ABOLITION AS A RACIAL PROJECT: ERASURES AND RACIALIZATIONS ON THE BORDERS OF BRITISH INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The abolition of slavery in the British Empire demanded a complete transformation of the global legal and political order. Focusing on British India, this chapter argues that this restructuring was, in and of itself, a vital racial project that played out on a global stage. Examining these dynamics over the nineteenth century, I trace how this project unfolded from the vantage point of the Bombay Presidency and the western coast of India, tightly integrated into Indian Ocean networks trading goods, ideas, and, of course, peoples. I show how Shidis – African origin groups in South Asia and across the Middle East – were almost the sole subjects of British antislavery interventions in India after abolition. This association was intensified over the nineteenth century as Indian slavery was simultaneously reconfigured to recede from view. This chapter establishes these dynamics empirically by examining a dataset of encounters at borders, ports, and transit hubs, showing how the legal and political regime that emerged after abolition forged novel configurations around "race" and "slavery." Documenting these "benign" encounters shifts attention to the racializing dimensions of imperial abolition, rather than enslavement. Once "freed," the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus that monitored and managed Shidis inscribed this identity into the knowledge regime of the colonial state resulting in the long-term racialization of Shidis in South Asia, the effects of which are still present today.

Keywords: Empire; South Asia; slavery; abolition; law; classification

On December 10, 1856, Lieutenant Colonel Hamerton discovered Jama and several other Africans on board the Futteh Kareem, a vessel docked in Bombay's harbor. Determined to liberate these poor souls from captivity – as was the moral duty of every agent of the British Empire – it would have dampened the heroic spirit of the moment when Jama turned around and emphatically denied that he was a slave. Instead, Jama insisted that he was a free seaman and demanded to be allowed to return to Zanzibar. Reluctantly, Hamerton allowed the vessel to depart with all its passengers: "It was evidently impossible to do anything respecting the manumission of men who either were not slaves, or were unwilling to be set free." Although slightly ruffled, Hamerton remained convinced of his intuition. He admitted this was a peculiar case but proceeded to give orders that all *nakohdas* (captains) arriving in Bombay should be obliged "to account for all Africans found on board."[1] The traffic in slaves would not be tolerated in British India.

This encounter captures a moment of spontaneous classification, a routine act as colonial agents monitored the flow of people moving across the borders of British India. We are also alerted, however, to the tenuous and problematic nature of the categories deployed – an agent caught in the act of "making up people" (Hacking, 2006; Omi & Winant, 2014). In this chapter, I provide empirical evidence that the association between African origin and slavery captured in this instance intensified over the nineteenth century in India. This correlation had been present since the early days of colonial rule but was strengthened over time and intimately linked to the "disappearance" of Indian slavery. I examine a dataset of encounters between colonial agents, magistrates, merchants, elites, and peoples suspected of or categorized as being illegitimately transported into, out of, and around British India. The picture that emerges from this examination demonstrates the mutual racialization over time of both Indians and *Shidis* – the indigenous term for "African origin" groups in South Asia.[2]

Examining scholarship on medieval forms of Indian slavery and by tracking changes in colonial records over time shows that a singular association between slavery and race or ethnicity was not indigenous to India. Rather, I argue that this correlation was actively forged by the intertwined logics of modern empire and global abolition. I trace how the Shidis – a broad category consisting of many different kinship lineages and caste groups with diverse histories and positions within Indian society – were racialized to be recognized almost exclusively through the lens of a particular history of enslavement. Abolition in India involved collapsing diverse Shidi histories and experiences into a single and legible analytic frame that privileged phenotypical characteristics – a project of "race-making." This process also involved the spontaneous association of African features as a "self-evident" proxy for the category of slavery versus trafficking, kidnapping, abduction, or other forms servile and bound social and labor relationships as the colonial state clamped down on illicit trafficking across and within its borders. Projecting "Shidis" as a distinct social and racial identity vis-à-vis "Indians" in India represented one iteration of a global imperial project of racializing categories of free and slave labor.

The fate of Shidis on the subcontinent was intimately linked to the simultaneous and complete erasure of indigenous forms of Indian slavery from

colonial knowledge production. The dynamics explored here took place in the wider context of the specific role that Indian labor played in imperial labor regimes. The quiet and uneventful nature of abolition in British India was both cause and consequence of differential racialization of Indians and Africans across imperial sites. Africans were quintessential slaves, while Indians, though servile and bound in sometimes violent hierarchical relationships, were constructed as nominally "free." In 1843, the East India Company (EIC) passed the Indian Slave Act – Act V – mandating that colonial courts could no longer recognize a slave-owner's rights in slaves. The passive nature of this legislation has led scholars to conclude that this phase is more accurately characterized as "delegalization" or abolition by semantics (Chatterjee, 1999, 2006; Temperley, 2000). If slavery was defined as the legal ownership of one person of another, and the dominant legal apparatus no longer enforced these claims, the ontological status of those who were once named as slaves suddenly became ambiguous. Indian slavery seemed to disappear into thin air – into a puff of smoke. Shidis, this tiny community, were the residue left behind. The creation and demarcation of the category of the enslaved, natally alienated, and unfree African, as separate and distinct from the servile, embedded, and free Indian, was necessary for "unseeing" Indian slavery.

In what follows I show how this case adds to a growing literature on comparative regimes of classification, identity formation, and racialization, while engaging with wider debates among scholars of slavery and abolition to highlight the significant effects of the imperial abolitionist measures that purported to end slavery and promote freedom, in transforming identities and *constraining* freedom across colonial sites. In order to ground my central argument, I demonstrate that prior to abolition slavery in India was both institutionally and ethnically diverse, leveraging historical work on the nuances of slavery and service in medieval India. The chapter then proceeds to describe the discursive production of the Indian slave in early colonial records and the subsequent erasure of Indian slavery after abolition. Next, I focus on the dataset this chapter draws on to demonstrate the mutual racialization of Indians and Shidis into separate legal categories over the nineteenth century. These two sections demonstrate that the category of slavery was contained along racial lines, and that to colonial agents these labels increasingly came to be seen as "self-evident." I delve into details of these encounters to provide insight into the processes and considerations involved in these judgments. I end by piecing together bureaucratic, administrative, and literary sources on the Shidis, demonstrating how these racial classifications were continuously reinforced in several different genres of knowledge production into the twentieth century.

Scholars have tended to point to the institution of New World slavery to explain how the association of "race" and "slavery" became inextricably linked in the modern imagination (Hirschman, 2004; Williams, 1994; Winant, 2000). The mass enslavement of Africans both drew on and strengthened the logic of biological and natural otherness, relying on narratives that aimed to dehumanize and extract labor from Africans and other native populations. Other scholarship has pointed out that race in general and Blackness in particular is a contingent and historically located phenomenon intimately tied to historical

shifts in labor demands across multiple geographies (Blumenthal, 2000, Magubane, 2004; Young, 2017). The historical processes examined here were unique in that they were driven by "benign" and mundane impulses, centered on routine acts of rescuing rather than violent acts of enslavement. In this chapter therefore, I posit not "slavery" but rather the legal and political apparatus that emerged in the wake of *abolition* as a profoundly transformative racial project in India.

As Cooper, Holt, and Scott (2000, p. 287) note, abolition "did not break the association between race and labor, but in some ways deepened the racialization of the labor question in the British Empire." This chapter suggests shifting attention to abolition as the appropriate site on which to examine novel configurations of race and labor, and to pay attention to these subtle shifts in the context of global ordering of imperial labor demands. This study is grounded in colonial India but has implications for how we think of the relationship between race, slavery, and abolition across colonial sites. I see this moment as a clear resignification of skin color, African origin, and slavery in India – categories that are too often conflated. By this I mean colonial agents increasingly began to see the slavery relationship as one characterized by natal alienation and social death marked by the color of one's skin. That this continues to dominate our understanding of slavery attests to the power of this belief (Patterson, 1982).

CLASSIFICATION REGIMES AND RACIALIZATION

During the nineteenth century, the British colonial state invested heavily in building knowledge regimes to classify and control subject populations. First the EIC and then the British Crown were tireless in their efforts to insert people into classificatory regimes to distinguish types of subjects from each other: pirates from merchants, scholars from rebels, and friends from enemies (Kolsky, 2015; Norton, 2014; Subramanian, 2016). Establishing these knowledge regimes involved compiling massive compendiums listing and describing the essential characteristics of hundreds of different castes, tribes, and kinship groups. Groups were, thus, associated with a diverse range of traits such as their criminality, militarily prowess, or agricultural talents (Ibbetson, 1916; Singha, 2015; Streets, 2017). Creating these categories was a vital part of rendering populations subject to regulation – in short, making them legible (Cohn, 1996; Dirks, 1992; Hevia, 2012; Scott, 1998).

Sociologists are increasingly interested in imperial projects of classification, paying attention to the cultural and racial logics that directed how the colonial state interacted with subject populations (Steinmetz, 2007; Wilson, 2011). Drawing insight from contemporary social theory, we know that states hold considerable power to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, "to make and unmake groups" (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 223). In *National Colors*, Mara Loveman examines mundane processes of classification focusing on state census projects across Latin America that claimed neutrality and the authority of science. Loveman shows how these state-driven

knowledge regimes have a "dual relationship to reality" partly reflecting but also exerting an influence on how subject populations see themselves. By paying attention to classification regimes in India in the context of global order making, we are analytically equipped to understand that the "micropolitics of racial classification" are intimately linked to "the macropolitics of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation making and state building" and I would add, empire (Loveman, 2014, p. xiv; Go & Lawson, 2017).

State classification projects were, furthermore, carried out in the context of a world "on the move" (McKeown, 2008). It is for this reason that ports and borders were particularly salient spaces of identity construction (Reyes, 2018). Imperial authorities contended with multidirectional currents of peoples – merchants, scholars, saints, pilgrims, criminal tribes, rebels, nomads, pirates, and, of course, laborers, servants, wives, concubines, and slaves. Migrations were driven by a growing demand for bodies to work on new plantations, factories, and commercial agricultural enterprises for an expanding world market. Mongia points out that the British imperial state's regulation of migratory labor was a site of unusual intervention and control, and links enhanced regulation to processes of state building (Mongia, 2018, pp. 26–30). Equally formidable was the movement of peoples across the Global South in circuits that were not regulated by, or even related to, colonial projects. In order to manage this diversity and regulate these flows, state agents tried to create order by inserting people into easily manageable classificatory regimes.

There is by now a sizable literature on how populations were reshuffled across oceans and between imperial sites first as slaves and then, after abolition, in the form of nominally free wage or indentured labor (Guterl & Skwiot, 2005; Kale, 2010; Stanziani, 2014; Sell, 2017). After the abolition of slavery, India provided a seemingly endless supply of cheap bodies both to be imported out of India through the indenture system or to be exploited locally as capitalists and plantation owners moved their business into the subcontinent (Behal, 2010; Gupta, 1981; Kolsky, 2010). India played a vital role in the colonial imagination as a site of "free" labor – the viable alternative that made the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean possible for abolitionists, and palatable to capitalists (Gray, 2008; Kale, 2010; Mahmud, 2013; Major, 2012; Mongia, 2018; Sturman, 2014). It was ideologically crucial that the circuits of laboring peoples that flowed along the sinews of empire were considered nominally "free." Studies have described the economic frameworks that expelled or "framed out" certain practices that "undermined the foundational concepts of capitalism" – such as slavery – in order to legitimate the hegemony of the "free market" (Matthew, 2016, pp. 7–9). Scholars such as Susan Peabody have shown how Indians and Africans had fundamentally distinct experiences navigating the changes wrought by the global transition from slavery to abolition (Peabody, 1996, 2017). In this chapter, I fold these insights into how the colonial state categorized global circuits of imperial labor and the racial categories that guided these interventions back inwards. Specifically, I direct our focus to how these classification regimes were inscribed in the legal and administrative apparatus of colonial India, coding Indian bodies as free and, therefore, available for mass importation as indentured and then contract labor.

Sociologists have long pointed out that the administrative processes that imbue bodies and physical characteristics with significance are always changing and in motion in real historical time (Omi & Winant, 2014). The case explored here clearly highlights the visual dimension in "seeing" and "recognizing" slavery. Theories of racialization draw attention to the fact that the very possibility of seeing categories as "self-evident" itself draws on a complex set of institutional practices which "impart social and symbolic meaning" to perceived phenotypical differences (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 111). While the traffic of people moving in, out, and around India was ethnically diverse, individuals with African features were marked as distinct from Indians, and assumed to be subject to a unique set of social and physical experiences. This chapter brings attention to the dynamics whereby the category of the racially distinct African and the legally and socially distinct category of slavery were constituted in real time. The former was constructed as separate from Indians, and the latter as distinct from forms of servitude and subordination experienced by Indians. I demonstrate how and why these relational dynamics emerged and explain why the distinction between Shidis and Indians was so ideologically vital for the British Empire in the post-abolition global landscape.

DISTINCT RACIALIZATIONS

State classification regimes were based on diverse typologies of difference drawing on, but not limited to, biological theories of race. It is, thus, important to ask what "racialization" meant in a context where complex ideologies of caste, religion, regional identity, kinship, and patrilineal tribal groupings dominated vernacular understandings of identity and belonging (Weiner, 2012). Scholars have long debated the particularities of the Indian caste system in relation to emerging concepts of "race" in the nineteenth century (Baber, 2010; Immerwahr, 2007; Pandey, 2013; Slate, 2011). It is true that Darwinian theories of racial difference and evolution may have heavily influenced colonial conceptions of the immutability of the Indian caste system (Bayly, 1999; Robb, 1995). However, I am here interested in the emergence of sets of discourses around Indians and Africans as two key imperial subjects experiencing, and engaged in, a different set of social relations among themselves, and between each other.

Colonial judgments about social relations between subjects were driven by a set of racialized assumptions about Indians as naturally servile and Africans as universally treated as legal property. Indian hierarchies were constructed as master–servant, landlord–peasant, Brahmin–untouchable, but relations between Arabs, Indians, or Europeans with Africans were most legible as master–slave relationships. Indian relationships were, thus, governed by complex traditions of servitude that could be perceived as legitimate defined by a "warm feeling" toward the familiar attachments and domestic life of Indians (Singha, 1998). That Shidis were seen as subject to a wholly separate social experience, and that this was an experience applicable to all who were phenotypically African, was part and parcel of a process of imperial "race-making."

Indeed, caste itself was a racialized category – applicable first and foremost to (Hindu) Indians. In moments when untouchability and caste-based inequality were designated as social problems, this called on a unique set of interventions than those demanded by "slavery." Namely, caste and untouchability should perhaps be reformed – outcaste Hindus converted to Christianity, land tenure rights strengthened, and credit extended – but slaves must be "freed." The relationship between Shidis and Indians could be readily explained as a slave relationship rather than one based on caste. This was further strengthened by the fact that many Shidis were Muslim and, thus, often seen outside the caste system. Seen through a history of enslavement rather than as part of the indigenous caste and kinship hierarchies of India, Shidis were reified as the perennial "other" – erecting a social boundary that continues to limit their inclusion in the modern Pakistani and Indian polities (Basu, 2003, 2013; Mussafir, 1950; Obeng, 2007; Yimine, 2007).

This chapter takes a particular stance toward debates around the novelty of the particular configurations that emerged around slavery, race, and phenotypical differences. The clear salience of color as a marker of status in the Indian context has made it easy to miss the nuances of the recalibrations that took place over the long nineteenth century (Bonnet, 2018). There is a strong tendency to see African origins and slavery as universally ubiquitous constellations across the premodern world. However, I call attention to the need to disaggregate these easy correlations, all too often reified as natural and historically inevitable. Rather by bringing attention to processes and global shifts in discourse around race and imperial labor, I define the recalibrations that empire put into motion during this moment as a racial project, described as "the simultaneous and co-constitutive ways that racial meanings are translated into social structures and become racially signified" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 109; Saperstein et al., 2013). The notion that Africans were "naturally" slaves in India seems intuitive and consistent with indigenous devaluations of human life based on color. Yet the Indian caste system is not, and has never been, reducible to such simple typologies, and the direct relationship between color and status is inexact and highly variable across time and place. Furthermore, notions of caste, jati, or kinship groups were open to public contestation. Most importantly to this argument, the category of *slavery* was highly ethnically diverse according to both historical scholarship as well as early colonial sources. This was not, as some scholars have suggested, a mere strengthening and grafting of premodern forms of hierarchy, but an active – if subtle – restructuring of racial categories of labor (Dikkoter, 1997; Dixon & Telles, 2017).

MIGRATIONS AND SLAVERIES: DIVERSITY IN PREMODERN INDIA

"Marsoon marsoon par Sindh na desoon!"

I will die, I will die, but will never give up Sindh! –Hosh Muhammad Sheedi, 1843

On the eve of the British annexation of Sindh on the western frontiers of the empire in 1843, one figure stands out as a famous Sindhi martyr, now concretized in myth and legend. In his account of the annexation of Sindh, Sir Charles Napier described the fierce defiance of Hosh Mohammad Sheedi against British forces at the battle of Miani. Today, a statue of Hosh Muhammad stands in the center of the old capital of Hyderabad, Sindh. This figure perhaps more than any other represents the ambiguous relationship between the Shidi and Indian identity in the Indian subcontinent. Today, Sindhi nationalists glorify the Shidis as evidence of Sindh's cosmopolitan history, in so doing coding them as distinct, external accretions to Sindhi society.

Hosh Muhammad – a Shidi – also represents the blurred lines between slave, vassal, and military commander in the Talpur army of Sindh. His esteemed role as a military slave shows us that transporting concepts wholesale from Atlantic history such as the enslaved as property experiencing social death may be problematic. Far from being a lone figure in the region's history, Hosh Muhammad is a reminder of the much deeper history of Africans in India who arrived, certainly as slaves, but also as merchants, military recruits, vassals, scholars, religious mendicants, traders, and travelers (Basu, 2003; Chatterjee, 2018; Harris, 1971; Pescatello, 1977; Robbins & Mcleod, 2006; Shroff, 2010; Tameskar, 2009).

Historians have characterized the Indian Ocean world as a "special type of interconnected zone" where circuits of goods, ideas, technologies, and, of course, peoples have historically flowed.[3] While the Atlantic slave trade continues to dominate scholarship, the Indian Ocean slave trade reached its peak at the very moment that the Atlantic slave trade was on the decline (Harms, Freamon, & Blight, 2013; Klein, 1994). European powers, led by the British, simultaneously created the demand for new forms of labor, even while intervening in and mobilizing ideological and political power against the continued practice of slavery (Matthew, 2016). Slave-trading across the Indian Ocean was a cause of anxiety for the British as the resilience of these networks challenged their imperial sovereignty on the high seas. Throughout the period of colonial rule, the British were forced to compete with multiple trading networks stretching from India, the East African coast, the Arab Peninsula, and the South Indian Sea (Sood, 2011).

Most Indian Ocean slaves were female, integrated into elite households for reproductive, menial, and other occupations, as was the case in India. In contrast to Atlantic slavery, black Africans formed a minority of servile people traded across the Indian Ocean (Ewald in Hawley, 2008, p. 20; McKeown, 2014; Yimene, 2007). However, as the data below shows, we see a spike in Africans traded across the Indian Ocean toward the end of the nineteenth century. Many Africans were used as slave labor in Madagascar, Zanzibar, and along the East African coast. There was also a peak in African slaves being taken to the Middle East, although the exact scale of these movements is difficult to estimate (Klein in Campbell, 2005). It is still more difficult to tell how many of these were brought to India.

It is crucial to the intervention that this chapter is making to highlight that "slavery" in India was both institutionally and ethnically varied. Slaves were brought over from Africa by East Africans, Arabs, Balochis, Turks, Indian, as

well as Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British traders starting from at least the twelfth century. However, so too were Georgians, Pathans, Arabs, Turks, Central Asians, and, of course, Indians (Kumar, 1994; Jackson, 1990). Indians were transported and traded either from other regions of the subcontinent, or were sometimes sold by desperate families to local elite households during times of economic hardship. Medieval sources clearly discuss dynasties built by Turkish, Afghani, and Central Asian military "slaves" – now glorified as revered commanders in local vernacular histories (Ali, 1996). Imported slaves were not used in India as a source of large-scale labor, but rather slaves were akin to vassals who symbolized the status of elite households (Chatterjee, 2018; Moosvi, 2011; Yimine, 2007). Slaves were often found among in retinues in elite households, in addition to households of British and Portuguese colonial officials themselves (Major, 2009; Pescatello, 1977). Untouchable groups such as the pariahs or pulaya castes were recorded in vernacular religious texts as slaves (Jayanth, 2019; Kumar, 1965; Viswanath, 2014).

As unstable as the term "slavery" is in the Indian context, the term "Shidi" creates similar problems of definition. As Ewald notes, the term Shidi is "a palimpsest that accrues new meanings even if it retained older ones" (Ewald, 2013, p. 202). Others note that this identity subsumes a diverse range of experiences in India under a single heading (Campbell in Hawley, 2008, p. 17). In India, the term Shidi incorporated numerous groups and did not, indeed still does not, necessarily connote a corporate group identity. Rather, it reflected multiple specific histories. Some Shidis had been in India for generations while others had newly arrived from the African continent with Arab, British, or African slave-traders. For example, Shidis in Balochistan – sometimes called Makranis – have a distinct history from Sindhi Shidis, the former having mixed with members of the local Baloch population over many generations (Edlesfon et al., 1960; Jamali, 2014; Mirzai, 2017). The Shidis of Janjira, again, are famous for having risen to power first as military slaves and then as rulers in their own right of one of the islands off the coast of Gujarat (Jasdanwalla, 2011; Robbins & Mcleod, 2006). Once Shidis achieved positions of power, sometimes as military slaves, and other times as generals, they were able to patronize networks of Africans who moved freely between India and East Africa (Oka & Kusimba in Hawley, 2008). Elite Shidis often retained the title of Shidi and its connotation of African origin but intermarried with the local population and over successive generations ceased to be phenotypically African. Many still maintain the honorific title of Shidi in their family names.

Despite an escalation in Indian Ocean slave-trading in the late nineteenth century, in India Shidis were only ever a small portion of the population, concentrated along the western coastal regions of India such as Gujarat, Bombay, Kathiawar, Sindh, and the Makrani coast. Colonial accounts note that these populations were usually in the mere hundreds in any given region. In response to debates over whether Africans, enslaved or free, were inevitably considered devalued subjects in medieval India, the unequivocal view from scholars who investigate medieval sources is that "the historical answer is no" (Chatterjee, 2018, p. 313). In any case, the diversity of statuses that Shidis occupied in Indian society significantly complicates simple readings of Shidis as slaves. As the

growing body of historical evidence related here shows, robust networks of exchange, pilgrimage, and commerce across the Indian Ocean meant that there were many different reasons why people might migrate to India from the African continent. Furthermore, slavery, as I show more below, was an amorphous and capacious category in colonial discourse in India. Yet colonial sources from the very earliest noted "Africans" as self-evidently slaves while there was always more ambiguity in disentangling Indian slaves from other forms of servitude. This association intensified over the nineteenth century.

INDIAN SLAVERY ON THE EVE OF ABOLITION

When Sir Henry Bartle Frere declared in 1841 that there were up to several million "slaves" in India, Shidis made up a decidedly small portion of this figure.[4] What did Indian slavery look like according to the British prior to abolition? How do we understand the "disappearance" of Indian slavery? Having reviewed some of the historical scholarship on Indian Ocean networks of slaves and African migrations, it is important to spend some time delving into the multiple figurations of the Indian slave in colonial discourse prior to 1843. Despite the refractions and problems of representation that this colonial archive represents, for the purposes of this chapter, it is important to identify how colonial discourse around slavery evolved over time.

I do this by focusing mainly on the Indian Law Commission Reports on Slavery presented to the British Parliament in 1841. The Law Commission Reports provide a sweeping review of the state of Indian slavery according to surveys of colonial judges, political agents, revenue officers, and key Indian state agents and religious appointees. These documents have been analyzed exhaustively by most scholars interested in the question of slavery or unfreedom in South Asia (Chatterjee, 1999; Hjejle, 1967; Kumar, 2017; Major, 2009; Prakash, 1990; Temperley, 2000). Containing scores of cases involving Indian slaves across the Madras, Bengal, and Bombay presidencies, it is clear from these documents that Indian slavery manifested in a bewildering variety of forms.

The Law Commission Reports contain a whole section dedicated to Africans and Shidis particularly in elite Muslim households.[5] They noted that the slave trade was carried on in Bombay with the full knowledge of the authorities and that African slaves were "highly prized in Kathiawar," and the "demand for African boys" was great in Cutch. The visibility of Shidis among the ranks of Indian slaves prior to 1843 is clear. Colonial sources are littered with references to Africans in elite households throughout India, but particularly in the western coastal regions of the Bombay Presidency. In 1835, the acting political agent wrote in a memorandum that his "attention was first attracted to the subject (of slavery in Kathiawar) by frequently observing African boys in attendance upon the chiefs of Kattywar when they visited Rajcote."[6] In 1865, Lieutenant Colonel C.P. Rigby noted:

> …from the number of Africans and their descendants met with in these provinces, there is no doubt that, as long as we have been connected with them, African slaves always have been and still are, imported in considerable numbers.[7]

While tallying number of slaves in a district in Kathiawar colonial documents divided categories of slaves into two columns: one for African slaves and one for all other types of "domestic" slaves.[8] Even from the earliest days of their experience in India, therefore, the British read the African presence in India through a narrative of enslavement and saw the experience of Shidis as distinct from that of Indians. Yet Shidis formed a very small part of the larger world of transactions in slaves uncovered.

The existence and varied definitions of slavery deployed by the EIC prior to abolition are clearly visible in legal cases around sales and purchases of slaves. There were several laws in place prior to 1843 that regulated the slave trade in areas under EIC control. Even before the empire wide ban of the slave trade in 1807, the EIC restricted the traffic in Indian slaves to rival colonial territories – particularly Mauritius and Reunion (Allen, 2009, p. 883). In 1774, Warren Hastings and his council issued two directives. The first was that any sale or purchase of an individual as a slave required a deed from a local judge – note that this transaction would not prima facie be considered illegitimate. These directives were reissued in 1789 in Calcutta, and in 1790, in Madras. Their policy during this period was to support indigenous religious laws governing slavery. Both Islam and Hinduism legally sanctioned slavery. After the empire-wide abolition of the slave trade in 1807, Regulation X of 1811 formally prohibited the import or export of slaves into EIC territory. In Bombay, this edict came in the form of Regulation I of 1812 prohibiting "all importation of slaves into this island for sale."[9] This was followed by Regulation XIV of 1827 of the revised Bombay code, of which Chapter IV prohibits the "illegal import, export, and transfer of slaves" in addition to kidnapping, detention, and forced labor.

The Law Commission Reports were compiled from a collection of testimonials from the 1820s and 1830s commenting on how EIC laws were administered. Some of these were delivered before the British Parliament, and excerpts and overlaps can, thus, be found in the Hansard records of Parliamentary debates. Magistrates and political agents adjudicated all kinds of questions about whether or not to return runaway slaves, whether purchasing of persons for charitable purposes should be prohibited by these laws, and how to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate violence against slaves. The sections on the Bombay Presidency in particular openly describe a situation where "many respectable Brahmin have one or more slave-girls as servants. In a Mohamedan household of any consequence they are indispensable."[10] Others report that "domestic slavery, particularly that of females, is very general." Agricultural laborers trapped in cycles of debt were frequently cited as "debt-slaves" or indebted bondsmen, frequently found particularly in Surat.[11] Other sources of slavery include children and families kept as "hostages" for unpaid debts or children born out of wedlock. However, by and large, they report "most slaves have been sold as children during times of famines, to save their own lives and keep their parents from starvation."[12] These are all examples of slavery drawn from the local Indian population.

The entire corpus of knowledge produced during this time by the Law Commission Reports and by prominent abolitionists often spoke of Indian

slavery as benign, the equivalent of the Indian "poor law." The reports frequently assert that the master slave relation "approximates that of a parent and child in respect of power and coercion."[13] Much rhetorical and ideological work was done to distinguish East Indian slavery from New World and West Indian slavery. The power of these refrains explains the peculiar form that abolition took in India. The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which was celebrated as a triumphant end to slavery in the Caribbean and across the British Empire, did not apply to India. The EIC as a private trading company maintained its right to regulate its own affairs separately from territories under the British crown. It was not until 1843 that the EIC passed Act V – the Indian Slave Act – bringing an official end to the institution of slavery. After 1843, "slavery" questions mostly enter courts as questions of analogy (Anderson, 1993). After Act V, there is an India-wide shift in official discourse shift around slavery – to one of euphemism and denial (Chatterjee, 1999; Major, 2012; Mohan, 2015; Viswanath, 2014).

LEGAL ERASURE AND RACIAL CONTAINMENT

Abolition in India was not simply a gradual process of ending a benign and fading institution but was, in fact, a substantial imperial project of discursively reordering the language and legal categories used to describe transactions in categories of people. It was, as I argue, a *racial project*. In this chapter, I demonstrate this empirically by examining a corpus of 122 cases or "encounters" illustrating the mechanisms that were deployed to classify peoples who were suspected, and/or, ultimately ascertained to be, illicitly transported as slaves. The dataset I examine draws on encounters from *after* the EIC passed the Indian Slave Act of 1843. There are compelling reasons for focusing only on these cases to capture the dynamics I am interested in here. As I have shown above, there is a formidable archive of correspondence, legal cases, and political discussion around Indian slavery prior to 1843.[14] This chapter is concerned with the residual instances in which the term slavery was used after the colonial state abolished the legal category of slavery. I thus start in 1843 specifically in order to isolate the effects of the 1843 legislation over time.

The encounters I examine start in 1843 and end in 1900 when discussions around slavery in India taper off and instead begin to focus almost exclusively on slave-trading in Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea.[15] Indeed, as the nineteenth century progresses, the colonial archive increasingly pushes the historian's attentions outwards to the Indian Ocean and political skirmishes with the Gulf and Arab states. The cases and encounters examined here focus on the Bombay Presidency and the western Indian coast, on the shores of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. The majority of the cases are from the Bombay Political Proceedings, and some from the Bombay Judicial Proceedings. The Proceedings are department-specific, annually generated compendiums containing abstracts of events and issues of importance for the entire year. These documents record incidents with native elites, political relations, and efforts to monitor the traffic of people as they moved in and out of India, making them the ideal source through

which to explore how classification regimes were deployed at borders and juris-dictional boundaries. In addition, I have collected supplemental cases from the Sindh Archives in Karachi, Pakistan, and legal cases found in the Indian Law Reports which document judicial decisions made in the high courts in India, focusing mostly on Bombay.

In this dataset, I have included cases where either actors or the written record used the language of abduction, trafficking, kidnapping, purchase and sale, disposing of, and transporting in order to capture a whole range of transactions in people. These encounters mostly take place at ports, most frequently Bombay, and involve interventions by colonial agents – police commissioners, political agents, and magistrates – in transactions involving the transportation of peoples. I have supplemented the main corpus from the Political Proceedings with the rare detailed report giving us in-depth insight into cases where slavery was suspected, debated, accepted, or denied. These encounters are in no way to be construed as numerical representations of the scale of slavery or transportation of peoples within India. The reported encounters in the Proceedings are already skimmed off the top of what was a largely undetected and persistent traffic in peoples being brought in, taken out, and circulated through India outside of the formal labor reallocation systems of the empire (Bosma, 2018, pp. 510–512). Rather the van-tage point these records provide us is precisely which of these transactions were most visible to the colonial state, and the classifications that were reproduced across different branches and bureaucratic apparatuses of the colonial state.

"Slave-trading" was regulated as a political matter rather than a legal matter. By this I mean that over time, decisions tended to be made increasingly by political agents at borders, rather than in the formal forum of a court. Before 1843, "slavery" was regulated in EIC courts with magistrates enforcing legal codes and deploying legal reasoning and arguments in order to try cases involving slaves. In fact, in 1874 the government of India wrote a letter "expressing hope that the government solicitor will in future be more alive to the importance of such cases connected with the suppression of the slave trade," demanding that they be tried properly in courts.[16] Evidence suggests that this still tended not to be the case. After 1843, fewer and fewer of these encounters are visible in the Judicial Proceedings, and we have to focus instead on the Political Proceedings to see any mention of slavery at all.

Of the 122 resulting cases, I removed 15 to simplify the visual representation below. Three of these cases involved Africans or Shidis, but the language used to describe the transaction was unclear. For example, in 1882 the Foreign Department issued a notice that restrictions on immigration into Hyderabad "should be made applicable to Siddhis (Africans)."[17] Twelve of the cases describe a clear transaction in slavery, but the ethnicity or origin of the individual remained unclear. Many of the abstracts could be cross-referenced with news-paper articles that provide more detail about incident and the ethnicity of the slaves, but a handful remained unclear.

When analyzed systematically over time, these encounters demonstrate how the term "slavery" was racially contained over time. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, we see a clear and repetitive pattern of liberating and freeing "slaves" of

African origin. More significantly, the specific category of illegal activity – for the purposes of "slavery" – was deployed selectively. The decision about whether a woman, man, or child was labeled as simply kidnapped versus kidnapped or trafficked *as slaves* became a crucial distinction. These designations were intricately connected to the emergence of racial and gendered categories of labor.

Furthermore, looking more closely at the encounters themselves below, I will show *how* decisions to choose one category over another were made. The details of the cases provided here show that decisions were made spontaneously, deploying the language of self-evidence. Furthermore, the data demonstrates that ports were crucial sites where these processes of political surveillance and selective recognition – racialization – were occurring. Delving into these cases, we can, therefore, unpack what enabled colonial agents to *see* slavery, and the reasoning deployed to obfuscate some forms of bound labor, while highlighting others. Examining the reasoning deployed, both by political agents and magistrates, allows us to uncover the underlying assumptions about why Africans were "self-evident" slaves, and why Indians were, evidently, not.

Fig. 1 demonstrates the distribution of these cases across two categories over time: ethnicity/race and language. Immediately, it is clear that the absolute majority of cases where the term "slavery" was applied – 52 out of 76 – involved Africans/Shidis. Furthermore, the frequency of interactions involving African slaves increased rapidly between 1880 and 1900. The graph also demonstrates that even until the 1870s there was some variation in the ethnic background of individuals identified as slaves. For example, within the category of "Indian" slavery, there were cases involving a Baloch woman, as well those involving individuals from Ajmere, Baroda, Sindh, and Hyderabad. In fact, this data captures a short period where there seems to have been a surge in Georgian and Circassian women classified as slaves and released.[18]
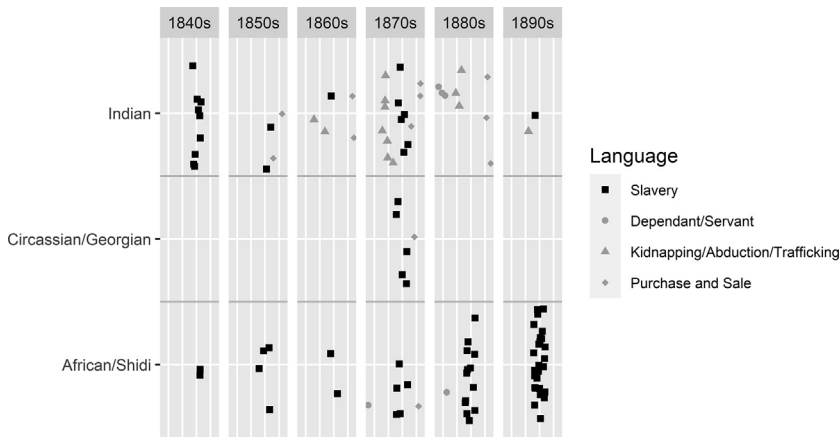

Fig. 1.   Distribution of Cases Across Categories Over Time: Ethnicity/Race and Language Ethnicity, Race, and Language.

Over time, however, encounters with Indians start to fragment into several kinds of transactions or relationships: kidnapping, dependence, or purchase and sale. After 1878, there were only two cases involving Indian subjects where the term slavery was applied. Note that in both these cases the possibility that these subjects were being disposed "as slaves" was recognized only because they were being taken to places outside of British jurisdiction. For instance, the 1878 case involved an Indian boy who was taken "as a slave" to Oman, an area under the control of the Sultanate of Oman. Similarly, the 1894 case involved Indian slaves discovered in Indian Turkmenistan.

This dataset represents the effects of two acts of importance. Act V – the Indian Slave Act of 1843 – is clearly the most important legal measure, after which the legal recognition of slavery was prohibited by the colonial state. Importantly, there are barely any cases brought under Act V at all.[19] The second act is the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860. The penal code represented British lawmakers' first attempt to comprehensively and exhaustively categorize criminal legal offenses into a complete set of rules and regulations (Wright, 2014). This law altered the terrain and synchronized vocabularies across presidencies to categorize all forms of criminal activity in India.

If there was any ambiguity about what counted as Indian slavery, the IPC attempted to eliminate these gray areas and organize criminal activity into clear legible categories. Slave dealing became a criminal offense as per the IPC but only within certain specific subsections of the code. There is an entire grouping of penal offenses under the broad heading "Kidnapping, Abduction, Slavery, and Forced Labor." Of these, section 367 of the IPC lists kidnapping or abducting in order to "subject persons to grievous hurt, slavery, and etc" as an offense. Section 370 specifically makes the "buying or disposal of any person *as a slave*" a criminal offense. And finally, section 371 enables the prosecution of those "habitually dealing in slaves." The vast majority of cases that arise, however, relate to the remaining sections dealing with abduction, prostitution, kidnapping for marriage, or kidnapping to be kept in confinement and not the sections of the IPC that deal specifically with slavery.

The resistance that magistrates exhibited in applying the slavery sections (367, 370, and 371) is instructive. For instance, the following circular logic is deployed when a magistrate attempted to adjudicate whether kidnapping for the purposes of slavery could be proven. As Stuart C. J., presiding magistrate, decided:

> It is exceedingly difficult to understand what is meant by Sec. 371… it appears to assume the condition of slavery is a possible fact within the cognizance of the law, but such a condition is as much ignored by the law as it is by the law of England.[20]

In other words, it was impossible to dispose of a person "as a slave" if slavery did not exist in British India. In another case from 1857, a girl was discovered to have been sold "for 90 Rs" in the city of Baroda. The case came before the district magistrate, and a discussion ensued about which law to bring the case under. The magistrate considered the possibility of bringing the case under the section of Regulation XIV of 1827 dealing with slavery but dismissed this line or argument.

Instead, the perpetrator was brought to justice under a different section, for "selling a thing not their own."[21] The neutral language of purchase and sale in this instance achieved the dual purpose of punishing violators of British law, regulating transactions in people, while at the same time avoiding official recognition of the existence of "slavery" in India. Recognizing transactions as clearly for the purpose of slavery, therefore, was extremely difficult and denied when it came to Indians. This apparatus of reprimands, euphemisms, and legal arguments thus became enshrined in the legal categories used to describe criminal behavior in India.

LANGUAGE OF SELF-EVIDENCE

One afternoon in April of 1856, Perohtee, identified in colonial correspondence as a Shidi and an ex-slave, visited the courtyard of prominent local notable, the Aga Khan, located in Karachi.[22] Now a settled inhabitant of Karachi, Perohtee, described himself as from an area he identified as adjacent to Zanzibar on the East African coast. He came across two girls fetching water in the Aga Khan's courtyard and became convinced that one of them was his sister and that they were being kept by the Aga Khan as slaves. What ensued was a rare recorded instance of an ex-slave taking initiative and demanding the colonial apparatus bear its weight on a landed, influential political and cultural figure. Indeed, the Aga Khan in particular was a crucial ally of the British state. When asked by the magistrate how he identified the girls as slaves he replied by "their language, their appearance, and from instinct." Without knowing the specific role they played in the house – as servants, adopted children, or mere dependents – Perohtee immediately labels them, and the colonial officer immediately accepts his interpretation, that they are slaves.

Looking at the depositions of Mirza Mohamad Kurreem, head employee at the Aga Khan's house, the attempt to legitimize the relationship is voiced using kinship and familial metaphors, insisting on a different reading of the nature of the relationship:

> I said before that the *shahzadda* (prince/royal leader) does not purchase or sell slaves, but in God's name we give them food and in his sight they are free and objects of pity…by so cherishing them we will not only obtain honor in the next world, but honor in this.[23]

The nonplussed captain B. Dunsterville, deputy magistrate of Karachi, however, asserted: "I have not the slightest doubt that they are slaves." The blurring between legitimate servitude and slavery was thus unceremoniously rejected, and the two girls were set free.

This case is, in fact, a rarity in its own right, and no doubt says a great deal about how charges of slave-trading were often wielded as weapons in political skirmishes between the colonial state and native elites in colonial India. By and large, however, British antislavery activities rarely extended to the cordoned off private sphere of the domestic economies of their subjects. Yet it is the very power of how the category of slavery was racialized, the idea of Africans as "self-evident" slaves, that rendered this kind of intervention possible in Perohtee's case.

Usually the act of sorting between slaves and nonslaves was made as people were transported. Keeping tabs on a highly mobile population rendered these relationships open to enhanced regulation, and in this classification regime, Africans were consistently under scrutiny. While the previous section examined broad trends over time, in this section, I look more closely at the details of some of the encounters in this dataset to examine the process of recognition. What exactly was involved in "seeing" a slave?

In 1892, an agent in the service of Abdul Aziz Bin Said, brother to the Sultan of Zanzibar, entered Bombay with a group of African "servants."[24] Despite having a written statement from Bin Said requesting safe passage for his agent, the Commissioner of Police insisted on detaining the group on the grounds that they appeared to be "suspicious."[25] The movement of Africans, therefore, even when protected by powerful elites, automatically warranted additional surveillance. In contrast, in 1882, Mirza Ebrahim Khan, a companion of the Nizam of Hyderabad, was traveling to Persia via Bombay with four servants. He reported that two of the men in his retinue were from Hyderabad and explains that he "got" them "during the last famine."[26] The vague vocabulary used to describe the acquisition of these individuals – indeed the very fact that they were acquired, or "got" rather than "hired" or brought into service – obscured what might have been a clear indication that this was a transaction originating in the purchase of a slave. Families selling themselves or their children into slavery during times of economic hardship was one of the main sources of "slavery" in South Asia, as was well-known by the British. Yet, in this circumstance, this transaction was viewed as legitimate dependency, and they were allowed to pass with no objection.

In 1890, a boat carrying Africans to Oman by way of Karachi by the SS Labordonnia was stopped by the police commissioner in Karachi. According to the official proceedings:

> …the peculiar composition of the party at once attracted the notice of Karachi police… for the simple fact that a number of Africans of the class from which slaves are usually drawn…was sufficient to leave little room for doubt that the case was really one of dealing in slaves.[27]

This was so despite the fact that the Africans denied that that they were slaves, a fact that the commissioner chalked up to having been coached by their captors. The "peculiar composition" referred to the mix of Arabs and Africans and became the basis for assessing the category of subjects on board. This case brings the tropes of both the African slave as victim and the Arab slave-trader as mercenary to the fore. In fact, the ship was not even bound for British India, yet the police commissioner in Karachi actively found cause to board and investigate the passengers on the ship.

While judgments about how to categorize slaves were certainly racialized, they also tended to be gendered. One of the arguments most often used by merchants when transporting women was to claim that they were being transported for the purposes of transactions in marriage. In several cases involving Indian women, this argument succeeded. Courts saw trafficking for the purposes of marriage, concubinage, or prostitution as an altogether different category than slavery. For instance, the case of *Empress of India* versus *Ram Kaur* in 1880, the judges were

emphatic in denying that the sale, purchase, or transport of an Indian girl Deoki, was a slavery question. The judge states:

> …The offense, if any, appears to have been one of kidnapping or abduction, but there is not a single element of the legal conception of slavery to be found under the facts.[28]

While the defendants in this case admitted she was "purchased" and "sold," they argued that her male companions intended for her to be disposed in marriage. This case set an important precedent for the interpretation of Section 371, and is often cited in published commentaries on the IPC to clarify the meaning of this section of the code.[29]

A contrasting case is instructive. In 1858, an Arab trader attempted to bypass the notice of the political agents at Surat, Gujarat, by claiming that that a young Habshi girl he was transporting was his adopted daughter. He argued that he was merely taking care of the girl after her parents' death, with the intention of arranging for her marriage. The governor council made clear however that he "regard[ed] the whole of the transaction with such great suspicion that he determine[ed] to detain the African girl at Surat."[30] In a letter to his counterparts he reported "the arrival of another Hubshee girl *evidently a slave* in this city a few days ago by steamer from Bombay."[31] Again the use of the language of "self-evidence" to explain the reasoning behind this decision stymied the need for further explanation or proof of the nature of the relationship.

British officers sometimes provided glimpses of their reasoning for being so particularly concerned with African slavery. In 1865, M. Keatinge wrote:

> …connected with African slavery, there is another and more frightful evil to be considered, viz., wholesale murders, the depopulation of provinces, and the demoralization of half the continent of Africa, to which it gives rise.[32]

It is also significant to note that British antislavery activities did not just draw on tropes about Africans but also the view of Arabs as the "original" Muslim slave-traders who were deeply imbricated in the African slave trade in the late nineteenth century.

By the early twentieth century, it had become almost impossible to use the term "slavery" to describe Indian domestic relationships, no matter how violent or self-evident the descriptor of slavery may have been to spectators. For example, in 1928, Mrs. Vincent, a British woman residing with some guests at the home of local noble Sardar Angre of Gwalior, witnessed the severe beating of an Indian boy Rama at the hands of his master and his servants.[33] The child ran away and tried to convince authorities he was a slave but was recaptured and reprimanded with harsh physical violence. As Mrs. Vincent writes: "Oh the terrible anger that was displayed by the Sardar's wife at Rama's perfidy in exposing his state of slavery." The political agent she was in correspondence with entertained her concerns but ultimately rejected her assertation that Rama was really a slave. In fact, he dismissed her reports by explaining that Mrs. Vincent was given to "hysterics." Indian slavery, irrespective of if whether the label originated from individuals themselves or from the visceral experiences of a third party, had become an ontological impossibility.

THE LONG SHADOW OF ABOLITION

> In all of Asia, wherever Europeans dominated, those who were slaves before became free. In Sindh, the Shidi people were given freedom in 1843, when the English were victorious in Sindh.[34]

In this passage, Muhammad Siddique Mussafir (d. 1952), an early twentieth century Shidi scholar who traced his ancestry to African slaves brought by the British to Sindh, links the political subjugation of Sindh to the freedom of the Shidis. Mussafir completed this text – *Ghulami'a ain Azadi*, or *From Slavery to Freedom*, in 1950. His writings contain one of the only accounts we have from within the Sindhi Shidi community regarding their experience of slavery and abolition. This work not only contains Mussafir's social commentary but also features oral histories from Shidis of his father's generation who recall their experiences of enslavement and being brought over to work in the households of ruling Sindhi dynasties – the Talpurs or Kalhoras.[35]

The slippage deployed above between "slave" and "Shidi" when Mussafir notes "the *Shidi* people were given freedom" is significant. The experience of being enslaved and freed is represented as one unique to the Shidi community. Other "slaves," Marehtas for instance, who were Hindu captives by the Talpurs during the precolonial period, are not mentioned on this narrative as part of the history of slavery in Sindh. Neither are the multiple men, women, and children who had undoubtedly been sold into relationships of bondage in Sindh as in the rest of British India.

This gradual blurring of multiple histories of migration to South Asia from Africa into a single narrative of enslavement was the result of a confluence of historical factors. I have focused on the disappearance of Indian slavery as a crucial dynamic. I end by focusing on the long-term production of colonial and vernacular knowledge around Shidis. The cases included in the dataset examined above often described the steps taken by the colonial administration after the initial act of "freeing" slaves, sometimes in detail. The transition from slavery to "freedom" was monitored and, thus, inscribed in the administrative apparatus of the colonial state. Liberation involved ripping Africans out of one set of transactions and "reinserting them into new matrices of bureaucratic power" (McKeown, 2008, p. 12). This identity needed to be easily recognizable across judicial, administrative, and political settings within the colonial government, that is, standardized. Categorizing transported Africans as slaves, and slaves as Africans, was an institutional designation that was repeated as a matter of routine administration. Intercepted at Aden, in Karachi, or in the ports of Bombay, Africans would be "disposed of" and then monitored once they arrived in British India. The colonial administration kept tabs on their progress into new homes, dispersed funds for their subsequent maintenance, and often hired them in various marine and labor-intensive occupations.

The copious documentation and references to freed ex-slaves and indeed the celebratory media accounts of these events garnered public attention – such demonstrations of heroism and anti-slavery were vital moral capital generating activities for the British crown (Brown, 2006). One such event was reproduced

across several news sources reporting that "ten miserable beings, just escaped from the jaws of death, were landed a the port of Kurrachee…the history of these poor boys and girls… is a heartrending one." The article goes on to relate that all was put right when they were:

> …made over the British authorities. Subscriptions were raised to feed these poor waifs… no doubt they will now be free, but the history of these courageous young adventurers shows that in spite of the efforts of the British men-of-war, the slave trade is still carried on.[36]

These public displays of antislavery fervor, almost solely focused on Africans and Shidis, created institutional and cultural memory around the Shidis as ex-slaves.

Once rescued, the colonial state assumed responsibility for the care and maintenance of freed ex-slaves, especially children. Notions of what post-emancipation "freedom" should mean for Africans drew on a set of global discourses that flowed across imperial spaces (Bates, 2019; Cooper in Morgan and Hawkins, 2004; Du Bois, 1998; Foner, 1983; Llewellyn-Jones, 2011). As Janet Ewald and others have noted, the successive freeing of African slaves by the British created a "drifting sea proletariat" of Black labor who worked as wage laborers on ships, plantations, factories, and mines – wherever labor was needed in the empire.[37] Males who were "able bodied and capable of employment" would sometimes join the British navy, engage in wage work, or be sent abroad to work as coolies.[38] Those who were "too sickly" were enlisted to work as domestic servants. Others were sent to work on either experimental farms in India or plantations on the East Coast of Africa. In 1890, a reverend, Windsor, reported that after completing their schooling at his institution, Africans under his care "have received employment in the Empress Botanical Gardens, Poona, and that five other are to sail for Mombassa as carpenters in the service of the Imperial East African Company."[39] Freed African children were usually sent to certain designated institutions run by Europeans specifically for freed African slaves. Reverend Windsor of the Deccan Industrial School in Sirur, for instance, received an allowance from the Bombay government for receiving freed African children and training them for a life as "free" workers brought up as devout Chrisitans.[40]

In addition to creating an archival footprint around Shidis as slaves and ex-slaves, the data shows how Shidis, Africans, and Indians with African features were often treated as one and the same. In 1893, Halimah, a liberated "African" woman, protested against being made to stay in Bombay with other members of the Shidi community. One colonial officer complained: "she refuses to live with the other Sidhis in Bombay, who are of the Habshi tribe, while she is a Nubian."[41] In other cases, members from various different Shidi communities were jointly criminalized and racially profiled. We see this in the details of an account about a particularly notorious Shidi outlaw named Seedi Ramadan Mubarak who was pursued by agents of the colonial state across Junagadh in 1887. As agents tried to track down Seedi Mubarak, they jointly monitored and restricted the movements of Shidis and other mixed African and Indian groups.[42] In another case, colonial agents discuss the appropriate individuals to

place in a line up when trying to convict Seedi Mubarak and his men. In order to ensure that the line up was "just" and accurate, the political agent insisted on gathering Makranis – a group known to have mixed Shidi heritage – from nearby villages to make sure that witnesses could choose between an ethnically similar group of suspects. Shidi groups were singled out for their curly hair, their dark complexion, and their distinctive features, which set them apart from the Indian population.

By the twentieth century, the association between African origin and slavery was reproduced across sites of colonial knowledge production. An early attempt to create a glossary of castes and tribes in 1900 Sindh by Sheikh Ansari, an Indian in the British civil service, listed several separate caste groups under the category of "slave castes." Of this list, which included 10 different "slave tribes/castes," seven were simply different names for groups who claimed or were reputed to have African origin. There is a separate category for menial and untouchable tribes such as scavengers and sweepers. Significantly, two categories of tribes, the Gurjis (Georgians), and Chorkas (Circassians) are listed under "miscellaneous" rather than slave tribes.[43] Recall that Circassians and Georgians were known to be imported in India as slaves, and even "freed" by the colonial regime in the 1870s, as captured in my data sample above.

Colonial agents had, thus, always seen Africans in India through the lens of slavery, belying an entire history of migration and complex regimes of service, client relationships, and military stature. Yet, with the disappearance of Indian slavery after 1843, Shidis were singled out as the most visible recipients of British liberation efforts and easily categorized as slaves. To do so involved deploying simple and uninterrogated arguments that relied on the idea that Africans were "self-evidently" slaves. While the term slavery was censured and quashed when used to describe Indians, there were repetitive, public, and celebrated accounts of colonial agents "freeing" African slaves, created a long-lasting association between Shidis and a legacy of enslavement. This was paired with a simultaneous process of collapsing diverse experiences of Africans, Shidis, and other phenotypically African groups into a single, emergent, proxy category of the "Black" experience in India. This long-term racialization, thus, both drew on classifications schemes driven by imperial labor demands, but reproduced itself continuously in various genres of knowledge production, including in vernacular histories written by Shidis themselves.

CONCLUSION

A controversy has been slowly unfolding within the Shidi community in Karachi, the largest city in what is modern-day Pakistan. Sitting with Bilali Saab and fellow members of a prominent Shidi organization in Lyari in the summer of 2018, we discussed the recent attention and public interest in the Shidi community. Zanji begum had recently become the first person and also the first woman from the Shidi community to win a seat in the Sindh Assembly, her nomination backed by one of the most prominent political parties in Sindh.

Bilali Saab explained: "the only issue that we have with Zanji begum, is that she accepts the narrative that the Shidi community were all brought to Sindh as slaves."[44] Bilali Saab, like Jama almost a century and a half earlier, was attempting to repudiate the easy colonial, and now postcolonial, association between that Shidis and slavery. He went on to lay out in careful detail all the evidence that he had collected over the years demonstrating that Shidis had a much older claim to the land than this narrative allowed, asserting that many Shidis came over with the Prophet's family in the days of Muhummad Bin Qasim in the seventh century – the original Muslim conqueror of Sindh credited with bringing Islam to the subcontinent.

This chapter places these localized modern skirmishes over identity and belonging within the context of colonial legal and political classification regimes that were global in their reach and implications. The unresolved and lingering question itself is powerful evidence of the reverberating impacts of colonial administrative and legal structures in creating lasting narratives around categories of subjects. I have argued that precolonial India was characterized by a diverse range of forms of slavery – both institutionally and ethnically. These forms were recognized by the EIC up until 1843, at which point they "abolished" slavery by denying the ontological existence of Indian slavery. I argue that the erasure of Indian slavery was inextricably linked to the increased visibility of Shidis as distinct categories of British subjects. Today, Shidis and their African heritage are viewed as physical artifacts of slavery and the slave trade in South Asia, despite the fact that legacies of slavery are, in fact, dispersed and fragmented in a myriad of Indian caste and kinship relationships.

This chapter has implications for the growing literature on racial capitalism (Jenkins & LeRoy, 2021; Johnson, 2004; Ralph & Singhal, 2019; Robinson, 2000). I have redirected attention to abolition – the left hand of global capitalism if you will – as the moment where race and slavery were mutually constituted in South Asia. Scholars of racial capitalism have been attentive to how global structures of economic exploitation were built on logics of racial differentiation. It is true that the violent treatment of Africans during the Atlantic slave trade and the benevolence of "freeing" Shidis in British India seem like qualitatively distinct modes of imperial engagement. Yet, both encounters represent different moments in a long-term project of driving and clearing the way for global capitalist production. Both Africans and Indians had specific roles to play as global imperial labor markets were expanding and being calibrated over the nineteenth century. In the imperial imagination, India was a site of free labor, notwithstanding the violence and disruption caused by empire, novel forms of global commodity production, and indigenous representatives of capital. Thus, indigenous forms of labor subordination were legitimized and rendered invisible in this moment. This new reality had to be discursively constructed through classification projects that could be reconciled with British desires to project antislavery fervor as part of her imperial mandate, while also facilitating violent capitalist labor regimes across the globe.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. Bombay Political Dispatches, 1857, IOR/E/1106. The majority of cases cited in this chapter are drawn from the India Office Records (hereafter IOR) at the British Library in London.

2. The terms Habshi or Shidi are commonly used to describe individuals or groups either proclaiming their identity or displaying phonotypical features identifying to others as originally from Africa. Indrani Chatterjee adopts the term Afro-Asians – a productive way to capture the complex histories of Africans on the subcontinent, and to acknowledge that Shidis were very much "Indians." The spelling of Habshis and Shidis varies a great deal across sources and I have replicated these spellings when quoting directly from sources.

3. Fernand Braudel characterized the Indian Ocean as a "world economy" with India as its center. Sugata Bose characterizes this space as "somewhere between the generalities of a 'world system' and the specificity of particular regions" (See Harms et al., 2013).

4. This was, of course, an exorbitant number, although still a small portion of India's population which was estimated at 150 million at the time. More conservative estimates were made by James Pegg who put the number at under one million, while Adam Williams estimated the number to be considerably higher (See Temperley, 2000, p. 177).

5. Reports of the Indian Law Commission upon Slavery in India, Slavery in the East Indies, 1841, Vol. I, 286–303.

6. Memorandum of the Political Secretary, From Acting Political Agent Lang, Extract Bombay Political Consultation, December 23, 1835, IOR/F/4/1699/68463.

7. Letter from Major R. H. Keatinge, V.C., Political Agent in Kattywar to C. Gonne, Esq., Secretary to Government, Bombay – no. 55W, dated March 16, 1865, IOR/L/PS/6/538.

8. List of Slaves in Kathiawar Ledger, August 25, 1837, in "Sale of 7 year old Kathiawar," IOR/F/4/1759/72063. In these reports, "African" slaves were usually in the single digits, while "domestics" were in the hundreds.

9. Slavery in the East Indies, 1841, Vol. III, 159.

10. Slavery in the East Indies, 1841, Vol. I, 277.

11. Slavery in the East Indies, 1841, Vol. I, 270.

12. Slavery in the East Indies, 1841, Vol. I, 275–277.

13. Slavery in the East Indies, 1841, Vol. I, 283.

14. For example, results for simple searches for "slavery" in the IOR taper off dramatically after this year, and increasingly focus on the slave trade outside of British India proper.

15. It is important to point out that the cases that I look at are only a subset of a much larger archive around the slave trade in the Persian Gulf, Oman, Zanzibar, Aden, Arabia, and the wider Middle East. I have selected out cases to only include those where there is a specific interaction with India, whether it is Indians being returned to India, or Africans being sent to Bombay. Many cases, for example, involve slaves freed by a Political Agent in Bushire, Muscut, or Aden, who were then sent to Bombay. These cases would have been governed by a separate set of mechanisms of recognition specific to the British Empire's political and diplomatic relationship with each of those political entities.

16. Bombay Political Proceedings (hereafter BPP) 1875, IOR/P/482.

17. BPP, 1882, IOR/P/1982.

18. This anxiety over "white slavery" in India is no doubt a fascinating insight into the politics of abolition and slavery in India, and while beyond the scope of this chapter certainly calls for further research and investigation.

19. In order to find slavery mentioned at all, one has to look in the Political Proceedings. Kidnapping, abduction, and purchase and sale cases, however, unlike slavery cases, are found across both political and judicial records and in publicized decisions in law reports. The political proceedings that I examine here are specifically concerned with the relationship between British India and native states, as well as rival colonial powers.

20. Empress of India versus Ram Kaur, decided on March 8, 1880, in the High Court of Allahabad Full Bench, MANU/UP/0034/1880.

21. "Sale of a girl, a British Subject, in the City of Baroda," IOR/E/4/846.

22. The Aga Khan is the head of the global Ismaili community, a wealthy and influential sect of Muslims with a substantial following in India, and disciples spread out across the Indian Ocean in East Africa and the Middle East.

23. Correspondence between Captain J. B. Dunsterville, Deputy Magistrate of Karachi and the Magistrate of Karachi, April 9, 1856, No. 2004, BJP, 1856, IOR/P/406/52.

24. BPP, 1893, IOR/P/4468.

25. BPP, 1872, IOR/P/4263.

26. BPP, 1882, IOR/P/1982.

27. BPP, 1890, IOR/P/3800.

28. Empress of India versus Ram Kaur, 1880.

29. See, for example, John D. Mayne, *Commentaries on the Indian Penal Code (ACT XLV of 1860)*, Madras: Higginbotham, 1884, 296–305.

30. Letter from the Commissioner of Police to the Town and Island of Bombay, February 9, 1858, from Mr Crawford, Commissioner of Police, Bombay Judicial Proceedings (hereafter BJP), 1858, IOR/P/407/7.

31. Letter to the Magistrate of Surat from G. Inverity, Magistrate's Office, November 30, 1857. BJP, 1858, IOR/P/407/7.

32. Major R. H. Keatinge, Political Agent in Kattywar to C. Gonne, ESQ, Secretary to Government, Bombay, March 16, 1865, IOR/L/PS/6/538, Coll 82.

33. "Indian States, Abolition of Practices analogous to slavery," November 28, 1928, Report of Resident at Gwalior on case of Rama's Treatment by Sirdar Anger of Gwalior, IOR/L/PS/10/1180.

34. Mohammad Siddique Mussafir, *Ghulami'a ain Azaadi'a Ja Ibratnak Nazari Ain Mussafir Jee Kahani Sandan Zabani*, 2007 ed. Translated from Sindhi to Urdu by Kitaab Publishers, Karachi. This work was originally published in 1950.

35. Syed families are considered a holy lineage who are accorded status and respect due to their being able to trace their lineage to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his family.

36. "A Heartrending Slave Story," *Cardiff Times*, Saturday, May 23, 1891, accessed through the British Newspaper Archive Online.

37. Ewald borrows this phrase from Barensde, See Ewald (2013, p. 205); R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean world of the seventeenth century*. Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2002.

38. BPP 1890, IOR/P/3800.

39. BPP 1890, IOR/P/3800.

40. BPP 1885, IOR/P/2650.

41. BPP 1893, IOR/P/4468.

42. See both IOR/R/2/667/15 and IOR/R/2/670/23.

43. Sheikh Sadik Ali Sher Ansari, *A short sketch, historical and traditional of the Musalman races found in Sind, Baluchistan and Afghanistan*. Karachi: Commissioner's Press, 1901, 74–76.

44. Interview with "Bilali Saab" and members of a local Shidi organization in Karachi, September 24, 2018, Lyari, Karachi. Names have been changed to protect the identity of my informants.

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