status prohibited her from following this religious recommendation because the Swahili elite consistently worked to maintain their high status.¹¹⁸ However, the freedom of movement was a critical aspect that defined free person's basic rights. This right was even more restricted for the upper class women than for lower class women.¹¹⁹ When the ability to freely move is applied to enslaved women, there are several ways that enslaved women navigate this space. Newman's work in *Banani*, explores how enslaved women were able to access marketplaces on the East Coast of Africa. Furthermore, on their days off they were able to move freely to build relationships and grow their own crops. After abolition, they were able to decide whether they wanted to move off the plantation or continue to work on it.¹²⁰

Furthermore, it was crucial for Emily Reute, an elite free woman, to define the work she did for her husband as voluntary and not equal to the work that enslaved women did.¹²¹ Voluntary work characterizes a critical distinction between the lives of free and enslaved women. The domestic work that enslaved women did in the household was comparable to some of the work that free women did for their husbands. Domestic enslaved women performed household

¹¹⁷ Reute, 149.

¹¹⁸ Fair, 74.

¹¹⁹ Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa*, 54.

¹²⁰ Newman, 32.

¹²¹ Reute, 154.

work that included making their masters comfortable in several aspects. Enslaved women in elite households would massage, fan and wash the hands of their masters.¹²² Comparatively, free women would work to make a husband comfortable by getting him drinks, showing affection, and helping him get dressed.¹²³ The distinction between these two types of work was further complicated due to the close relationships masters had with their domestic slaves compared to their plantation slaves.¹²⁴ However, the assertion of the voluntary nature of free women's work defined one aspect of how freedom was constituted on the East African Coast.

According to Emily Burrill's "Wives of Circumstance", enslaved women had various choices available to them regardless of their inferior status. Enslaved women navigated these choices through the decisions they made to make their situations better.¹²⁵ During disputes between an enslaved woman and her husband and in cases of mistreatment the enslaved woman had several options to seek support. Often the enslaved woman would turn towards the new kinship ties she developed on the plantation, emphasizing the importance of protection through kinship. Other times, the enslaved woman would seek out an Islamic judge, or Kadi, to handle the dispute. And, an enslaved woman had the option to seek legal aid from the state's legal system.¹²⁶ These options available to enslaved women show the several areas of society where enslaved women carved out spaces to seek recourse according to their individual circumstances.

Enslaved women and free women were also able make decisions about their lives through motherhood. In Emily Reute's *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess: An Autobiography*, a free woman was displeased with her daughter who did not divide the money given to her by her

¹²² Reute, 56, 59.

¹²³ Reute, 154.

¹²⁴ Reute, 68.

¹²⁵ Emily S. Burrill, "'Wives of Circumstance': Gender and Slave Emancipation in Late Nineteenth-Century Senegal," *Slavery & Abolition* 29, no. 1 (2008): 49-63.

¹²⁶ Reute, 153; Strobel, 46.

father at the time of his death with her half sister as a way to separate ties. The daughter, Farschu, ignored her mother's request and the mother decided to move away from her daughter. The mother began working and providing for herself because her daughter did not give her any money that was left by the father. The law states that the child is meant to provide protection to the widow who lost their husband.¹²⁷ The mother was not receiving enough security from her daughter as the customary law prescribed, so she had to make the decision to separate from her daughter. This dependency or protection free women received from their children was not the same for enslaved women. Keeping a child can be a source of integration and connection that is important for an enslaved woman to foster elements of her own life. However, having a child can also take away valuable time, energy, and resources from a mother who does not have enough resources to provide for herself let alone her child. Some enslaved women engaged with the benefits that came with motherhood while others simply chose not to engage with the expectations placed on women to be mothers through the performance of abortion or infanticide.¹²⁸

Donald Mackenzie's travel report of the region, suggested that there were not a lot of children born to enslaved women.¹²⁹ There were instances where enslaved women performed abortion or infanticide due to the increased burden bearing a child brought to an enslaved woman. Newman noted how there was, "a great deal of infanticide," in his report of the East African Coast.¹³⁰ The intensive labor of plantation work also does not supply the woman with a healthy environment to conceive and carry out the pregnancy to have a child. Another observer Emily Reute, commented on how horrible it was for a mother, enslaved or free, to have to give

¹²⁷ Reute, 135-136.

¹²⁸ Turner, *Contested Bodies*, 106.

¹²⁹ Mackenzie, *A report on Slavery*, 17.

¹³⁰ Newman, 31.

up a child. Reute further commented that enslaved women were not as deeply impacted by losing a child, as a mother should be.¹³¹ Reute could have overlooked other instances where enslaved women were deeply disheartened when their child was taken from them or sold to another master.¹³² The reproductive capacity of an enslaved woman was an area of her life that she was able to carve out and define according to her personal preferences. This is seen when different women choose to make different decisions about their children based on their circumstances.

Ultimately, there were competing views of enslaved women by British abolitionists, slave owners of Zanzibar the British colonial government, and enslaved women themselves. Each of these competing actors influenced how the British Anti-Slavery Society constructed the abolitionist message that first attempted to put an end to the slave trade in and around Zanzibar. The British Anti-Slavery Society used enslaved women's bodies centered on themes of marriage and chastity to make an argument for the abolition of slavery. The Anti-Slavery Society was a Protestant Christian organization that encouraged a British 'civilizing mission'. From a Christian perspective, a monogamous patriarchal family structure was a central reason given for an increased British presence in the region especially in regards to the humanitarian mission to eliminate slavery and the slave trade.¹³³ Although the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* described how absurd it was that enslaved women were being taken advantage of, British abolitionists at the same time, used the protection of female bodies as a justification for British intervention and presence in the region. Enslaved women capitalized on this abolitionist message by strategically resisting to weakness within the slave system and defining their own avenues towards freedom.

¹³¹ Reute, 68.

¹³² Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women*, 53.

¹³³ Wright, "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest", 247.

Chapter 3: ‘Emancipation’ and New Forms of Dependency for Female Domestic Slaves

“All [slaves] do what they want to do,
And if they do not want to do it, they don’t do it.”¹³⁴
~*Swahili Prose Texts*

The institutions that upheld slavery on the East Coast of Africa did not fully disappear as a result of British colonial emancipation in the 1890s, but rather changed and left residues that enslaved women needed to negotiate in order to continue carving out space for their freedom. Dependency for formerly enslaved women shifted during emancipation. Arab-Swahili slave owners were critical of abolitionists who did not provide any form of support for enslaved persons at the time of their emancipation highlighting the critical nature of dependency in the region. According to Emily Reute’s *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*, there were accounts of enslaved persons having to deal with minimal access to resources and no secure place to live after emancipation.¹³⁵ These reports largely do not account emancipation as a long transitory period, when enslaved persons negotiated both old and new resources and support networks. For instance, it was common for enslaved persons to return to their previous masters in the instance of illness or death in the family. The ties between master and slave rooted in dependency were still largely present, highlighting the constant negotiation between old and new forms of dependency in the region. Moreover, the new economy based on wage- labor and rooted in patriarchal structures acted as avenues that encouraged dependency to exist in new forms on the East African Coast after emancipation in 1897. Not all enslaved women were afforded freedom at the time of emancipation due in large part, to their position as domestic slaves. Adequate

¹³⁴ Lyndon Harries, ed., *Swahili Prose Texts: A Selection from the Material Collected by Carl Velten from 1893 to 1896* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 209.

¹³⁵ Reute, 219.

access to the new economy was the central way that formerly enslaved women and women still enslaved were able to profit from their own labor, and establish autonomous resources of social reproduction. Enslaved women adapted their strategies to negotiate the institution of slavery after emancipation. They did so by taking their masters to court, finding wage labor as porters, and through concubinage and domestic childcare.

Social integration into the networks of the dominant Swahili elite was a major factor that defined an ex-slave's social status and their ability to access freedom on the East African Coast. Freedom was defined through access to dependent networks and privileged ways of life typically reserved for the Swahili elite. Access to leisure time, elite forms of dress, and the cultivation of dependent relationships provided avenues for ex-slave's to advance their social status and maintain their social security. Dependency upon coastal elite kinship and social networks had enabled enslaved and marginal persons the ability to gain security and access to rights and a means of livelihood, because enslavement meant alienation from familiar kinship and social networks in the East African interior.¹³⁶ As Harold Fraser reports in *The East African Slave Trade*, protection provided by a Swahili master substituted for the protection provided by indigenous African kinship networks.¹³⁷ Acquiring knowledge of Swahili customs and language enabled integrated slaves to gain a higher social standing than "raw slaves" recently captured from the interior and brought to the coast. The importance of assimilation of slaves into Swahili culture reflects the concept of dependency that ensured social protection and sustainable livelihoods for a person with a slave status.¹³⁸ In the case of runaway slaves, access to support structures outside of their master's estate often took the form of illicit accumulation. As

¹³⁶ G.A. Akinola, "Slavery and Slave Revolts in the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no. 2 (1972): 216.

¹³⁷ Fraser, *The East African Slave Trade*, 45.

¹³⁸ Akinola, "Slavery and Slave Revolts in the Sultanate of Zanzibar," 216.

Glassman argues, dependency defined the movement of enslaved persons towards freedom and informed the decisions of some slaves to remain in a dependent relationship with their owners. Indeed, the nearly 12,000 slaves who achieved emancipation in 1897 through the British colonial court systems had to work with the same networks of dependency that underpinned slavery.¹³⁹

The residues of slavery including patriarchy, dependent labor practices, and politicized social status differentiation lingered on the East Coast of Africa for decades after abolition. It was likely that emancipation did not drastically change the lives of the majority of ex-slaves in the region. The legal social norms surrounding the ownership of slaves continued to permeate daily life. Within the social context of the region, Swahili women distanced themselves from markers of servitude like the cheap merikani cloth that was worn by enslaved women.¹⁴⁰ Laura Fair describes how the more expensive, kangas, “colorful, printed cotton cloths sold in pairs [and] imported from abroad” were purchased by former enslaved women in order to assert their integration into Swahili coastal society.¹⁴¹ In regard to the legal norms, there were instances in court documents where former slave owners were still naming women as their slaves or calling themselves ‘the owners of a slave’.¹⁴² In some cases, nearly twenty years after emancipation, slave owners were needed to approve the marriage of a former slave.¹⁴³ These situations highlight how central slavery was to the social and economic structures in the region even after slavery had been legally abolished.

The slavery system was deeply entrenched in the society of the East African Coast because slave owners’ well being was tied to the coerced labor of their slaves. Many actors on

¹³⁹ Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Nairobi; London; Dar es Salaam; Portsmouth, N.H.; Heinemann, 1995), 254.

¹⁴⁰ Fair, 79.

¹⁴¹ Fair, 79.

¹⁴² Strobel, 51.

¹⁴³ Strobel, 53.

the coast including Swahili government officials and Muslim women in positions of power questioned the justice and logic of British abolitionism.¹⁴⁴ The conflict of interest between Arab slave owners and British abolitionists was based on competing capitalistic ideologies. The British colonial government wanted to assert its control of the East Coast of Africa, whereas Arab and Swahili slave owners desired to sustain the social and economic benefits that their control of slave labor provided.¹⁴⁵ By exploiting British abolitionism to further challenge the slavery system and expand the scope of social integration in the late nineteenth-century, enslaved women contributed to the struggles over the social definitions of what Swahili society should be.

The sex ratio of emancipated male and female slaves in Zanzibar and Pemba was 47:53. Each of the 5,465 enslaved women who were emancipated forged a specific “freedom narrative,” navigated the social realities of free status, and reckoned with the embodied legacy of enslavement.¹⁴⁶ The tactics that enslaved women employed after emancipation to assert their freedom and create new livelihoods for themselves varied from dressing as “Swahili”, engaging in wage-labor, or entering into concubinage. Each tactic employed by enslaved women reflected the unique life circumstances and preferences these women held on the coast. Leading up to emancipation, enslaved women were able to buy their freedom from the money they saved up through the paid work they were afforded. Women often worked as porters or laborers near sea ports where they would unload and load ships or perform duties within the port towns. These were largely paid positions where enslaved women were hired for work. These paid positions

¹⁴⁴ Reute, 221.

¹⁴⁵ Strobel, 46.

¹⁴⁶ A. Sheriff, “Localisation and Social Composition of the East African Slave Trade, 1858-1873,” in *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Gervase Clarence-Smith (New York: Routledge, 2013), 144.

allowed women to supplement their diets, buy clothing or save up to buy their freedom.¹⁴⁷

Enslaved women did not receive as much pay as enslaved men, but they still had access to these capitalistic avenues of profit.¹⁴⁸ After abolition, enslaved women had the option to stay and work on the plantation for wages or leave to forge a new life for themselves.¹⁴⁹ Formerly enslaved women engaged in new forms of labor after emancipation. Enslaved women either moved away from the plantations in search of new forms of work, lived as squatters on the land, or continued working for their masters usually in situations involving domestic slavery. Emancipated women working in domestic households were able to become supervisors of other female workers of servile status within the household or work as hired house workers for a wage.¹⁵⁰

Enslaved women and slave owners negotiated manumission practices to their benefits. Enslaved women were able to achieve manumission at the behest of their master who provided freedom papers to a woman for personal and religious reasons. It was not uncommon for slave masters to emancipate their slaves, as a pious Muslim act, in anticipation of Godly graces, or in the hope of receiving a miraculous cure from sickness.¹⁵¹ However, the master's permission was not the only way enslaved women could achieve freedom. Enslaved women were able to make decisions about their own freedom, irrespective of their master's desires. Especially, the 1890s era of emancipation marked a transition from a stable slave society to a society with impatient slaves and anxious masters. The promise of emancipation generated concerns for the slave owners who anticipated the problems they would face without a source of coerced labor. Thus, in 1890, when slaves were allowed to purchase their own freedom as a result of a new British legal

¹⁴⁷ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, "Strategies of Women and Constraints of Enslavement in the Modern Americas," in *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic, Vol. II* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 17.

¹⁴⁸ Mackenzie, *A report on Slavery*, 16.

¹⁴⁹ Newman, *Banani*, 32.

¹⁵⁰ Beech, "Slavery on the East Coast of Africa," 147.

¹⁵¹ Beech, 147.

decree, slave owners and the sultan of Zanzibar immediately revoked the new law because it had encouraged widespread overt slave disobedience. Slave owners' fears were rooted in enslaved people's acquisition of their freedom by any means necessary including instances of revolt.¹⁵² Slave revolts typically initiated by male slaves of high status who disagreed with the severe punishment on the plantations and the restriction on the enslaved person's freedom of movement.¹⁵³

After 1897 in particular, enslaved women were able to capitalize on the legal system's sentiments surrounding manumission by choosing between legalized freedom and freedom through protection that was required by slave owners. There are many reports of enslaved people being careless or disobeying their masters in the primary source material. The British authors of these reports understood these rebellious behaviors as a reflection of the slave's child-like status and inferior mental development. However, this was not the case. In some cases, enslaved women would purposefully work slowly or disobey orders from their owners in anticipation of getting punished. At the time of emancipation, cruel punishments were increasingly intolerable under the legal system and slave owners were often charged with mistreatment. The remedy for this infringement was manumitting the slave who was mistreated. Thus, one of the ways that enslaved women could precipitate their case to the British courts was by provoking their master's excessive punishment. Some enslaved women embraced the legal provision that gave them the option to remain with their slave owners as protected subjects and dependents. Most emancipated women in this category were either old or sick, and often opted to remain under the security and protection of their former masters, who would be obligated to

¹⁵² Robert Nunez Lyne, *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times: A Short History of the Southern East in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1905), 176.

¹⁵³ Glassman, *Feasts and Riots*, 288.

provide basic necessities for the enslaved person under their protection.¹⁵⁴ These exemplify the deliberate choices available to enslaved women, who articulated the threat of legal freedom. The limited scope of British emancipation defined the terms of enslaved women's freedom negotiation. Not all enslaved women were emancipated. In fact, concubines were not fully emancipated, but rather were integrated into the harem structure and acted similarly to the wives of the master. Female domestic slaves were not fully emancipated because of the concern the British abolitionists had with the Arab slave owners. Female domestic slaves were not fully emancipated, including some concubines because it would cause conflict in the harem domestic structure of the Arab household.¹⁵⁵ First, the British did not wish to interfere with the autonomy of Arab patriarchal domesticity. Second, the British government did not have the resources to compensate the Arab male elite for their slave property. Third, the British understanding of "slavery" as evident in involuntary labor and the absence of free will limited their emancipation largely to field slaves. As a result, the British crown essentially did not extend its "protection" to include the domestic sphere of slavery.¹⁵⁶ Yet, for some enslaved women of the domestic sphere, the provision of the 1897 emancipation decree was a reason to challenge their masters. According to the 1897 *Anti—Slavery Reporter*, a domestic female slave who wanted her legal freedom "refused either to allow her master to seduce her or to be made one of his concubines."¹⁵⁷ Enslaved women's refusal of their new concubine status reflected the unease and dissatisfaction some enslaved women possessed and their refusals exemplified their resistance tactic. Significantly, such enslaved women's refusals were often met with force or cruelty. Indeed, when the British abolitionists wrote, "If females were happy they would remain

¹⁵⁴ Lyne, *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times*, 185.

¹⁵⁵ *The Anti-Slavery Reporter ser. 4 v. 16-17 1896-1897 [Apr.-Jun.]*. (London: Anti-Slavery Society and Kraus, 1969 reprint), 99.

¹⁵⁶ *The Anti-Slavery Reporter ser. 4 v. 16-17 1896-1897 [Apr.-Jun.]*, 93.

¹⁵⁷ *The Anti-Slavery Reporter ser. 4 v. 16-17 1896-1897 [Apr.-Jun.]*, 93.

where they are,” they ignored the threats that enslaved women faced if they decided to challenge their masters. The prevention of the emancipation of domestic slaves was a critical issue because leading up to emancipation at the end of the nineteenth century there was a deep favoring of enslaved boys and enslaved women highlighting the specific and high demand for domestic slaves.¹⁵⁸

Staying within the domestic household as a concubine or slave was also a real choice for enslaved women, and demonstrates how reproductive work was an avenue for enslaved women to gain their legal status as freed people. According to Emily Reute in the *Arabian Princess*,

Of course only a wealthy man can purchase [a] Sarari [concubine]. Slaves by birth, they become free as soon as they have children. It happens very rarely, and then only in the case of very hard-hearted men, that the Sarari is resold by her master after the death of her child, from necessity or because he is weary of her. In case of the husband's death, his Sarari are absolutely free and have no other master. And if they are married again to a brother or to any relation of the deceased, they become, as free women, the legitimate wives of such.¹⁵⁹

This passage highlights how the ownership of concubines reflected masculine ideals of wealth.

This passage also emphasizes the paths to manumission that were available to enslaved women if they entered into a relationship with their master as a concubine. When a master had a child with an enslaved woman, it was customary on the Swahili coast that not only the child would be freed, but the master would free the mother as well.¹⁶⁰ An enslaved woman's position as a concubine allowed her to gain a similar status to that of the master's wife, functioning simultaneously as an incentive for the enslaved woman to remain a slave and seek out the

¹⁵⁸ William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Routledge, 2013), 144-145.

¹⁵⁹ Reute, 152.

¹⁶⁰ Fraser, *The East African Slave Trade*, 46.

protection and security that came with being treated like a master's wife.¹⁶¹ According to Lyndon Harries' translation of late nineteenth-century Swahili oral traditions collected by Carl Velten, it was a common adage in the 1890s that a concubines, "[got] a room just like a wife,"¹⁶² making access to basic necessities and support networks easier for the enslaved woman to acquire. Concubines were even found to own slaves themselves, usually as a result of the death of their master. This shows that they were able to gain social mobility or expand the scope of their freedoms as a result of their position.¹⁶³ Indeed, the transformation of reproductive work for enslaved women after emancipation encouraged a blending of new and old forms of labor production.¹⁶⁴ Reproductive work allowed formerly enslaved women better access to integration within the communities they lived.¹⁶⁵ Reproductive work took many forms outside of bearing children with the intent of producing a larger slave population. Margaret Strobel in "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa" argued that reproductive work included caring for children in the household, performing daily modes of reproduction, including cooking, fetching water, cultivating food crops and contributing to the hierarchical relationships that defined productive work within a household.¹⁶⁶ Female domestic slaves formed greater 'social and cultural ties' to their owners making them have greater access to integration into Swahili society. The opportunities of integration into elite Swahili society offered enslaved women more choices for gaining freedom during emancipation ranging from concubinage, domestic wage labor, or the outright dismissal of engaging work that was deemed 'slave work'.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, through the

¹⁶¹ Lyne, *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times*, 180.

¹⁶² Harries, *Swahili Prose Texts*, 210.

¹⁶³ Clarence-Smith, *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade*, 141.

¹⁶⁴ *The Anti-Slavery Reporter ser. 4 v. 16-17 1896-1897 [Apr.-Jun.]*, 182.

¹⁶⁵ Margaret Strobel, "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa," in *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 128.

¹⁶⁶ Strobel, "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa," 119.

¹⁶⁷ Strobel, "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa," 123, 128.

reproductive work of concubinage, domestic childcare, daily household work and their position as wives, formerly enslaved women demonstrated individual choices and decision-making.

The economy on the East Africa Coast shifted from one based on the free labor of slaves towards a wage-based economy that offered new challenges for the enslaved who needed to gain access to compensatory labor production in new ways. Instances where enslaved women expressed difficulties finding jobs after emancipation exemplify new challenges brought about by British emancipation.¹⁶⁸ Fraser in *The East African Slave Trade*, critically argues that the British are careless in their emancipation process because their government does not provide adequate protection for slaves once they are free. Fraser highlights how the employers on the island of Zanzibar regard the influx of newly freed slaves to be “a burden” and encourages the British government to provide ex-slaves with protection from exploitative employers.¹⁶⁹ The British emancipation narrative constructed a humanitarian ideal that would bring freedom and good will to slaves in dire circumstances. However, British expansion of the Westernized commercial trade, as a result of their presence on the coast, actually made life for plantation slaves more difficult.¹⁷⁰ After emancipation, there were reports of enslaved persons having to leave the island of Zanzibar in search of work because Zanzibar had much less work opportunities for freed slaves.¹⁷¹ The new wage-based economy created monetary constraints for the newly-freed population. For example, formerly enslaved persons were taxed in an attempt to ensure they were working, providing for themselves, and being effective members of society after emancipation.¹⁷² Without regulations on the new wage-based economy, employers were able to negotiate their own terms of employment. There were reports of former slave’s wages

¹⁶⁸ Fraser, 22.

¹⁶⁹ Fraser, 22.

¹⁷⁰ Glassman, *Feasts and Riots*, 227.

¹⁷¹ Lyne, 176.

¹⁷² Lyne, 180.

being cut in half to reflect the same earnings that they would have received as slaves in an attempt by the slave owners to compensate for the lack of free labor.¹⁷³ This negotiation of wages, however, happened at the behest of the formerly enslaved people as well. Similar to tactics used by slaves on plantations, newly freed persons would work slowly or carelessly often to the distaste of their employers.¹⁷⁴ This shows that even after slavery legally ended, laboring populations were constantly renegotiating their labor practices and injustices performed against them.

¹⁷³ Lyne, 183.

¹⁷⁴ Lyne, 185.

Conclusion

“[An] Arab I know had a slave-boy from Manyema who taught himself to
read & write—to use his master’s words.
The boy stole the knowledge, &
then his master felt compelled to teach the boy more.”
~Reverend W. Hutley, 1881¹⁷⁵

Modern day society and the ease that comes with acquiring goods in a globalized world developed at the behest of unpaid coerced slave labor. At the center of slavery systems was a capitalistic venture that worked to maintain wealth and class status for the handful of people who carried out the operations of slavery. In different regions of the world, the system of slavery was maintained through various structures that accounted for that region’s political, economic, and social contexts. On the East Coast of Africa, plantation slavery developed as a result of the embedded structures of paternalism and dependency. The Swahili elite who benefitted from the coerced labor of their slaves, used their access to wealth to maintain their own privileges while controlling the dominant ideology on the coast. With any normative ideology, there are structures that maintain its existence. However, these very structures can be targeted to dismantle the oppressive ideology because even the most rigid of normative ideologies and practices has gaps in its legitimacy.

Enslaved women, as active agents in history, were consistently challenging the system of slavery that oppressed them through meaningful avenues that shed light on their values, beliefs and experiences. These enslaved women used covert and overt modes of resistance to preserve their livelihoods in the limited, but available ways they could. The study of enslaved women’s experiences expands the avenues that slaves had to resist their complex situations. Enslaved

¹⁷⁵ Glassman, “Feasts and Riot,” 316.

women resisted slavery in everyday life by singing work songs, denying the sanctity of such system, cultivating close relationships with kin, achieving various forms of freedom and creating their own definitions of what constituted a good life amidst the traumas of slavery.

In conclusion, enslaved women's voices on the East African Coast have been silenced in history not because of their inferiority or their lack of resistance to an oppressive system, but due to the structures of patriarchy, imperialism, and misguided understandings of African kinship slavery that operate with the intention of diminishing the voices of the most vulnerable people. Peeling back the layers of misinterpretation of enslaved women's experiences is important in order create an authentic history of these women's lives and recognize the complexities of their experiences.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Beech, Mervyn W. H. "Slavery on the East Coast of Africa." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 15, no. 58 (1916): 145-49.

Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872.

Fraser, Harold Arthur. *The East African Slave Trade, and the Measures Proposed for its extinction: as viewed by the residents in Zanzibar*. London: Harrison, 1871.

Harries, Lyndon, ed. *Swahili Prose Texts: A Selection from the Material Collected by Carl Velten from 1893 to 1896*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Lyne, Robert Nunez. *Zanzibar in Contemporary Times: A Short History of the Southern East in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1905.

Mackenzie, Donald. *A report on slavery and the slave trade in Zanzibar, Pemba, and the Mainland of the British Protectorates of East Africa*. London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1895.

Newman, Henry Stanley. *Banani: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Zanzibar and Pemba*. London: Headley Brothers, 1898.

Reute, Emily. *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess: An Autobiography*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888.

The Anti-Slavery Reporter ser. 4 v. 16-17 1896-1897 [Apr.-Jun.]. London: Anti-Slavery Society and Kraus, 1969 reprint.

Secondary Sources

Akinola, G.A. "Slavery and Slave Revolts in the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no. 2 (1972): 215-28.

Alpers, Edward. *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009.

Bay, Edna G. *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1998.

- Beachey, R.W. *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa*. London: Rex Collings, 1976.
- Berlin, Ira. "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African- American Society in Mainland North America." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1996): 251-288.
- Campbell, Gwyn, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller. "Strategies of Women and Constraints of Enslavement in the Modern Americas," in *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic, Vol. II* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.
- Campbell, Gwyn, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller. *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic, Vol. II*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.
- Clarence-Smith, William Gervase. *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. Routledge, 2013.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*. London, UK: Pearson Education, 1977.
- Cornwall, Andrea. *Readings in Gender in Africa*. Oxford; Bloomington;: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Curtin, Patricia Romero. "Laboratory for the Oral History of Slavery: The Island of Lamu on the Kenya Coast." *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (1983): 858-82.
- Fair, Laura. *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945*. Oxford;Athens;: Ohio University Press, 2001.
- Getz, Trevor R. and Liz Clarke. *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History*. Second ed. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Glassman, Jonathon. *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*. Nairobi;London;Dar es Salaam;Portsmouth, N.H;: Heinemann, 1995.
- Glassman, Jonathon. "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast." *The Journal of African History* 32, no. 2 (1991): 283-284.
- Klein, Martin and Claire Robertson. *Women and Slavery in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.

- Klein, Martin and Claire Robertson. "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems" in *Women and Slavery in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.
- Lawrance, Benjamin N., Richard L. Roberts, Kevin Bales, and Jody Sarich. *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012.
- Lovejoy, Paul E. *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- McMahon, Elisabeth. *Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa : From Honor to Respectability*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Marsh, Zoë. *East Africa through Contemporary Records*. Cambridge: University Press, 1961.
- Meillassoux, Claude. "Female Slavery," in *Women and Slavery in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.
- Miers, Suzanne and Igor Kopytoff. *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.
- Miller, Joseph C. "Women as Slaves and Owners of Slaves," in *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic, Vol. II* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.
- Nurse, Derek and Thomas Spear. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- Sheriff, Abdul. *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar*. London: James Currey Ltd, 1987.
- Sheriff, A. "Localisation and Social Composition of the East African Slave Trade, 1858-1873," in *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Gervase Clarence-Smith. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Strobel, Margaret. *Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890-1975*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Strobel, Margaret. "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa," in *Women and Slavery in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.
- Stuckey, Sterling. "Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery." *The Massachusetts Review* 9, no. 3 (1968): 417-437.

Turner, Sasha. *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2017.

Wright, Marcia. "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest among Slave Women in Central Africa, 1886-1911," in *Women and Slavery in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.

Wright, Marcia. *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa*. London; New York;: L. Barber Press, 1993.