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A Woman's Portion: 5000 Years a Slave

by

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ABSTRACT

Slavery is one of humankind's oldest institutions. The earliest evidence of slavery appears with the cities and states of Mesopotamia, at least 5000 years ago. Scholars consider that the Indian Ocean world was the direct inheritor of these systems of slavery. In societies from southeast Asia to the east coast of Africa, slave systems have been part of the social, economic and political fabric of life for millenia.

Scholars of this ancient network of slave systems note that women were in the majority among the enslaved. I will suggest in this paper that slavery itself originated as an attempt to control the reproductive as well as the productive capacity of the female, and that this attempt to control was in no way limited to enslaved women. In the case studies I examine, we see that the economic, political and social needs of societies attempting statehood tended to require that all women, free or slave, cede control over their reproductive capacities, a condition that persists today.

This long history of the enslavement of women has been overshadowed by the trauma of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which still profoundly dominates the culture, politics and economics of the modern world. The New World slave system was one of several marked exceptions to the rule by which systems enslaved predominantly women; a brutal instance of the use of the enslaved male body as a machine. By contrast, the long enslavement of women is almost invisible. In order to see it, we must begin to recognize that, as profound is the trauma of the enslavement of Africans in the New World over the last 600 years, so profound is the trauma of slavery over the 5000 years that it has been a woman's portion.

INTRODUCTION

Slavery is among the most ancient human practices, existing before there were states but adapted readily for state use, and argued as essential to certain forms of economic ‘progress’ through the Industrial Revolution (Engels and Leacock 1983, Lerner 1986). Its oldest tradition has become so much a part of the cultural history and the fabric of daily life on a worldwide scale that it is practically invisible. This pattern leaves its first archaeological traces with tallies of enslaved women in cuneiform on clay tablets from 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia (Algaze 2001, Lerner 1986, Patterson 2018). For the subsequent 5000 years, and continuing into the present, most of the enslaved in the world have been, and are, women.

Here I will pause to take stock of three semantic issues. First, the debate over the precise meaning of the word ‘slavery:’ The one at which I aim to arrive here is operational. What common characteristics can be gleaned from a study of how slavery was practiced on women over time?

When I refer to women in the past or the present, I am not, in this work, untangling complex understandings of gender; I am making use of understandings of sex, which refers to biological traits (Geller 2009). The focus, for my purposes, is on the perceived ability to produce a child. I have tried to be consistent in my usage of the word sex rather than gender. There is still some variability in how scholars use these terms.

Finally, there is the epithet ‘slave.’ There is justifiable concern that to so designate a person imbues the essence of an already grievously injured human being with what is a coerced and imposed condition. Therefore, a preference for the word ‘enslaved’ has been expressed. What is clear is that to enslave is to perpetrate a profound crime against the soul and body of another person, a crime which lasts a lifetime and extends to future generations. One of the

effects of this great wrong is the erasure of personhood. I have attempted to use the term ‘enslaved’ when referring to a person existing under these conditions. Any omissions are mine. I have let the scholars below speak for themselves as regards usage. Well into the 21st century use of the word ‘slave’ is still common in academic publications.

The research on which I base my analysis centers around Africa and the Indian Ocean world (IOW), in the 18th through 20th centuries, and often refers back as far as the 16th century. While only parts of the east African coast are considered part of the IOW, indigenous slave systems existed all over the continent and interacted and traded with IOW partners, and I have included studies of pan-African indigenous slave systems. This is Old World slavery, which has its roots in the most ancient slave systems for which archaeologists have evidence. Virtually all scholars of slavery in this region acknowledge that the roots of these systems go back to the ancient past. Their work provides evidence and analysis regarding the slave systems of the Indian Ocean world and Africa before and at the time of their collision with the commercial demands and opportunities created by the European entry into the region and into the market. The edited volumes *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Campbell, ed. 2006), and *Women in Slavery* (Campbell, Miers and Miller, eds. 2007) were invaluable in this regard.

I also studied works on slavery as a broader topic, including Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Patterson 2018), Paul Lovejoy’s *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Lovejoy 2012) and Gerda Lerner’s *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Lerner 1986).

The research I cite below is conclusive: Most enslaved people, in most cultures that had slaves up until the time of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, were women. Most of these enslaved women were assimilated into households, from the fairly affluent to the royal, in commensurate numbers. These women aided ‘free’ women in their household tasks. They were, as were the ‘free’ women, prized for their reproductive function. Wives, concubines and children were part of a man’s wealth, often considered the preeminent part.

I will attempt to show that these systems of enslavement were built to absorb reproductive and productive workers into kin-based systems for the purposes of maintaining and expanding local population, and that they did this by removing females from their natal supports and making them dependents in the societies in which they were captive.

I discuss some of the issues around the offspring of enslaved women, and how the enslaving population dealt with parents and children in free, in enslaved, and in mixed unions, in law and in practice. And I present evidence of coordination and parallels in the processes of the enslavement of some women, and the subordination of all women.

I will suggest two avenues for further research: The first regards raiding activity, an ancient and common method for acquiring slaves. Historical accounts of raiding often mention the slaughter of the men of the target settlement, and the enslaving of the women and children. It would be fruitful to explore the connection between any evidence of violence in both prehistoric and historic times and the practice of enslaving women and children.

The second opportunity for further research would be to apply the emerging ideas on the fragility of the state to study the issue of the enslavement of women. Peter Robertshaw suggests a connection between the enslaving of women and the desire for resilience on the part of elites (Robertshaw 2019, 142, 144, 146, 153). It would be interesting to analyze whether or not these

slave systems did aid in making their societies less fragile, and whether or not elites depended on them to do so.

The final section of the paper is a critical review of the recent research on slavery, and an attempt to demonstrate some central biases hampering this research.

OLD WORLD SYSTEMS OF SLAVERY

By the time of substantial European contact in the 15th century, slavery was widespread in the IOW, stretching from Indonesia and the Philippines to Southeast Asia (Campbell 2006, ix). It was also important in Egypt, Greece and Rome (Lerner 1986, 83-4; Patterson 2018, 113-4, 120-1). In East Asia it had its own ancient roots and was practiced continuously in China, Japan and Korea (Schottenhammer 2006, 143-54; Patterson 2018, 117; Kim 2006, 155-168). It was the ancestor of the caste system in south Asia (Patterson 2018, 48-51). The slave trade flourished along the east coast of Africa (Campbell 2006, ix).

Many of the direct inheritors of the Near Eastern system became followers of Muhammad and codified the practice of slavery into law, providing a model which would spread throughout North Africa and which influenced the trade with and in other parts of Africa (Lovejoy 2012, 15). Slavery was practiced in West Africa before contact with Islam or Europe. Like the ancient Near East, West African societies were kinship-based, and enslavement was one means by which kin groups increased their productive and reproductive potential and power (Lovejoy 2012, 12, 14).

These ancient systems developed by kinship-based societies, and the later forms adapted by Islam, cooperated and competed over centuries. They were forced into eventual collision with Europeans and other foreigners, as these infiltrators made incursions into African and Asian markets, introducing their own economic techniques and priorities, and their own ideas about the role of enslaved labor (Miller 2006, 169).

I first explore the systems of slavery which pre-dated Islamic systems and continued to be practiced in areas of Africa and the Indian Ocean world which were not Islamic. I then describe the elaborations on these systems which were created during the triumph and spread of Islam.

Indigenous systems in kinship-based societies

Paul Lovejoy, in *Transformations in Slavery*, says “The existence of slaves in societies that emphasized kinship and dependency permitted their integration into a vast network of international slavery. This integration probably stretched far back into the past ... for those areas closest to the Mediterranean basin, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean” (Lovejoy 2012, 15).

Kinship is the original way in which humans organized themselves (Lévi-Strauss 1969). Its association with slavery has existed from ancient through modern times (Lovejoy 2012, 12, 14). Some authors define slavery practiced in kinship systems as ‘open.’ The definition of a system of slavery as ‘open’ or ‘closed’ depends on whether the free society will allow the slave to become absorbed into it, and under what circumstances, or whether the free society will tend to continue to consider slaves as outsiders.

In his introduction to *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, Gwyn Campbell writes “... many authors consider Africa to have been characterized by ‘open’ systems of slavery in which slaves were largely assimilated into the dominant society” (Campbell 2006, xviii). Edward Alpers, writing on “Escape from Slavery among Bonded Africans in the Indian Ocean world, c.1750-1962,” gives this definition: “Asian closed systems [were systems] in which slaves were permanent outsiders ... African open systems of slavery [were systems] in which slaves were considered as belonging to their owner’s lineage ...” (Alpers 2006, 51).

James Francis Warren, writing on the Sulu Sultanate, which existed in parts of the Philippines and Indonesia in the late 18th-19th c (Warren 2006, 111), categorizes the slave systems there as ‘open,’ “which acquired their labour through capture or purchase of slaves, and

assimilated them as ‘insiders’ into the dominant group” (Warren 2006, 123). Warren also mentions that “within the first generation, those individuals most likely to be incorporated in an ‘open’ system were female slaves, adolescents and children” (Warren 2006, 123-4).

As we explore indigenous ‘open,’ assimilative slave systems, we see the predominance of women among the enslaved. Indeed, the entire purpose of a system of slavery based upon assimilation is achieved through women. Consider Paul E. Lovejoy’s definition of ‘societies based on kinship:’

“Elders controlled the means of production and access to women ... Given that women were often the principal agricultural workers ... production and reproduction were closely associated. The maintenance of society depended on the fertility of the women and the output of their labor. The crucial variables for gerontocratic domination included the number of women married to elders, the number of children born to each wife ... In this situation, slavery did not alter the essential basis of the social formation. Slaves could add to the size of the population, but ... slaves performed virtually the same functions as lineage members” (Lovejoy 2012, 12).

Lovejoy goes on to say: “In all societies, a man could have control over many women, including slaves, pawns, and free ... once a respectable marriage was established [meaning with, optimally, a cousin, resulting in kinship ties], a man could then seek additional wives who were pawns or slaves ... The nature of such relationships promoted assimilation, not segregation” (Lovejoy 2012, 14).

Here we have, in societies based on kinship, the idea of wealth-in-people (Robertshaw 2019, 142). This imperative is satisfied by harnessing the productive and reproductive labor of women.

Islamic Systems

Paul Lovejoy writes “By the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, the Islamic world had become the heir” to the long tradition of slavery that originated in kinship-based societies (Lovejoy 2012, 15). He continues:

“... the principal concern here is with the consolidation of slavery in its Islamic context; for more than seven hundred years before 1450, the Islamic world was virtually the only external influence on the political economy of Africa.

“Initially slaves were prisoners captured in the holy wars that spread Islam from Arabia across North Africa and throughout the region of the Persian Gulf ... The central provinces of Islam provided the market for slaves; the supplies came from the frontier regions” (Lovejoy 2012, 15).

The ancient systems inherited by Islam originated as majority-woman. Orlando Patterson, in *Slavery and Social Death*, writes:

“With the rise of the Islamic states we find a systematic effort to capture as many men as women in order to supplement the conquering armies of Islam and reinforce their manpower. Once these states were established, the age-old practice of favoring female over male captives returned. Among the great majority of Islamic peoples after the ninth century, female captives and kidnapped persons fetched a higher price than males, even where slavery was economically important” (Patterson 2018, 121).

Here Patterson has divorced domestic and reproductive work from economic, but he is clear about the bias towards women slaves.

Islamic rulers and states were dominant trading partners over their millennium of influence in the Indian Ocean world and Africa. Equally important, however, was Islam’s impact on the institution of slavery. The scholarly application of *sharia* to the question of slavery created a codification of the institution of slavery unparalleled since Hammurabi. Islamic expansionism spread this code beyond the People of the Book. And Islamic scholars grappled, in writing, not only with the technicalities of owning people as property, but with the ethical and spiritual implications of such an act.

James Searing, in “Islam, Slavery and Jihad in West Africa” (Searing 2006, 761-779)

writes:

“ ... slavery in the Islamic world is explained more often through the imperative for jihad against infidels, even while recognizing that the doctrine of jihad could be abused and used as a cover for slave raiding ...

“[A] key paradox emerges from the study of Islamic law. First, Islam, as exemplified by the actions and words of the Prophet Muhammad, took action to reform slavery, a widespread institution in what became the heartlands of Islam. Believers were encouraged to treat their slaves humanely. ‘Feed them what you eat; clothe them with what you wear. Do not impose on them that which they are unable to do.’ ... Islam encouraged manumission as a pious act and Islamic law established the principle that freedom is the natural state for human beings.

“On the other hand, Islamic law recognized the status of slavery, which could only come about through birth to slave parents or through capture in a war against unbelievers” (Searing 2006, 761-2).

Gwyn Campbell writes:

“[M]ost slaves in the Middle East were necessarily ‘outsiders’. This followed from the stipulation in the *sharia*, or Islamic law, that slaves could not be purchased or acquired as tribute, and that the only legitimate targets of enslavement were non-Muslims opposed to Islam -- which by the ninth century meant anyone living in non-Muslim lands. However, Abdul Sheriff questions the appropriateness of attempting to identify a specifically ‘Islamic’ form of slavery. In the Muslim world there emerged different schools of legal interpretation, within which individual scholars could differ significantly on the niceties of Islamic law. Some Islamic legal systems tolerated the covert enslavement of Muslims, and the equally forbidden production of eunuchs. Moreover, Islam influenced vast swathes of the IOW [Indian Ocean World]. In the merchant cities of South-East Asia the *sharia* helped forge a legal distinction between slave and non-slave unknown in the rural hinterland” (Campbell 2006, xvi).

Holy war against unbelievers resulted in their capture and enslavement. The proscription against enslaving in any other way became permission to enslave in this way. Despite the ethical and spiritual consequences of enslaving fellow humans, slavery was a cultural habit from the very oldest days of civilization, as well as being deeply woven into the fabric of the economy and of politics. In the end, a way had to be found to reconcile these ethical and spiritual problems with social, economic and political imperatives.

Suzanne Miers says:

“What was notably different from the slavery of the western world ... was the degree to which [the enslaved] were protected by Muslim law. When the law was observed, their treatment was good. They might expect to marry and have families of their own, and they had a good chance of being freed. There were also built in avenues of escape. For instance, a female slave who married her master had to be freed first. Concubines - slaves by definition - were freed or, at least were not saleable, once they had borne their masters’ children” (Miers 2006, 4).

In this we see the importance of offspring in the life trajectories of female slaves. The words of Muhammad and the discipline of *sharia* attempt to mitigate the evil of denying a human being her ‘natural state’ of freedom. Once she has fulfilled her function, by bearing the child of her master, she may resume that state, at least as much as any ‘free’ woman can.

One cannot address the issue of unfree women in Islam without stumbling over the culturally fraught and distorted idea of the harem. Martin A. Klein, in “Sex, Power, and Family Life in the Harem” says:

“The harem as an institution was found throughout much of Asia and Africa, where it is of great antiquity. It is often seen in the West as a Muslim institution, but harems existed long before Islam and in many other societies ... (Klein 2007, 63-4).

“The word *harem* comes from two closely related Arabic words, *haram*, (forbidden, unlawful) and *harim* (sacred, inviolable place) ... (Klein 2007, 65).

“Ehud Toledano has written that the harem was not about sex. It might be more accurate to say that it was about more than sex ... Mernissi is more decisive that the harem is a family place, where the master comes to relax. It is also ‘a densely populated place where everyone is always watching everyone else’...

“The harem was also a place where female family members lived, as well as older women, servants, and children ... In the 1990s, the Kano [northern Nigeria] palace still housed about twelve hundred persons, which included only three wives and twenty-five actual and former concubines.

“The harem was also a major political arena. It was where the dynasty reproduced itself and trained its young” (Klein 2007, 70-1).

Klein quotes Beverly Mack: “I have lived long enough in the Kano harem to know that it is all about sons, sons, sons, not sex, sex, sex. One needs a big offspring pool from which the kingmakers choose if the kingship is to be kept in the family” (Klein 2007, 70). As Islam

elaborated on the slavery of kin-based societies, so was the harem the elaboration of a long tradition of polygyny and the strategic exchange and accumulation of women.

In the next section I explore the institutional decisions that African and Indian Ocean world societies made in order to reinforce control over women and their reproduction. I will focus on two areas. The first regards the customs and law surrounding children of the enslaved. The second regards the stripping of rights from all women, regardless of free/unfree status.

FUNDAMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE ENSLAVEMENT OF WOMEN

The study of modern hunter-gatherer societies and of other primate societies suggests that, for the majority of human history, female humans had significant responsibility for the support and education of the children they carried and bore. Enslavement for women entailed a seismic shift in their experience as mothers. The development of slavery as we have traced it above made women and children into property. Ownership of female slaves invariably entailed rights over their children, or “the potential consequences of their reproductive capacities” (Miller 2007, xvi), meaning that women were stripped of those rights.

The importance of the children of enslaved women in the societies I have discussed cannot be overstated. It was a preoccupation of law from the early 2nd millennium BCE with the writing of the Hammurabic Code, as humans struggled with the meaning of using one another for labor, and with the meaning of property. More specifically, significant portions of law dealt with the complexities of acquiring another human, particularly female, and appropriating and assuming control over her children (Lerner 1986, 101-22; Patterson 2018, 135-47, 228-32).

Joseph Miller says, speaking of Africa and the Indian Ocean world in the 18th and 19th centuries: “Households filled with women acquired through trade, and thus without kin to protect them or to claim the legacy of the house for their children, allowed rapid intergenerational accumulation, concentration and transmission of the wealth derived from trade” (Miller 2007, 14). This intergenerational accumulation may have relied on women for the generations themselves, but the accumulation was almost invariably owned by men and their male descendants.

Decisions about the status of the children of enslaved mothers were dictated not by the rules of kinship, even as they may have prevailed in the larger society around them, but by the state. Orlando Patterson writes:

“There were five ways in which slave status was determined by birth: (1) by the mother only, regardless of the father’s status; (2) by the father only, regardless of the mother’s status; (3) by the mother *or* the father, whoever had the higher status; (4) by the mother or the father, whoever had the lower status; and (5) by neither, the child always being free regardless of the status of either or both parents. The last case, of course, refers to incipient (nonhereditary) slavery and is not, strictly speaking, genuine slavery as we understand and use the term” (Patterson 2019, 134).

Patterson calls attention to the majority of slaveholding societies in which the “rules determining the inheritance of status for the children of parents both of whom were free differed from those determining the inheritance of slave/free status” (Patterson 2019, 135). Practically this implies that in the majority of slaveholding societies the status (class) of children born of free parents was determined by the status of the father, and the status (enslaved vs. free) of children born of ‘mixed’ marriages was determined by the status of the mother. Again, practically, this meant that children born of a slave mother were slaves.

In kin-based societies, often matrilineal, the reproductive vulnerability of enslaved, kinless women would have been central to the strengthening of patrilineality. These children belonged to their fathers, to enslave or to legitimize as they wished. Joseph Miller: “In matrilineal societies slave women were in special demand, as their children by men of the lineage belonged to their fathers’ kin groups, whereas the children of free women belonged to the lineages of their mothers and were responsible to their maternal uncles” (Miller 2007, 12). Orlando Patterson describes the same thing: “The child whose father was the master of his mother was of special importance to the matrilineal Ashanti, for only over such children did the biological father have complete authority ...” (Patterson 2018, 136). Thus ownership over

women meant access to children unfettered by inconvenient kinship ties, which permitted a manipulation of their status to the benefit of their owner.

Parallel to this evidence, which indicates that one of the main purposes in enslaving women was reproductive, exists evidence which associates slavery and low fertility. Let us examine some of this evidence.

Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, speaking of Sub-Saharan Africa in the 19th century, says:

“As for aristocratic Sahelian societies, they radically opposed ‘mixed’ marriages between free males and women acquired as slaves. At best, a female slave was a concubine. Other female slaves were less reproductive than free women, first because these women slaves were looked on solely as commodities or were used for labor and not as vehicles to found families, and second because they lived in such harsh conditions that they were not enabled to give birth to, or rear, children. As a result, infanticide was frequent among them, and they often abandoned their babies” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2007, 49).

Gwyn Campbell, writing about Madagascar from 1820-95, writes:

“As elsewhere, excepting in the United States and possibly West Africa, the slave population in Madagascar experienced a high mortality rate and low birth rates and thus failed to reproduce itself, despite comprising mainly women. First, African slaves imported with them deadly diseases ... In addition, slaves were the greatest victims of the *tangena*, a poison ordeal used until 1861 as a chief judicial means of determining guilt, notably in cases of suspected witchcraft and sorcery. Christopher Wrigley considers witch manias to be a reflection of the rage of a male-dominated power structure against women and procreation, and therefore a device to limit population growth” (Campbell 2007, 240).

Peter Boomgard, writing on Indonesia from 1600-1910, says:

“I would add slavery as an important contributory factor to low population growth rates in pre-nineteenth century Indonesia. First, slave-owning societies have low birth rates. This is true both of slave-owners and of slaves themselves. In fact, the need to have children who could be employed as workers is obviated by the possession of slaves ... However, while slavery may have stopped some people from having (more) children, it may have kept people in the slave-exporting areas, such as Bali or Nias, from introducing (more) birth control measures ... Could it be that in bad years these areas, instead of adopting birth control techniques, might have opted to export their population surplus?” (Boomgard 2006, 92).

George Michael La Rue, in “African Slave Women in Egypt, ca. 1820 to the Plague of 1834-35,” tells a mesmerizing story, a microcosm of the anguish and chaos that accompanied slave raiding. Repeated episodes of plague devastated Egypt’s peasant population over centuries, and in 1821,

“Muhammad ‘Ali, ruler of Egypt, sought wealth in sub-Saharan Africa, and the enslavement of African populations was one of his key motives.

“Muhammad ‘Ali requested that African males be sent first, to fill the ranks of his army and provide additional field labor. But he also specifically directed his generals to enslave women in the Sudan and send them north to Egypt ...” (La Rue 2007, 172)

But “Of the first captives sent north in August 1821, males suitable for the army were a distinct minority.” Of 1900 captured, about six hundred made it across the desert. La Rue quotes Victor Schoelcher, an abolitionist observing events in Egypt at the time: ““To see them, one would have said that they were ghosts. Mothers and girls were exhausted and fell to the sand, and finished their suffering by leaving this life”” (La Rue 2007, 172). Muhammad ‘Ali soon saw that he would have to better protect his investment from the depredations of the desert crossing: “New wells were dug, food was provided along the way, and boats were collected or built to bring more slaves alive to Egypt” (La Rue 2007, 173).

Despite these efforts, mortality rates remained high on the journey north. The African women who did reach Cairo were almost all dead by 1835. Those who did not die in childbirth were felled by the plague epidemics of 1824 and 1834, necessitating “a fresh wave of violence” to capture and enslave. The Saharan crossing had not gotten any easier:

“... Edward Lane, the renowned Arabic scholar who lived in Egypt from 1825 to 1828 and again from 1833 to 1835, saw the suffering of the new slave women and implied that most Abyssinian and black female slaves were raped by *jallaba* (trans-Saharan merchants) en route to Egypt. Nor did their suffering stop in Egypt: ‘Even when they have reached and are settled in the Egyptian cities, their average term of existence is deplorably short - not so much from ill-usage, for, on the whole, they are treated with tolerable kindness by the Mahometans - but from the change of climate, altered modes of life, seclusion and pestilential visitations’” (La Rue 2007, 182).

La Rue concludes:

“These reports suggest several demographic patterns among African slave women in Egypt: many were raped at young ages; frequently they bore children by Egyptian masters rather than by African slave men; their children suffered high rates of infant mortality; the women themselves aged rapidly; and both mothers and children were swept away by epidemics” (La Rue 2007, 183).

Orlando Patterson, in *Slavery and Social Death*, says

“The failure to distinguish between age-specific and general rates of birth and death has led to unwarranted generalizations about slave populations’ failing to reproduce out of despair with their lot. True, there have been a few such cases but they are rare in the annals of human slavery. The instinct to reproduce usually triumphs over despair ...” (Patterson 2018, 133).

He uses eighteenth century Jamaica as an example:

“We have already observed that the Jamaican slave population during most of the eighteenth century was unusual for its biological and social nonreproductivity. Between the end of the seventeenth century and the middle of the eighteenth, the enormous growth of the slave population was due to the massive importation of slaves from Africa. Males outnumbered females to a degree greater than any estimate ever suggested for the slave population of ancient Rome. And yet by the end of the 1760s Creole slaves outnumbered Africans” (Patterson 2018, 134)

The examples cited above reveal the extraordinary number of factors which contribute to fertility, the challenges to arriving at reliable trends or estimates over time and place, and the tendency to indulge in gross oversimplifications where ‘the instinct to reproduce’ is involved.

However, the most notable limitation of these examples is that they are modern. The generalization about the low fertility of enslaved women reflects the tendency to simply ignore the much older precedent of enslaving women for the express purpose of exploiting their reproductive labor and the products thereof.

As we have seen in our discussion of kinship-based societies, the story of the ancient enslavement of women overlaps the story of the subjugation of all women. Gerda Lerner, in *The*

Creation of Patriarchy, argues “The oppression of women antedates slavery and makes it possible” (Lerner 1986, 77). Her argument depends on the great antiquity of “[t]he ‘exchange of women,’ ... [which] has been identified by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss as the leading cause of female subordination ... preceded by ... the indoctrination of women, from earliest childhood on, to an acceptance of their obligation to their kin to consent to such enforced marriages ... “ (Lerner 1986, 47).

Joseph C. Miller, in “A Theme in Variations,” the last chapter of *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, discusses Southeast Asia:

“Domestic entities - extended families or household networks, peasant communities and also descent-defined and/or kin-based ‘lineages’ in insular South-East Asia and mountainous regions of the mainland - in these composite polities included everyone. Such intimate communities were strongly patriarchal at all levels, often patrilineal, and affiliated with one another by exchanging women under numerous conditions from honourable, publicly acknowledged, formal, and enduring connections of ‘marriage’, to girls or other dependents ‘loaned’ collectively as ‘pawns’ against cash or other advances of credit, to personal ‘gifts’ and ‘cash purchases’. Females constituted the ongoing and fundamental premise of transactions in people among the lineages, households and other collective entities of composite polities. Outsiders entered these human exchange circuits as ‘slaves,’ in the conventional sense of isolated strangers generally only in small minorities” (Miller 2006, 172).

Whether the enslavement of women modeled the subordination of all women or the other way around, the historical evidence indicates the simultaneity of these two phenomena. As systems which enslaved women became more elaborate, institutionalized and widespread, ‘free’ women were being stripped of their legal rights to property, their authority over their productive and reproductive bodies, and of access to education, participation in government, and economic opportunity.

Gerda Lerner outlines this in her analysis of early legal codes: “In the law codes under discussion [the Codex Hammurabi, the Middle Assyrian Laws, the Hittite Laws and Biblical law] we see a great deal of attention focused on the legal regulation of sexual behavior, with

women being restricted much more severely than men” (Lerner 1986, 102). In this way, she says,

“[t]he state, during the process of the establishment of written law codes, increased the property rights of upper-class women, while it circumscribed their sexual rights and finally totally eroded them. The lifelong dependency of women on fathers and husbands became so firmly established in law and custom as to be considered ‘natural’ and god-given. In the case of lower-class women ... [t]heir sexual and reproductive capacities were commodified, traded, leased, or sold in the interest of male family members. Women of all classes had traditionally been excluded from military power and were, by the turn of the first millenium B.C., excluded from formal education, insofar as it had become institutionalized” (Lerner 1986, 141).

This suggests that the conditions of life for females existed on a spectrum, with no real discontinuity between the conditions of life as enslaved and free. As Lerner says, “The distinction between a free married woman and a slave was expressed within degrees of unfreedom” (Lerner 1986, 96). She later elaborates:

“The class position of women became consolidated and actualized through their sexual relationships. It always was expressed within degrees of unfreedom on a spectrum ranging from the slave woman, whose sexual and reproductive capacity was commodified as she herself was; to the slave-concubine, whose sexual performance might elevate her own status or that of her children; then to the ‘free’ wife, whose sexual and reproductive services to one man of the upper classes entitled her to property and legal rights” (Lerner 1986, 215).

The central fact of life for women, whether enslaved or free, was lack of agency.

Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch addresses this matter in “Women, Marriage, and Slavery in Sub-Saharan Africa in the Nineteenth Century” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2007, 42-61). She says:

“Particularly in the most patriarchal of the patrilineal societies, the function, if not also the status, of a free wife differed little from that of a slave ... [S]ince most of the time individuals were not recognized apart from their kinship relationships, a slave was uprooted (i.e., taken out or away from his or her ‘normal’ kin ties and milieu). This isolation was, at least on a small scale, also the case for female spouses; most marriages were patrilocal, and most wives were foreign to the villages where they had to live after marriage” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2007, 43).

Whether wives enjoyed access to greater natal support than slaves may have depended on local custom, or whether patrilocality undermined this access. From the enslaved woman's perspective, however, whether she had the experience of forcible removal from her natal place or was born enslaved, this meant a shifting of reliance and allegiance from kin, largely and daily female, to the master. If she was 'free,' but by custom living with her husband's kin, this shift would have been to him and his unfamiliar, and not necessarily supportive, kin.

Joseph C. Miller, in his introduction to *Women and Slavery*, states this:

“For women, the social membrane separating slave and ‘free’ was more permeable than for men ... it made relatively little practical difference to women whether they were slave, that is, without significant local networks of their own, or well and deeply connected as sisters, nieces, and wives, since all lived - and worked very hard - under the generalized patriarchal control of fathers, husbands, and brothers ... the key distinction between their positions lay in wives' access to responsible kin, to whom they could appeal for protection if they were ill treated” (Miller 2007, 26).

This shift in the quotidian conditions of all women is pivotal to understanding the ability of women to resist and oppose these conditions. It addresses the nagging question of why women conspired for so many centuries in their own subordination. The removal of women from all kin and natal support was an important step in hampering their ability to organize resistance. Differences in language and customs would have impeded them. Their experiences of violence, loss, grief and trauma would have further depleted their energy for resistance. The social organizations in which they found themselves gave them limited opportunities for success. In Islamic systems they could compete for the sexual attention of the master, hope to bear him a son, and hope that *sharia* would be adhered to in granting her 'freedom.'

Alone among these scholars, Gerda Lerner discusses the economic imperatives which increasingly drove this coercive behavior. She writes:

“Women’s reproductive capacity is first recognized as a tribal resource, then, as ruling elites develop, it is acquired as the property of a particular kin group.

“This occurs with the development of agriculture ... In the fully developed society based on plow agriculture, women and children are indispensable to the production process, which is cyclical and labor intensive. Children have now become an economic asset. At this stage tribes seek to acquire the reproductive potential of women, rather than women themselves” (Lerner 1986, 49-50).

“... Thus, the first appropriation of private property consists of the appropriation of the labor of women as *reproducers* ... we must conclude that in the course of the agricultural revolution the exploitation of human labor and the sexual exploitation of women become inextricably linked” (Lerner 1986, 52).

Here Lerner not only reminds us of the importance of labor, and of women as the means of production of that labor power, but names the control of women as a significant step in the definition of private property. I will discuss below the role scholarship has played in placing the productive and reproductive work of women outside of the realm of economic significance, and how it might limit our understanding.

First, however, I will follow the female story of slavery to its modern, male conclusion.

THE COLLISION BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AFRICAN AND IOW SLAVERY, AND EUROPEAN SLAVERS

As Europeans began to circle the globe in the 15th century, they encountered existing slave systems almost everywhere. Ancient kinship-based and more modern Islamic systems had been coexisting for centuries, from West Africa to Southeast Asia.

Joseph Miller writes:

“The shared framework of changes coursing through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Atlantic from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries was an intensifying commercialization, as merchants consolidated a new global economy and governmental authorities sought to integrate larger and increasingly imagined communities of insiders who seldom encountered one another. Throughout Atlantic Europe, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist Asia, Muslim and non-Muslim Africa, and the Americas, they did so out of many different older, much more concrete ‘domestic’ communities - including households, domains and estates, peasant villages, ‘lineages’ ...” (Miller 2006, 169).

Here Miller is talking about the profound transformation of ancient, traditional societies on four continents as they fought to protect their sovereignty in the face of this ‘new global economy.’ In these older, ‘domestic’ communities, slaves were present, but in the minority. However, Miller says, “the numbers of such slaves increased significantly from about the fourteenth century in the dialectic of political expansion and accelerating commercial growth and integration ... The rivals particularly significant to slaving after the fifteenth century were (particularly foreign) merchants” (Miller 2006, 172-3).

This turbulent, 300-year process of ‘intensifying commercialization’ also meant a shift in sex ratios among the enslaved, as, for the first time in its history, the focus of slaving moved from local ‘domestic communities’ to unimaginably distant industrial enterprises. Gwyn Campbell says: “Overall, it is clear that the structure of slaving and slavery in the IOW differed considerably from that of the Atlantic world ... First, unlike the Atlantic slave-trade in which

predominantly male Africans were shipped to plantations to serve as field hands, the majority of slaves traded in the IOW were female ...” (Campbell 2006, x).

Paul E. Lovejoy agrees with Campbell’s characterization of the IOW trade as predominantly female, but he argues for a deeper analysis. In “Internal Markets or an Atlantic-Sahara Divide?” he writes:

“The Atlantic and Sahara slave trades are often portrayed as serving two distinct forms of slavery, the first reflecting the preference for males over females for use as labor, especially in the fields, and the second representing the Muslim preference for women to fill harems, and correspondingly their relatively insignificant economic roles ... However, these generalizations disguise discrepancies and historical change that can be traced to the political geography of Africa and specifically to restrictions on the slave trade that seem to have been enforced in Muslim areas of West Africa ... As Claire Robertson and Martin Klein have argued, a majority of slaves in western Africa were females. This preference for females affected the demographic structure of the transatlantic slave trade, with the result that fewer females were sent to the Americas than were retained within Africa. As is argued here, this preference for females within Africa was particularly pronounced in Muslim areas in the interior of West Africa ... This regional specificity of the gender of those sold is one of the most striking characteristics of the slave trade of West Africa, which was reflected in the prices paid for males and females in the interior and at the coast.

The gendered division of the slave trade in the interior of West Africa affected the enforced flow of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic. Preferences for slaves among Muslims in particular explain why males usually cost more on the coast than females, while in the interior, particularly in Muslim areas, females generally cost as much as a third more than males. In short the internal market in Muslim areas, not some divide between Atlantic and Sahara, was a significant factor, and perhaps even the dominant factor, in the determination of prices” (Lovejoy 2007, 260).

Elaborating on this action of supply and demand in the African slave trade, Lovejoy says in his 2012 book *Transformations in Slavery*:

“During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the number of slaves increased, with the result that many societies experienced a social transformation ... In the northern savanna, where older patterns of economy and society continued ... [w]omen and children were exported in greater numbers than men, even though the domestic market for women and children was greater than for men. This market preference in both the export and domestic spheres meant that the cost of male labor was relatively low, which guaranteed the maintenance of labor supply for agriculture.

“Along the West African coast and in west-central Africa (and in scattered spots elsewhere), by contrast the export market favored young males, so that the domestic

preference for women and children and the foreign trade complemented each other” (Lovejoy 2012, 109).

Orlando Patterson, in *Slavery and Social Death*, discusses the shift in internal slaving practices after contact with Europeans:

“The Aboh, who traditionally had taken women and children, with the coming of the Europeans took both sexes, keeping the women and children for themselves and selling the males to the Europeans. The Vai, before 1826, took only women and children. Between 1826 and 1850 they took mainly men, to meet the demand on the coast. When the Atlantic trade dried up in about 1850, they returned to the practice of killing male captives and taking only women and children. This changing sexual bias was even more pronounced among the Duala of West Africa, who until 1700 took mainly women and children, to meet their own traditional domestic needs; then between 1700 and 1807 shifted to an emphasis on males, to meet the needs of the European traders; after 1807 returned to an emphasis on women and children when the export trade declined; then, with a shift in their own mode of production at the turn of the century, changed once again to the acquisition of mainly male captives, a pattern that continued until 1920, when slavery was finally abolished” (Patterson 2018, 122).

Joseph Miller divides the globe according to its response to or place in the new global economy, based on the industrial use of male slaves:

“Slaving intensified in the Indian and Atlantic oceanic regions in contrasting ways. Three relatively similar regional contexts emerge along the continuum of relative commercialization: (1) less commercialized mountainous mainland Asia and insular south-eastern Asia, parts of western, central and eastern Africa and most of native America, (2) the remaining partially commercialized parts of western, northeastern and eastern Africa and coastal and lowland Asia where Muslim (and other) merchant interests competed with local domestic communities and - primarily - strong military states, and (3) the maritime Atlantic and most of the Americas, where mercantile interest emerged unchallenged after c.1600. In all these, slaving provided a principal strategy by which merchants operating on scales that transcended local residential communities succeeded locally based agricultural, military, and religious interests in commanding the economic activity of populations they controlled. In this division of the consolidating global economy, Europe stood apart. There, merchants employed primarily financial means to consolidate control ...” (Miller 2006, 170).

Europeans approached Africans as trading partners first. However, their increasing economic power, particularly their skillful use of credit (which was restricted for Muslims although this, too, was worked around), gave them enormous sway. Miller says

“The rivals particularly significant to slaving after the fifteenth century were (particularly foreign) merchants, who ... by this era were independently acquiring sufficient wealth to challenge the military rulers ...

“Commercial credit from such foreign traders enabled merchant communities in the principal political spheres to extend investments in peasant production. Domestically, such regional merchants had undercut the coercive power of military rulers by loaning cash to peasants ... The resulting peasant indebtedness ... burdened borrowers indefinitely, and ... was passed along to heirs through the generations. Debtors, or more likely their children - particularly girls - fell victims ...” (Miller 2006, 173).

Through the 17th and 18th centuries, Europeans expanded their economic control on the African continent to eventual occupation and political control. Over the course of the 19th century, the peak of European colonization of Africa, abolition ended first the European slave trade and then slavery itself. There were some ironic consequences for the female enslaved in this process. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch says “Female slavery increased all over Africa during the nineteenth century. In the west, the dwindling Atlantic slave trade led to a glut of captives retained, and many of the women among them were then sent across the western Sudan by conquerors’ armies. Other women slaves remained as tools of production ...” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2007, 55).

And in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was Europeans themselves to whom female slaves turned: Coquery-Vidrovitch says “when the first ‘villages de liberte’ (freedom villages) were created by the French colonizers [in sub-Saharan Africa] to receive former slaves, more women than men fled there as refugees” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2007, 56). Suzanne Miers writes “Abdul Sheriff writing on the Persian Gulf region, and Suzanne Miers writing on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, note that a number of slaves took refuge with British officials or on British warships, risking recapture and severe punishment, in order to obtain manumission” (Miers 2006, 5). James Francis Warren describes the same thing in the Philippines in the late

18th and 19th century: “After the 1830s, when Spanish warships began to frequent the area, larger numbers of *banyaga* risked escape ... fugitives were assured protection on European warships” (Warren 2006, 122). Jan-Georg Deutsch, describing German East Africa, writes “In the later 1890s and the early 1900s, during which slavery drastically declined in East Africa, the strategies of female slaves changed as they now embarked on a quest for greater personal autonomy. Because of greater security of movement provided by the establishment of colonial rule, flight, and, to a lesser extent redemption became more common” (Deutsch 2007, 140).

During this tumultuous period of intense and accelerated change, in which once distant groups of people were exposed to one another in relationships of commerce and power, a global economy developed that was based on slavery. But in this instance, it was a unique type. The Greeks and Romans had male slaves, for agriculture, civil construction, administration and soldiering (Roth 2007). In Islamic slave systems powerful male slaves who operated in administrative and political spheres were common (Patterson 2018, 299-333). There were always men trapped in debt so that they and their heirs were de facto enslaved. But trans-Atlantic slavery was different. It was the adaptation of the coerced body to be a cog in an industrial machine. So powerful, so transgressive, so successful was this exploitation that its echoes are still felt everywhere today.

The reality of the enslaved male body as machine was so repugnant that it ended in the abolition of ‘legal’ slavery. However, in the United States of America, one of the nations built by the trans-Atlantic trade, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution incentivizes the criminalization of the sons and daughters of the formerly enslaved, for profit. It guarantees that Black people will still be surveilled, harassed, isolated, disadvantaged, penalized and imprisoned

long after they were granted their 'freedom.' The trauma of the trans-Atlantic trade is a continuing one.

Below I suggest some opportunities for further research.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Raiding behavior

In his introduction to the 2006 edition *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, Gwyn Campbell writes

“... slavery became increasingly important the more economically developed and politically centralized a society became. Geographical expansion, intrinsic to state formation, entailed the conquest and subjugation of weaker neighbors. This was, for instance, the reputed origin of slavery in Mesopotamia and India in the third and first millennia BCE respectively.

Most adult males captured in campaigns of military expansion were killed, while younger women and children were enslaved ...” (Campbell 2006, xii-xiii).

These ‘campaigns of military expansion,’ describe a range of activities, from aggressions by the people of one settlement on another to invasions of armies under a state authority. I here refer to this entire spectrum of activity as raiding. There is evidence for this behavior in the context of almost all human settlement even prior to emergent states. It appears that intersettlement aggression emerged almost contemporaneously with the practice of settlement (Otto et al 2007, Gat 2015). In many cases the killing of men and taking into captivity of women and children is specifically mentioned.

Gerda Lerner, in *The Creation of Patriarchy*, attests to the antiquity of the practice in both Mesoamerica and Mesopotamia:

“In the Inca Empire the conquerors extended their rule by forcing conquered villages to provide virgins for state service and as potential wives for Inca noblemen ... We will see a similar process at work in Mesopotamia in the practice of destroying conquered towns, killing the men, and deporting the women and children to slavery in the land of the conquerors, and in the network of marriage alliances among rulers to cement interstate cooperation” (Lerner 1986, 58).

She writes “Historical evidence suggests that [the] process of enslavement was at first developed and perfected upon female war captives” (Lerner 1986, 78) and “There is overwhelming historical evidence for the preponderance of the practice of killing or mutilating

male prisoners and for the large-scale enslavement and rape of female prisoners” (Lerner 1986, 81).

Orlando Patterson cites this practice by the Greeks and Romans: “Finley says of Homeric Greece ... ‘There was little ground, economic or moral, for sparing the lives of the defeated men. The heroes as a rule killed the males and carried off the females, regardless of rank’” (Patterson 2018, 120). He goes on to quote Ducrey, speaking of 6 - 2 century BCE Greece, as having

“found that the practice of enslaving the women and children and killing the men was no longer ‘normal,’ but was still quite common. The situation was not much different among the Romans. Indeed, some authorities suggest that their practices seem to have been closer to what we find among the primitives. Mars M. Westington concluded his study of atrocities in Roman warfare by observing that ‘the slaughter of adult males and the enslavement of women and children is tersely mentioned with the regularity of a fugal theme ... the primitive practice of massacring the men and enslaving only the women and children was clearly attested in numerous instances’” (Patterson 2018, 121).

The practice continued long into the 19th century. Turton describes slave raiding on the border of Burma and Siam in the 1830s (Turton 2006, 70,71,75); Boomgard attests not only to raiding as a source of slaves but to the frequent killing of male captives, with the females and children sold into slavery in Indochina over his period of study, 1600-1910 (Boomgard 2006, 89); Warren discusses the Sulu Sultanate of the late 18th-19th century where “The prosperity of the ... Sultanate depended to a large extent on the labour of *banyaga* [slaves] who crewed the raiding *prahus*” (Warren 2006, 116) (in other words, slaves manned the slave raids); and Delaye writes about the mountain tribes in Indochina, traditionally vulnerable to slave raids and also engaging in it themselves, where it was “common to kidnap women and children for sale” (Delaye 2006, 132). Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, speaking of Sub-Saharan Africa in the 19th century, says “A number of societies also captured women from other people or bought them for

marriage. Wife capture or purchase was widespread in the kinship-based societies ... of what is today southern Ivory Coast” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2007, 48).

Orlando Patterson writes: “There was certainly a decline in the tendency among more advanced peoples to kill off their male captives, especially when there was an economic need ... but before the Atlantic slave trade we rarely find more males being captured than females, and the practice of massacring male captives remained prevalent even where they were also enslaved” (Patterson 2018, 120-1).

The ‘fugal theme’ of the slaughter of men and taking of women and children in violent raids should be further explored. For example, in “Fragility of Vulnerable Social Institutions in Andean States,” Tom Dillehay and Steven Wernke write

“The Inka state was excessively expansionistic ... The motives for its sustained aggressiveness are not well understood but we can surmise from historical documents that the first conquest of neighboring ethnic groups could have been undertaken for vengeance and a desire to consolidate their geopolitical situation ...” (Dillehay and Wernke 2019, 114).

Gerda Lerner, as cited above (Lerner 1986, 58), has used the same civilization as an example of raiding for women. Can it help us to understand Inka aggressiveness if we give weight to the need of their elites for virgins for state service and wives for noblemen? All of our evidence regarding early warfare can be reexamined for signs of raiding behavior and the ways it might have served aggressors.

Population, fragility, and reproductive appropriation

I have suggested that there is evidence that women’s reproductive labor was appropriated in order to protect population levels from the time of the earliest states onward. This is an assertion that needs further research and discussion.

In “Entropic Cities: The Paradox of Urbanism in Ancient Mesopotamia.” Guillermo Algaze presents the challenges of maintaining ancient urban populations. As he states it, “The paradox is this: absent strict sanitation standards and advances in preventive medicine that took place only in the last 200 years or so, premodern cities would have been entropic over the long term, unable to reproduce themselves demographically – much less grow – without a constant stream of new population” (Algaze 2018, 23).

This is a challenge to the traditional paradigm which holds that agriculture and the population densities which accompanied it were an unalloyed success for humans. James Scott has popularized this discussion in *Against the Grain* (Scott 2017), citing among the “burden(s) of agriculture ... the direct epidemiological effect of concentration” as well as “the state plague of taxes in the form of grain, labor, and conscription over and above onerous agricultural work.” He asks “How, in such circumstances, did the early state manage to assemble, hold, and augment its subject population?” (Scott 2017, 21).

Guillermo Algaze roundly rejects the role of reproduction in the replacement of non-elite population:

“ ... a significant portion of the inhabitants of premodern cities would have lived lives of isolated dependency, working as household servants, slaves, or soldiers, or as laborers ... the contingent nature of such activities would surely have promoted relatively high levels of celibacy among the lower-status individuals forced to engage in them. At a minimum, the sorts of full or partial dependency entailed would not have been conducive to early marriage or to the formation of stable families, resulting, one presumes, in lower birth rates and higher infant mortality rates ...” (Algaze 2018, 23).

Here Algaze makes some questionable assumptions about ‘relatively high levels of celibacy’ and about the importance of the nuclear family as a reproductive pathway for ‘lower-status individuals.’ Scott is not so dismissive of the reproductive potential of the dependent portion of the population:

“It would be instructive, but alas impossible to know, in the light of the epidemiological challenges of early state centers, the importance of slave women’s reproduction to the demographic stability and growth of the state. The domestication of non-slave women in the early grain state may also be seen in the same light. A combination of property in land, the patriarchal family, the division of labor within the domus, and the state’s overriding interest in maximizing its population has the effect of domesticating women's reproduction in general” (Scott 2017, 181).

To Gerda Lerner as well, the evidence suggests a connection between population pressure and the appropriation of women’s reproductive labor. Speaking about ‘the semi-nomadic tribes conquering Canaan’ c. 1250 BCE, she says “The combined pressure of the need for agricultural labor in settling a desert environment and the concurrent loss of population due to wars and epidemics ... may explain the Biblical emphasis on the family and on women's procreative role” (Lerner 1986, 164).

There is a growing literature around the idea of fragility in the development of cities and states, which counters the idea of a steady march towards civilization. In *The Evolution of Fragility: Setting the Terms*, edited by Norman Yoffee (Yoffee, ed. 2019), contributors address eight early states and cities specifically with an eye to detecting and analyzing the factors that might have made them fragile and those that might have made them resilient and durable.

Almost all of them (Dillehay and Wernke 2019 on the Inka, 9; McAnany 2019 on the Maya, 49, 56-7; Pauketat 2019 on Cahokia and Chaco, 102-3; Petrie 2019 on the Indus, 110, 119; Stark 2019 on Angkor, 162) ponder, at least briefly, how commoners would have been affected by the cycles of resilience and fragility in these nascent centers of power and population. Most of the writing, however, is focused firmly on the elites and the environment, and the mistakes made by the former regarding the latter and many other factors.

However, Peter Robertshaw, writing on sub Saharan Africa, has this to say: “Historical and ethnographic data reveal that many pre-Colonial African chiefdoms and states had very low population densities, whereas the opposite was true of acephalous societies ... Therefore elites are likely to have pursued wealth-in-people rather than wealth-in-things.” (Robertshaw 2019, 142). He says “Women, as farmers and as reproducers of labour, would have been needed as much as men” (Robertshaw 2019, 147).

This gives us a tantalizing suggestion about what can be gained by examining the behavior of elites in hoarding population and reproductive resources. Can we examine other state-making attempts in low population densities and detect the same patterns?

A persistent focus on commoner life is enormously instructive. Archaeologists often complain about the concentration of excavation and analysis on public structures. But there is a great deal of data now on the living quarters of common people, and it is well represented in fragility studies. Justin Jennings inadvertently explores this in his book *Killing Civilization* (Jennings 2016). Although he does not use it in his analysis, he comes back, again and again, to the puzzle of living spaces: in Catalhoyuk (Jennings 2016, 97-104), in Cahokia (Jennings 2016, 124-5), in Harappa (Jennings 2016, 153-6), in Jenne-jeno (Jennings 2016, 186-8), and in Tiahuanaco (Jennings 2016, 211, 214-5). He calls it ‘compartmentalization,’ a way of dealing with scalar stress (Johnson 1982). Algaze (Algaze 2018), as well as other authors I have mentioned above, assumes in many cases that these compartments contained a nuclear family. It is time to re-examine our evidence on that, to allow for alternative interpretations, and to see what the evidence can tell us about social organization around reproduction at these fascinating sites.

In the next section, I examine the recent literature on slavery with an emphasis on biases which have impeded our understanding of the place of women in systems of enslavement.

RESEARCH BIAS IN THE STUDY OF WOMEN AND SLAVERY

From the earliest records we have of slavery, evidence clearly demonstrates a marked preference for women, and a marked intention to enslave them. Orlando Patterson, in *Slavery and Social Death*, closes his section on enslavement by captivity in warfare and by kidnapping: “One final issue ... sexual bias. A common view is that among more primitive peoples ... there was a strong preference for women, but that with more advanced social systems ... the bias shifted toward the taking of male captives. The comparative data suggest otherwise ... It turns out ... that this sexual bias in favor of women holds true for the great majority of peoples” (Patterson 2018, 120).

Gwyn Campbell writes: “unlike the Atlantic slave-trade in which predominantly male Africans were shipped to plantations to serve as field hands, the majority of slaves traded in the IOW were female, notably girls and young women ...” (Campbell 2006, xi).

How do scholars explain this sex ratio imbalance? Campbell says “Most adult males captured in campaigns of military expansion were killed, while younger women and children were enslaved, a practice largely motivated by the expenses of surveilling men who were more likely to flee or rebel than women or children” (Campbell 2006, xii-xiii).

Orlando Patterson says it was “the problem of security in the captor’s society. It is obvious that women and children were easier to take than men, they were also easier to keep and to absorb in the community” (Patterson 2018, 120-1). Joseph Miller, in his introduction to *Women and Slavery* says much the same: “The captors found many advantages in having females as slaves. Girls and women were less likely to try to escape than young men or boys and easier to absorb into households” (Miller 2007, 11). Even the feminist historian Gerda Lerner writes “It is difficult to know what first led men to the ‘conditional commutation of death’ for

women and children. Most likely their greater physical vulnerability and weakness made them appear less of a threat in captivity than did male enemy warriors” (Lerner 1986, 78).

It is remarkable that scholars must resort to deterministic, culturally specific attributes of women - their docility and their physical weakness - in order to explain the undeniable predominance of women among the enslaved, while ignoring the reality of the fact that they can produce offspring, even under coercion.

Sometimes scholars simply ignore the reproductive capacity of women in favor of their sexual exploitation: as in Machado’s analysis of Mozambique 1730-1830 (Machado 2006, 27), which mentions the demand for female slaves as ‘domestic workers and concubines,’ and “the express purpose of purchasing young girls to be brought up to prostitution;” and Boomgaard’s mention of Bali as a place where “rulers employed sometimes 300 slaves as prostitutes” (Boomgard 2006, 87).

Even when the role of reproduction is acknowledged, its inevitable association with sexual exploitation can be problematic. The sexual attractiveness of women as a factor in their enslavement can obscure other issues. Gwyn Campbell writes that the female majority of slaves traded in the IOW were “valued particularly for their sexual attractiveness and reproductive capacity” (Campbell 2006, xi). Paul Lovejoy, on the first page of *Transformations in Slavery*, says “slaves are property ... [T]hey do not have the right to their own sexuality and, by extension, to their own reproductive capacities” (Lovejoy 2012, 1).

Joseph C. Miller, in his introduction to *Women and Slavery*, says:

“[Women’s] distinctive strategic value as slaves ... lay in their vulnerability to control, and therefore sometimes - perhaps often, even ubiquitously - to abuses, sexual and otherwise. But as women, their sexual availability also made them vehicles for producing children ... not subject to the claims of in-laws or other potential protectors ... For men, the value of women brought into households through slaving thus turned on their reproductive capacities. The children resulting from their sexual allure in the eyes

of men these enslaved women in turn forged into a classic weapon of the weak ...” (Miller 2007, 32-3).

Considering the harem, an ancient institution of polygyny, Martin Klein also confuses the issues of sexual exploitation and reproduction: “When I have articulated skepticism about the value of the harem, friends have often said that it was about prestige ... If that were so, then why did they confine their harems behind walls? ... Women were acquired for their beauty and were trained to make love.” But he goes on to say “The harem met several basic needs. First, it was a place where the dynasty reproduced itself. It did not need hundreds of women. It did, however, need to guarantee heirs” (Klein 2007, 76-7).

In all these examples, ‘sexual attractiveness,’ ‘sexual allure,’ ‘beauty’ are forefronted. It is not that the importance of reproduction is ignored, but the emphasis on female desirability threatens to turn the systematic kidnapping and enslaving of women into an aesthetic exercise.

Orlando Patterson writes: “Another attribute of slaves that influenced their condition was gender. It should not be assumed that female slaves were always acquired primarily for sexual purposes. Among most of the more developed slaveholding societies of Africa, women - both free and slave - played a major role in food production” (Patterson 2018, 179).

Here Patterson makes another important distinction which normalizes and makes invisible the enslavement of women: the relegation of any sexual or reproductive role to economic non-entity. Suzanne Miers, in her discussion of the definition of slavery in the Indian Ocean world, firmly separates ‘labour exploitation for economic motives’ from the ‘equally important’ categories of slaves as status symbols, human sacrifices, prostitutes and concubines (Miers 2006, 7). Not only is no economic benefit recognized for these latter categories, but their reproductive capacity is not mentioned. Even prostitution is reckoned as devoid of economic function. This is a profound misunderstanding of economies from ancient times to the present.

If concubinage, prostitution and trafficking in women are discussed in the context of their role in the marketplace, sometimes they are then exempted from the definition of slavery, despite the fact that, as Gerda Lerner writes “It is likely that commercial prostitution derived directly from the enslavement of women ... “ (Lerner 1986, 133). Discussing late imperial China, Angela Schottenhammer does acknowledge that ‘research into the trafficking of women’ is an exception to the neglect of the topic of chattel slavery by Western sinologists (Schottenhammer 2006, 143). But she exempts “the sale of young Chinese girls of non-slave status as concubines ... and trafficking in female prostitutes that continued until 1949” from her definition of “‘slaves’ in a strictly legal sense.” She goes on to say “The dominant form of slavery in late Imperial China was domestic slavery,” but fails to specify whether this involved largely men or women. Her final sentence of the chapter seems to recognize this lack: “any analysis of [the demand for domestic labor] should incorporate a study [of] traditional Chinese ideology, notably in relation to gender” (Schottenhammer 2006, 151).

The uncritical assumption of a modern, patriarchal lens for analyzing other times and other cultures can complicate the study of the experiences of men and women in enslavement. Karine Delaye writes about Indochina: “According to a more precise evaluation by Jean Moura, Representative of Kampuchea Protectorate: ‘On 24 March 1877, there were 3015 Comlas and 6580 Pols in the kingdom, not including women and children’ - Comlas and Pols being ‘state’ slaves. Working on the assumption that these men were generally married and fathers of families, one could undoubtedly multiply this figure by three” (Delaye 2006, 131). Delaye does not present evidence of the pathways to marriage and family for state slaves. No explanation is sought for why women and children were excluded from the count, nor is evidence presented for

the conditions of life for these women and children. It is assumed that they belong to the nuclear family of a male state slave, rather than residing with the master or in segregated quarters.

In his discussion of ‘Marriage and Other Unions’ under ‘the Condition of Slavery’ (Patterson 2018, 186-90) Orlando Patterson focuses almost exclusively on the male point of view: “Male slaves were allowed two wives in most traditions and were permitted to divorce them” (Patterson 2018, 188); “The slave, however, never became a paterfamilias and could never exercise potestas” (Patterson 2018, 189). The fact that enslaved women had no rights over their children is mentioned only obliquely: “Among the Ashanti ... the children of slaves belonged to the master unless the mother was a free woman” (Patterson 2018, 188). Their lack of agency even in sanctioned marriages is assumed.

Many scholars of slavery have simply omitted all discussion of sex from their presentation. Richard Allen on Madagascar (Allen 2006, 133); Alpers on escapes of African enslaved in the Indian Ocean world, 1650-1962 (Alpers 2006, 151); Boomgard on Indonesia from 1600-1910 (Boomgard 2006, 85-6); Miller, (Miller 2006, 170); all of these authors mention the sex of the enslaved once or twice or not at all, and never as a basis for analysis.

In a 2006 article entitled “Islam, Slavery and Jihad in West Africa” (Searing 2006), James Searing takes note that slavery was a “widespread institution in what became the heartlands of Islam,” and that the Prophet Muhammad sought to reform slavery, but not to end it. Nowhere in the article, however, does he discuss the fact that most Islamic slaves were women and that although Islamic nations eventually abolished slavery, in many of these nations polygyny is at present not forbidden and women are still, in many respects, entirely dependent on men.

Joseph Miller, in his “Historical Schema of Slaving in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean Regions,” discusses the introduction of commercialization by Europeans and its impact on the traditional slave trades in Africa. Despite the fact that this is the final chapter in a volume whose editor and authors repeatedly call attention to the preponderance of females in the enslaved population of the Indian Ocean world, he mentions the sex of the enslaved but once: “[D]omestic communities ... [who] also used slaving to adapt, ... eventually reacted violently against the pervasive pillage of kidnapping, man-stealing, and - mostly - ‘womanizing’, if the modern sense of the term may be extended to earlier practices of direct seizures of females” (Miller 2006, 170-171). I would suggest emphatically that ‘womanizing’ is not an appropriate term in this context.

Orlando Patterson, although stating quite clearly “that this sexual bias in favor of women [among the enslaved population] holds true for the great majority of peoples” (120) designates as “The Ultimate Slave” the mamluk, the administrative slave, the eunuch of Byzantium and China, almost exclusively male (Patterson 2018, 299-333). And in his exhaustive Appendix C, “The Large Scale Slave Systems,” which lists the proportion of slaves within a total population, the figures are not broken down by sex (Patterson 2018, 353-64).

Patterson resorts to a generic idea of market flexibility in order to explain the sexual bias in favor of women: “Often radical shifts in sexual preference took place over time ... During the earliest periods of Mesopotamian and Egyptian history there was a decided preference for female prisoners, males being killed on the spot; later the bias moved in favor of males.” But the note to that paragraph states: “This shift in favor of male captives does not mean, however, that male slaves ever came to outnumber females” (Patterson 2018, 121n403). Patterson cannot escape the preponderance of female enslaved, yet he cannot satisfactorily explain it.

Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, writing on “Women, Marriage, and Slavery in sub-Saharan African in the Nineteenth Century,” says:

“The fact is that many scholars still have a tendency to speak of peasants and slaves without differentiating among either by gender. [Claude] Meillasoux was the first to initiate a change, with his seminal study published in 1975. He underlined the major role of women in rural Africa and in agriculture - a fact that is nowadays well known - pointing out their double exploitation, first as producers (in a subsistence economy) and second as reproducers (thanks to their fertility). Meantime, in the Western world, Victorian and bourgeois ideologies focused on women exclusively as reproducers, keeping them in the domestic sphere, which in Europe meant at home” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2007, 56-7).

Yet feminist scholars are no less vulnerable to the tendency to diminish the reproductive labor of women. Ulrike Roth speaks of Rome: “Mention of the female slave ... remains almost exclusively concentrated on the sphere of (biological) reproduction - all nicely guided by the parameters of Roman imperial history, and thus in good agreement with the pattern discerned from the literary sources.” She bitterly cites “the virtual *neglect* of female slave labour in Cato’s *De agricultura*, followed a hundred years later by some *references* to female slaves in Varro’s *De re rustica*, climaxing, as it seems in a bit of *discussion* of female slaves in Columella’s *De re rustica* in the 1st century AD ...” (Roth 2007, 5).

Certainly there is grounds for Roth’s bitterness at women’s erasure from the arena of important productive economic labor. Feminist scholars respond defensively to the assumption that all women are good for is making babies. But if we make reproduction the argument that we must counter, we hamstring ourselves in understanding women’s long subordination, not to mention, as Gerda Lerner says, “women’s historical ‘complicity’ in upholding ... and in transmitting that system that subordinated them and in transmitting that system, generation after generation, to their children of both sexes ...” (Lerner 1986, 6). Ulrike Roth says if we “believe that we can get the full story of Rome’s drive for empire by focusing on men ... we not only get

half the story, but we simply get it wrong” (Roth 2007, 2). By ignoring the reproductive capacity of women and how its exploitation was foundational to the establishment of states and economies, we simply get it wrong.

CONCLUSION

James Scott writes: “It would be instructive, but alas impossible to know, in the light of the epidemiological challenges of early state centers, the importance of slave women’s reproduction to the demographic stability and growth of the state” (Scott 2017, 181). In this paper I attempt to challenge the idea that this is unknowable. I offer a possible contribution by exploring the evidence of the institutionalization of control over women’s reproduction in African and Indian Ocean world indigenous slave systems. The scholars who have explored this evidence have themselves linked these systems to much earlier systems with their roots in the oldest civilizations for which we have evidence. I have suggested that we further explore the connection between this process and the growth of political and economic systems which demanded population concentration and increase.

I have presented evidence that indigenous slavery in Africa and the Indian Ocean World was majority female, and that these systems which enslaved women served the purpose of reproductive control and ownership. I have delved into the laws and structures of these systems for illumination on how these women fared, and found a simultaneity between the institutionalization of their owned status and an accelerating loss of agency for all women. The enslavement of women, and the systematic stripping of rights from all women, are two almost universal historical processes. As we would with any such widespread phenomenon, we must attend to the probability that they reflect significant political, economic and social imperatives.

In a few thousand years, human beings moved from beginning to contest the innovative and transgressive idea of ownership (Engels and Leacock 1983, Lerner 1986) to owning one another. Within this very short span of time, women found themselves bound to the dictates of a system which, in order to flourish, had to surveil, coerce and control them. Bereft of influential

kin, of female allies, and of potency in their own eyes and the eyes of their children, the agency and the fortunes of women went into steep decline, from which they are only now beginning to recover. Even now, freedom from oppressive surveillance and control is the exception if you are a woman, and women's reproductive rights and right to equal treatment are everywhere under constant threat.

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