



Contours of Slavery and Social Change in Africa

Patrick Manning

The American Historical Review, Vol. 88, No. 4. (Oct., 1983), pp. 835-857.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-8762%28198310%2988%3A4%3C835%3ACOSASC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>

The American Historical Review is currently published by American Historical Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/aha.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Contours of Slavery and Social Change in Africa

PATRICK MANNING

THE PAST GENERATION OF AFRICANIST SCHOLARSHIP, with its profound revision in the interpretation of African social change, has raised questions about previous notions that change in precolonial Africa stemmed primarily from the influence of Europeans and other outsiders. According to the old view—the vision of “eternal Africa”—societies in tropical Africa changed at no more than a glacial pace, except under the relentlessly growing pressure of European intrusion. That this vision of eternal Africa survived until relatively recent times, if only among scholars whose work centered on other regions, is illustrated by H. R. Trevor-Roper’s famous characterization of African history as the study of “the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe.” A remarkable corpus of recent research has demonstrated, in contrast, the dynamic and innovative characteristics of precolonial African societies, particularly in the political, economic, and religious arenas.¹ As a result of this new literature, the Atlantic slave trade—that major avenue of contact between Africans and Europeans from the mid-fifteenth through the late nineteenth centuries—must now be viewed in a substantially different context.

The present study focuses on the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on precolonial African societies. In more general terms, it reconsiders the slave trade in terms of the relative importance of domestic and external sources of African social change. In addition to summarizing research on slavery and the slave trade, I hope to show, on the one hand, how the canons of African historiography have conditioned interpretations of the role of the trade in slaves and to indicate, on the

Research for this study was funded by a grant from the Social Science Research Council. Previous versions of this essay were presented at the Atlantic Seminar, held at The Johns Hopkins University in December 1981, and at the Walter Rodney Seminar, held at Boston University in April 1983. I wish to express particular gratitude to Jean Hay and Leonard M. Thompson for their useful comments.

¹ Trevor-Roper, “The Rise of Christian Europe,” *The Listener*, 70 (1963): 871. Historians who have followed Hugh Trevor-Roper’s recent efforts at authenticating documents will find his BBC television lecture—with its critique of journalistic fashion, of history based on speeches and battles, and of history beyond Europe—rewarding reading. Exemplary studies in the Africanist tradition include, in politics, Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975); in economic history, Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 2 vols. (Madison, Wisc., 1975); and, in religion, T. O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–7* (London, 1967).

other, what the implications of recent slave-trade studies are for broader interpretations of African history. The key elements unifying these empirical and interpretive considerations are a set of demographic and economic factors—changing prices, quantities, age and sex compositions of slave exports—and their links to African social structure.

THE OLD INTERPRETATIONS AND THE OLD DISPUTES on Africa and the slave trade have left their mark. The vision of eternal Africa allowed room for disagreement about the impact of the slave trade, and these disagreements have found their way into the current literature.² The contrasting interpretations separated those who contended that the transatlantic commerce in slaves brought major changes to African societies from those who denied that trade in slaves disturbed the African social order. Archibald Dalzel, the eighteenth-century English slave trader and propagandist, argued that African society remained unaffected, and he quoted King Kpengla of Danhomè in support of his position.³ David Livingstone, the mid-nineteenth-century explorer and missionary, argued forcefully that, to the contrary, slavery and the slave trade were devastating to African society.⁴ At the turn of the twentieth century Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston, an imperial man-on-the-spot and amateur scholar, attempted to synthesize these conflicting positions in an interpretation that is in some ways more optimistic than either: "Abominable as the slave trade has been in filling Tropical Africa with incessant warfare and rapine . . . , its ravages will soon be repaired by a few decades of peace and security during which this prolific, unextinguishable negro race will rapidly increase its numbers."⁵

Both the similarities and the differences among these arguments are instructive. Dalzel and Johnston saw African societies as robust and able to withstand the pressures of the slave trade, while Livingstone viewed African societies as fragile and easily shattered. All three, however, shared the view of African societies as static. Although it had survived the slave trade intact, the "prolific, unextinguishable negro race," in Johnston's words, had not progressed—had not gained the ability "to start the children from a higher level than the parents."⁶ This vision of eternal Africa, emphasizing stagnation and resistance to change, took root and

² Although pre-World War II studies on Africa commonly took a disparaging view of African society, some of them are very valuable sources for the history of African slavery and the slave trade. See, for example, Gustav Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan*, trans. Allan G. B. Fisher and Humphrey J. Fisher, 3 vols. (London, 1975); and Captain R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford, 1929), 33–46.

³ Dalzel, *The History of Dahomy, an Inland Kingdom of Africa* (1793; reprint edn., London, 1967), 217–21. Also see Loren K. Waldman, "An Unnoticed Aspect of Archibald Dalzel's *A History of Dahomey*," *Journal of African History*, 6 (1965): 185–92; and I. A. Akinjogbin, "Archibald Dalzel: Slave Trader and Historian of Dahomey," *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966): 67–78.

⁴ David Livingstone and Charles Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and Its Tributaries* (New York, 1866), 481–98; and David Livingstone, *The Last Journals of David Livingstone*, ed. Horace Waller, 1 (Hartford, Conn., 1874): 62–65, 97–98.

⁵ Johnston, *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races* (2d edn., Cambridge, 1913), 161–62; also see *ibid.*, 91. This volume, revised from the first edition of 1898, appeared in the Cambridge Historical Series and stood, for the first half of the twentieth century, as the most authoritative general text on African history.

⁶ Johnston, *History of the Colonization of Africa*, 162.

survived in the minds of observers largely because of the difficulty of knowing what changes had taken place. This difficulty, in turn, stemmed not only from the scarcity and dispersal of documentation on precolonial Africa but also from the blurring of perception brought about by cultural differences between African and European observers.

Contemporary Africanist historians have shown remarkable success in bridging the gaps within the documentary record and between cultures, not least because of the growing number of African contributors to the literature. Yet the rise of the Africanist tradition has not been sufficient to resolve the role of the slave trade in precolonial Africa. Instead, the earlier contending views—whether trade in slaves exerted great or small influence on African historical development—have aligned themselves with two interpretive tendencies that have grown up within the Africanist literature. For instance, Basil Davidson, writing in the early 1960s when many African countries were regaining their independence, argued, “Viewed as a factor in African history, the precolonial connection with Europe—essentially, the slave trade—had powerfully degrading consequences for the structure of society.” Some years later John D. Fage brought to the debate the revised figures on the magnitude of the slave trade; he concluded that the eighteenth-century loss of four million persons from West Africa did not reduce its population, and he later added that the region’s social institutions similarly remained unaffected.⁷ Considering many of the same data but also taking underdevelopment into account, Walter Rodney reasoned that, on the contrary, the trade in slaves had brought great harm to African economic and political structures.⁸ A decade later Joseph C. Miller argued, with reference to West Central Africa, that a domestically generated cycle of drought, disease, and famine did more to limit population and provoke social change than did the impact of slave exports.⁹

All of the participants in this recent discussion of the impact of the slave trade on Africa have assumed an African dynamism. The differences among them are in the relative emphases they have given to external forces of change. Can the external forces be safely minimized and treated as boundary conditions for a situation in which the major forces for change were domestic, as Fage and Miller have argued? Such an analytical approach may be termed the vision of “emergent Africa”: as the historical reconstruction of African social change has become increasingly detailed, this approach has become widely influential in the thinking of Africanist historians. Or must external factors be drawn fully into the analysis of precolonial forces for change, as Davidson and Rodney have contended? This is the vision of “Afrique

⁷ Davidson, *Black Mother: The Years of the African Slave Trade* (Boston, 1961), 277; and Fage, “Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History,” *Journal of African History*, 10 (1969): 393–404, “The Effect of the Export Slave Trade on African Populations,” in R. P. Moss and R. J. A. Rathbone, eds., *The Population Factor in African Studies* (London, 1975), 15, and “Slaves and Society in Western Africa, c. 1445–c. 1700,” *Journal of African History*, 21 (1980): 289–310.

⁸ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, 1972), 103–11. Also see Rodney, “African Slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression in the Upper Guinea Coast in the Context of the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966): 431–44.

⁹ Miller, “The Significance of Drought, Disease, and Famine in the Agriculturally Marginal Zones of West-Central Africa,” *Journal of African History*, 23 (1982): 30.

engagée," which focuses on such interactions as much as on domestic evolution. The choice between the two is determined by ascertaining which leads to the most detailed and yet elegant interpretation of the historical record.

John Fage's view of the role of the slave trade in precolonial Africa dominated the opinions of historians during the 1970s. For West Africa, Fage compared eighteenth-century slave exports that averaged forty thousand per year with a population he estimated at twenty-five million and a growth rate he estimated at 1.5 per thousand—or, some thirty-eight thousand—per year. Hence, "the effect of the export slave trade in the eighteenth century may have been more or less to check population growth," and its impact was in consequence minimal even at the height of slave exports. Fage continued, "The conclusion to which one is led, therefore, is that whereas in East and Central Africa the slave trade, sometimes conducted in the interior by raiding and warring strangers, could be extremely destructive of economic, political and social life, in West Africa it was part of a sustained process of economic and political development."¹⁰ West Africa's domestic processes of evolution were potent enough, in Fage's view, to absorb, neutralize, and, conceivably, even benefit from the effects of participation in slave exports. Although he admitted that the negative effects of slave trade might have been greater outside of West Africa, other scholars have claimed that, particularly for Central Africa, the population and social institutions successfully withstood the pressures of the slave trade.¹¹ This is the vision of emergent Africa, as applied to the impact of the trade in slaves.

Basil Davidson and Walter Rodney, while basing their views on the assumption of an evolving, developing African society, nevertheless asserted that the slave trade had a significantly detrimental effect on African society. Theirs was a vision of a precolonial Afrique engagée and of a continent that suffered from the engagement. The details of their arguments, however, rely not so much on demographic reasoning (both assumed that the African population did not decline) as on the interruption of African institutional and social progress. "The years of trial," as Davidson called the precolonial era, "were years of isolation and paralysis wherever the trade with Europe, essentially a trade in slaves, could plant its sterilizing hand." Although Davidson, with his slaves-for-guns thesis, and Rodney, with his underdevelopment thesis, listed striking examples to support this view, neither was able to develop a sustained and detailed analysis.¹² Moreover, their image of the meeting of European and African influences depicted not so much a true interaction of the two as the truncation of the latter by the former. Their interpretation thus veers

¹⁰ Fage, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History," 400.

¹¹ Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (Cambridge, 1975), 79–82. John Thornton, in an analysis of the 1777–78 Portuguese censuses of Angola, emphasized the ability of the Angolan population to reconstitute itself even with the loss of many slaves; in a subsequent study, however, he concluded that the region's population fell at the height of slave exports. Thornton, "The Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Angola: Effects on Demographic Structures," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 14 (1980): 421–22, and "The Demographic Effect of the Slave Trade on Western Africa, 1500–1800," in Christopher Fyfe and David McMaster, eds., *African Historical Demography*, 2 (Edinburgh, 1981): 691–720.

¹² Davidson, *Black Mother*, 273. Rodney did argue that African political development continued after 1500, but he failed to reconcile that position with his underdevelopment thesis. Compare his *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 103–23, with *ibid.*, 124–48. For a critique of the slaves-for-guns theory of African coastal states, see Patrick Manning, "Slaves, Palm Oil, and Political Power on the West African Coast," *African Historical Studies*, 2 (1969): 279–88.

back toward Harry Johnston's image of eternal Africa, except that Davidson and Rodney emphasized the negative, rather than the positive, contributions of European contact to African development.

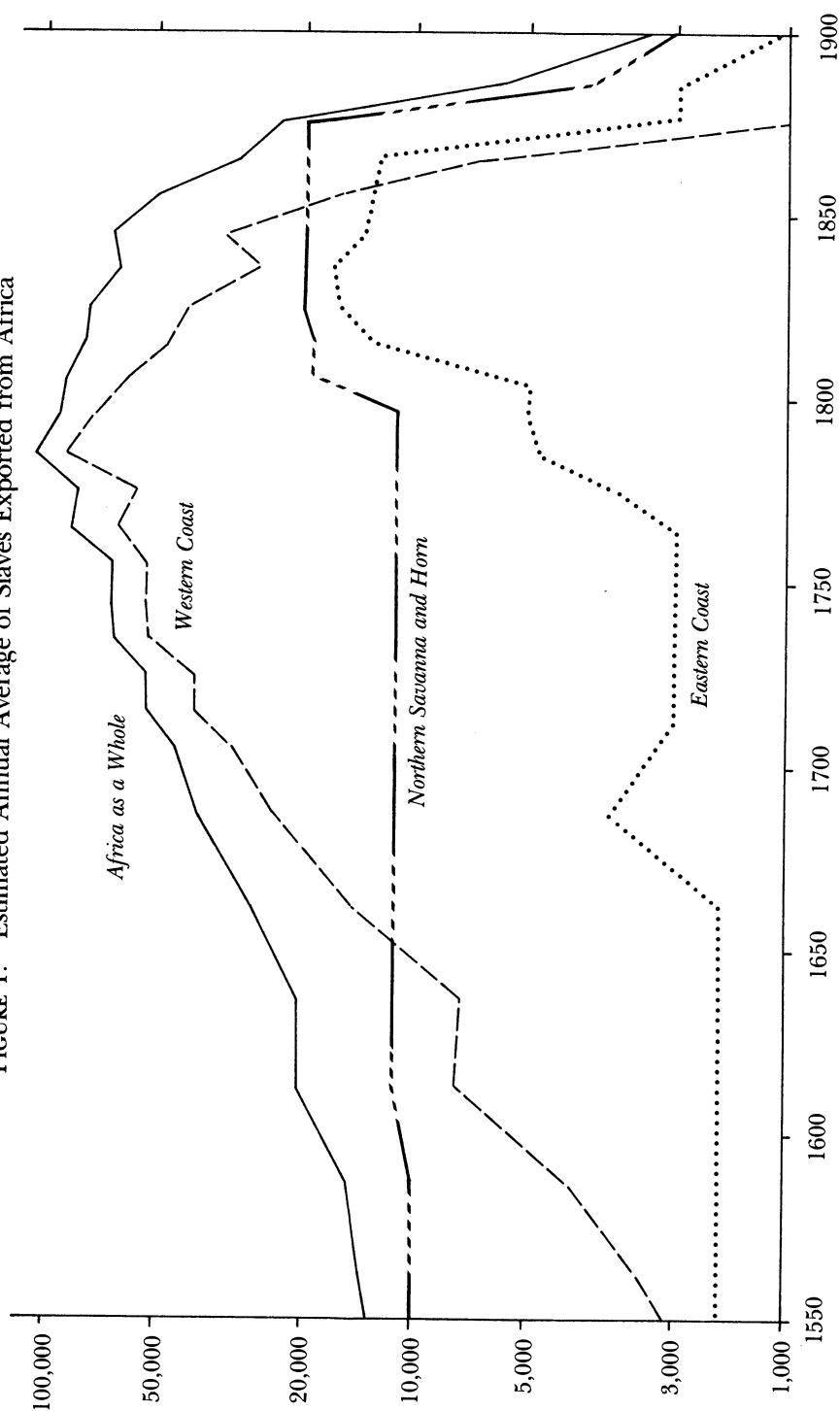
With a reformulation of the argument, however, the vision of *Afrique engagée* has gained validity as the relevant framework for interpreting the role of the slave trade in precolonial African history. The limits of Fage's interpretation are centered in his aggregative approach: he did not give much attention to the breakdown of slave exports by sex or age or to the impact of changes in quantities and prices of slave exports over time. Disaggregation of the data, when combined with analysis based on demographic principles and price theory, leads to results that are different from, and in some cases contradictory to, those previously accepted. The interactions of the New World demand for slaves with domestic conditions in Africa brought about—long before the late nineteenth century Scramble for Africa—pervasive social change. Such social changes included the expansion and subsequent transformation of polygyny, the development of two different types of African slavery, the creation and subsequent impoverishment of a class of African merchants, and a final expansion of slavery in the decades before the Scramble. Although the most profound changes from the interaction of the slave trade and African conditions occurred along the western coast of Africa, almost all regions of Africa were touched by the influence of the export trade at one time or another.

RECENT RESEARCH HAS CLARIFIED, to a remarkable degree, the dimensions of the export trade in African slaves. In addition to Philip Curtin's well-known estimation of the volume of the transatlantic slave trade, Ralph A. Austen has more recently estimated the volume of the slave trade across the Sahara, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean.¹³ The results of this research, updated to account for most subsequent revisions, are presented in Figure 1. Here the volume of exports is shown as estimated average annual exports for three great African regions: the western coast (from Senegal through Angola), the northern savanna and the Horn (from Senegal through Somalia), and the eastern coast (from Kenya through Mozambique and Madagascar).¹⁴ In age and sex composition, the populations of slave exports heavily favored young adults, those who were most valuable and best able to survive the ordeal of enslavement. Children, normally almost half the population in societies of that day, were quite underrepresented among slave exports. In the Atlantic trade, the preponderance of slaves transported was male, in a ratio of nearly two to one over women. This sex ratio varied according to, among other factors, the region of the coast from which slaves were shipped: men from

¹³ Austen, "The Islamic Red Sea Slave Trade: An Effort at Quantification," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies* (Chicago, 1979), 443–67, and "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1979), 27–76; and Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Wisc., 1969).

¹⁴ Of the remaining portions of the continent, South Africa and Namibia exported virtually no slaves, although some domestic enslavement and slave importing took place, and North Africa was a slave-importing region. For the slave-exporting regions, the intensity of enslavement varied greatly, and even some adjoining regions were quite dissimilar: Togo exported few slaves and the Gold Coast exported many; Gabon exported few slaves, and the Congo exported many.

FIGURE 1: Estimated Annual Average of Slaves Exported from Africa



NOTE: Quantities displayed above remain approximate, with an error margin of roughly 10 percent. The graph is intended to reflect quantities of export from Africa, though in some cases the quantities are imports to receiving areas, which are slightly lower figures.

SOURCES: Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Synthesis," *Journal of African History*, 23 (1980): 480-81, 485, 490; Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Wisc., 1969); Ralph A. Austen, "The Islamic Red Sea Slave Trade: An Effort at Quantification," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies* (Chicago, 1979), 443-67, and "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1979), 27-76; Edward A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves from the East Coast of Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975); 187, 213, 238; and Allen F. Isaacman, *Mozambique: The Africanization of a European Institution* (Madison, Wisc., 1972), 86, 92.

Angola, where the slaves came from the far interior, exceeded women by as much as three to one, while the sex ratio was more nearly equal in the Bight of Biafra and other regions where slaves were drawn from coastal areas.¹⁵ For slaves exported to the Middle East, the sex ratio was reversed: women exceeded men among those slaves exported.¹⁶ Prices of African slaves, however, are not as well known as the quantities and sex composition of slaves exported. The main studies to date suggest, however, the pattern displayed in Figure 2, which shows estimates of average purchase prices for slaves on the western coast of Africa (in constant £1913).¹⁷ These prices thus represent the real earnings of the African sellers of slaves. Within this overall pattern there was great local variation as well as sharp fluctuations in slave prices associated with famines, epidemics, and warfare.¹⁸ Prices for female slaves peaked somewhat later and fluctuated less than those for male slaves.

These patterns of volume and prices reflect the changing pressures of African, Middle Eastern, and, especially, New World demand. Domestic African purchasers of slaves valued women more highly than men, since the social productivity of women (not only as domestics and wives but also as laborers) exceeded the economic productivity of men (as agricultural or artisanal laborers). In North Africa and the Middle East, the relative demand for women was even greater than in sub-Saharan Africa, although male slaves were employed there in agriculture and military service. The highest priced slaves in the Middle East, however, were eunuchs, which serves to accentuate the basically female orientation of slavery in that region.¹⁹

New World demand, meanwhile, was primarily for male slaves, and prices for men there were higher than for women. For the years from 1650 to 1800, the high productivity of New World slave labor and high purchasing power of slave owners, particularly in the sugar industry, generated a level of demand that governed prices of slaves throughout the world. As the New World demand for slaves continued to grow in the eighteenth century, prices for both male and female slaves rose in Africa and in the Middle East, which tended to choke off demand for slaves in those areas. But in the late eighteenth century, the New World demand reached its peak and began a slow decline, for a variety of reasons: a slackening growth in sugar production, the growing campaign against the trade in slaves, and, later on, the rise of an alternative source of sugar in the European beet and the opening up of alternative sources of New World field labor. The successive steps in the abolition of the slave trade—first in the Atlantic and then in the Indian Ocean, North Africa,

¹⁵ Patrick Manning, "The Enslavement of Africans: A Demographic Model," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 15 (1981): 517.

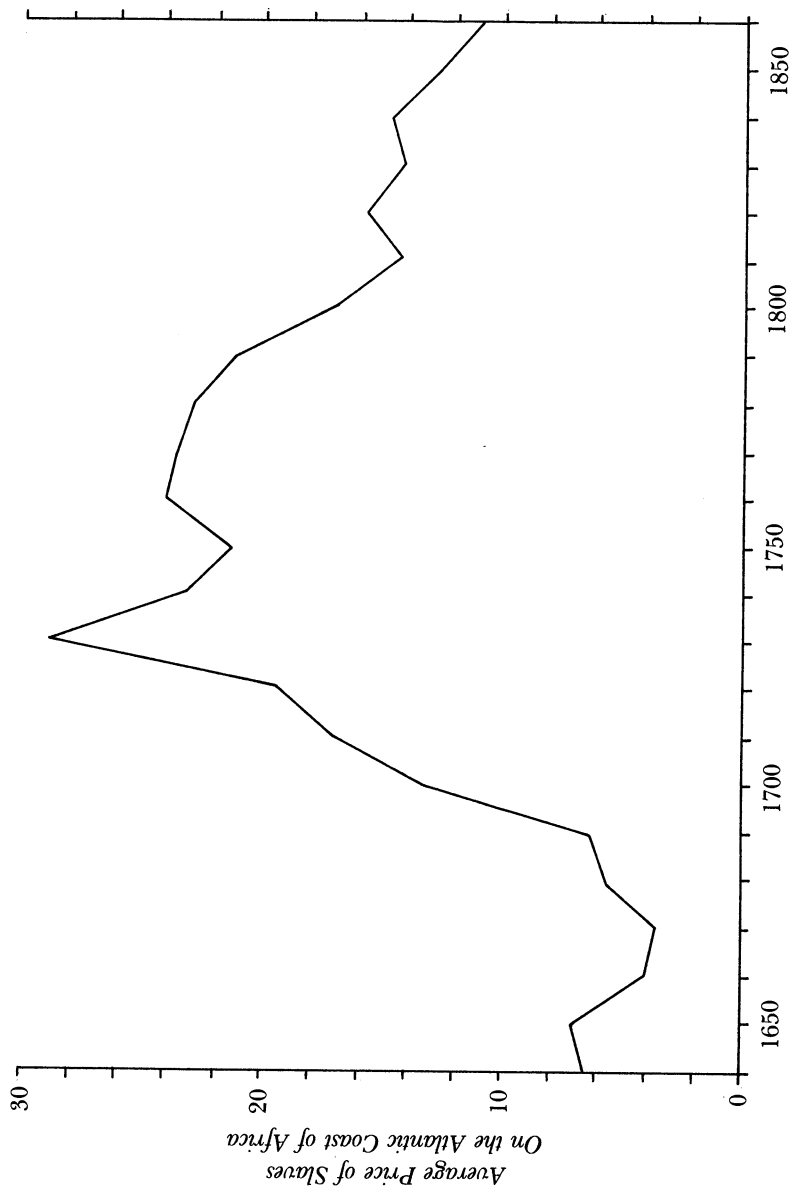
¹⁶ Austen, "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade," 44.

¹⁷ Prices are given in £1913 because 1913 was the last year of a more than two-century period of overall price stability; the main fluctuation in prices during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a price rise associated with the Napoleonic wars and a subsequent decline almost to prewar levels.

¹⁸ On the range of prices, see Richard N. Bean, *The British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1650–1775* (New York, 1975), 158–59; and Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, 1977), 123, 136–37.

¹⁹ Austen, "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade," 44–46; and Roberta Ann Dunbar, "Slavery and the Evolution of Nineteenth-Century Damagaram," in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, Wisc., 1977), 161.

FIGURE 2: Prices of Slaves Exported from the Western Coast of Africa



NOTE: Prices are in 1913 £.

SOURCES: Richard N. Bean, *The British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1650–1775* (New York, 1975), 135–60; E. Phillip LeVeen, *British Slave Trade Suppression Policies, 1821–65* (New York, 1977), 8, 113; and Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960* (Cambridge, 1982), 332–34.

and Asia—brought a decline in external demand for African slaves and a sharp drop in slave prices. From this point, domestic African, rather than external, demand governed slave prices.²⁰ Thus the expansion of nineteenth-century African slavery coincided with the decline in slave exports not only because more slaves remained in Africa but also because they became cheaper.

This continental perspective on the demography and economics of slave exports is supplemented and confirmed by the growing number of detailed local studies, whose contributions have included year-by-year totals of slave exports, specifications of which ethnic groups were exported, descriptions of the techniques of enslavement, analyses of the demography of the remaining population, and analyses of the conditions of slave production in Africa.²¹ The emergence of broad patterns has, further, prompted several scholars to propose general demographic models. In accounting for the size and composition of the export slave population, these models reveal by implication the size and composition of the remaining African population. The models generally focus on the western coast of Africa, although the rest of the continent has received some consideration. All tend to provide for a "catchment area" behind a given coast from which slaves were drawn, including a peripheral population that yielded slaves and a central population that both collected slaves and forwarded many of them to external markets.²² The models, which assume two stages of mortality (upon capture and upon export from Africa), have been used to argue that slave exporting reduced the population for those groups hardest hit by enslavement as well as for whole African regions and that the composition of the population was greatly distorted by the selective age and sex characteristics of exported slaves. Thus the models, used to organize data on the demography and prices of African slave exports, aid in the consideration of the impact of slavery and the slave trade on African society at each point in the course of the great expansion and eventual decline in the export demand for slaves. Their use represents an explicit adoption of the vision of *Afrique engagée*.

THE RECORDS OF THE FIRST PORTUGUESE RECONNAISSANCE along the African coast confirm that slavery existed in ancient Africa—as, indeed, in virtually all corners of the world. In addition to slavery, polygyny and monarchy were clearly developed in fifteenth-century African societies, notably those of Jolof, Benin, and Kongo.²³

²⁰ Claude Meillassoux, "Rôle de l'esclavage dans l'histoire de l'Afrique occidentale," *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, 2 (1978): 130–31.

²¹ For year-by-year totals of slave exports, see David Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola* (Oxford, 1966), 137, 141, 154–55; and Joseph C. Miller, "Legal Portuguese Slaving from Angola: Some Preliminary Indications of Volume and Direction, 1760–1830," *Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-Mer*, 62 (1975): 135–71. On identification of specific ethnic groups, see Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960* (Cambridge, 1982), 335–43. On methods of enslavement, see David Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford, 1978), 65–80. On the demography of the remaining population, see John Thornton, "The Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Angola," 417–27. And, for an analysis of slavery in East Africa, see Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, 153–212.

²² Manning, "The Enslavement of Africans," 499–526; John Thornton, "Demographic Effect of the Slave Trade on Western Africa," 691–720; and J. E. Inikori, Introduction to Inikori, ed., *Forced Migration: The Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies* (London, 1982), 19–45.

²³ Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, 1: 8–11; A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485–1897* (London, 1969); and Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison, Wisc., 1966), 38–46.

Before the New World came to dominate the African market for slaves, the Middle Eastern slave trade caused a slow but steady drain on the African population. Although the regional and temporal variations are difficult to reconstruct in detail, it appears that women crossed the desert to Morocco, Tripoli, Egypt, and South Arabia in greater numbers than did men, leaving more men than women in the African savanna. Those who became slaves within Africa were generally obtained in war; the victors got women for their harems, men for their fields, and additional slaves to export. In the African savanna, then, the losers lost population to the winners, who created a servile class, predominantly male and predominantly agricultural, from which a few slaves could be selected to rise as soldiers, domestics, or bureaucrats. So it was in Songhai, Borno, and Sinnar in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁴ The constraints on the expansion of slavery in these states, however, corresponded to the limits on the power of the sovereigns and the limited market for slave-produced goods. The early growth of this savanna system of slavery and trade in slaves may, in turn, have served to reinforce the development of slavery in adjoining African areas even before the era of maritime contact with Europeans.

The Atlantic slave trade before 1650 rarely carried more than ten thousand slaves per year. Its aggregate impact on the continent was, therefore, small, although the experiences of certain regions prefigured the sharp pressures that were subsequently felt on a broader scale. The Kongo kingdom, for instance, became the main source of slaves for the sugar plantations of São Thomé in the sixteenth century, and numerous sources confirm the corrosive effect of slave exports on Kongo political structure and on the spread of Christianity there.²⁵ The Upper Guinea Coast supplied large numbers of slaves (predominantly male) as New World laborers in the early seventeenth century, and accounts of contemporary observers give strong support to the image of a predominantly female society left behind, in which women took over agricultural and fishing tasks to assure sufficient production.²⁶ Although only these two regions, Senegambia, and perhaps the kingdom of Benin exported enough slaves in these early days to influence population size and composition, virtually every region on the western coast of Africa provided some slaves to European purchasers in the years before 1650. But slaves had not yet become Africa's dominant export: gold exports, especially from the Gold Coast, exceeded the value of African slave exports until the end of the seventeenth century.²⁷

A qualitative change in the slave trade took form at the turn of the eighteenth century; a four-fold increase in slave prices occurred within thirty years. From the

²⁴ Meillassoux, "Rôle de l'esclavage dans l'histoire de l'Afrique occidentale," 119–28; J.-P. Olivier de Sardan, "Captifs ruraux et esclaves impériaux du Songhay," in Claude Meillassoux, ed., *L'Esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975), 111–13; and J. L. Spaulding, "Farmers, Herdsmen, and State in Sinnar," *Journal of African History*, 20 (1979): 339–45.

²⁵ Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, 45–69.

²⁶ John Thornton, "Sexual Demography: The Impact of the Slave Trade on Family Structure," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of African Studies, held in Toronto, May 11–14, 1982.

²⁷ Richard Nelson Bean, "A Note on the Relative Importance of Slaves and Gold in West African Exports," *Journal of African History*, 15 (1974): 351–56. On slaves' ethnic origins, see Frederick Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford, 1974), 40–41; and Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 113.

late sixteenth century to the mid-eighteenth century, the quantity of slaves shipped across the Atlantic grew at an average rate of 2 percent per year. Driving this growing demand was the sugar plantation system, as Brazil came to be joined by Barbados, Jamaica, Martinique, and other colonies. By 1650 the New World had displaced the Middle East as the dominant destination of African slaves. During the final years of price stability in the seventeenth century, African suppliers developed efficient methods for delivering more slaves with no increase in cost.²⁸ But, by the opening of the eighteenth century, the limits on the ability of Africans to provide cheap slaves had been reached, and prices rose dramatically. The cost of obtaining slaves rose as prospective captives learned to defend themselves better and as middlemen and toll collectors interposed themselves into the process of delivery. For these reasons as well as actual population decline, slaves became scarce relative to the level of demand. The price increases in this period led to the establishment of something resembling a world market for slave labor, in which New World demand and prices for slaves were so high that both slave prices and the quantity of slaves moved were affected not only along the western coast but in many regions of the African continent as well.²⁹

Two African regions bore the brunt of the expansion in exports at the turn of the eighteenth century: the Bight of Benin and the Gold Coast. Both of these regions experienced numerous wars among small states near the coast, from which captives were sold to the Europeans. For the Gold Coast, it meant the eclipse of gold as the main regional export for a time; for the Bight of Benin it brought entry into large-scale Atlantic trade. In both cases, the volume of slave exports rose within three decades to a level that reduced the region's population, after which slave exports declined slowly. Similar patterns of export increase to the limits of population tolerance, with a subsequent slow decline in exports, can be traced for other regions at other times. For Upper Guinea, the most substantial export of slaves occurred between 1600 and 1630. For the Senegambia, after a spurt of exports in the sixteenth century, exports rose again to a peak in the late seventeenth century. For the Bight of Biafra, slave exports shot up from the 1740s to the 1760s and remained at a high level through the 1820s. The Loango coast experienced a sharp increase in export volume in the years from 1720 to 1740 and another increase to a still higher volume from 1780 to 1800. Angola also experienced two great spurts in exports: one in the mid-seventeenth century, after which slave exports declined, and one during the 1720s to 1740s, after which exports remained at a high level into the nineteenth century.³⁰

Each of these sudden regional expansions in the slave trade caused—and reflected—changes in the methods and the morality of obtaining slaves. War,

²⁸ Bean, *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, 69. For indications that prices at this time had fallen from an earlier level, see Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982), 198–200.

²⁹ Demonstrating the existence of a continental market in slaves necessitates demonstrating the movement of slaves at many points on the continent in response to changes in price. A related set of short-distance moves, however, suffices as well as long-distance displacements of slaves. For effects of this sort in Morocco, for instance, see Allan R. Meyers, "Class, Ethnicity, and Slavery: The Origins of the Moroccan 'Abid,'" *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10 (1977): 443–61.

³⁰ Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*; Phyllis M. Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast, 1576–1870* (Oxford, 1972), 91; and Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola*, 137, 154–55.

judicial procedures, and kidnapping were the main processes by which slaves were obtained—war predominated in most of West Africa, kidnapping predominated in the Bight of Biafra, and judicial procedures played a leading role in Central Africa. For the Gold Coast, Ray Kea has documented changes in the technology and social organization of war that preceded the expansion of slave exports there. As war was transformed from the combat of elites, with minimal and defensive war aims, to combat based on musketry, on the *levée en masse*, and on objectives of territorial conquest, a seemingly endless stream of conflicts and captives was unleashed.³¹ A similar transformation accompanied the rise of slave exports from the Bight of Benin.

Were the wars provoked by the desire to sell slaves, or were the captives simply a by-product of wars fought for other reasons? Observers of the slave trade have debated the question inconclusively ever since the Atlantic trade began. Philip Curtin posed this choice with an eye to sustaining the vision of emergent Africa: he contrasted a political model and an economic model for enslavement in the Senegambia and concluded that the evidence best supported the political model.³² E. Phillip LeVeen offered the economist's response. The decision to export slaves captured according to the political model depended on the level of prices, and thus slave exporting, as opposed to capturing, fits the economic model.³³ The test of the issue is the responsiveness of slave export quantities to price changes. Even for small and well-defined areas, the elasticity of slave supply fluctuated sharply with the passage of time. Much of the apparent disorder, however, can be resolved by distinguishing periods when the system of supply was stable and positive price-responsiveness was clear (1730 to 1800 in the Bight of Benin) from periods when the ability of merchants to supply slaves was either improving sharply (1740 to 1780 in the Bight of Biafra) or declining (1690 to 1730 in the Bight of Benin).³⁴ These three examples can be set within the vision of *Afrique engagée*. In the Bight of Benin in the eighteenth century, domestic and external forces were locked in an equilibrium of sorts; in the Bight of Biafra in the mid-eighteenth century, domestic conditions changed more rapidly than can be explained by the influence of external forces alone; and in the Bight of Benin from the late seventeenth through the early eighteenth century external influences were the main source of African sociodemographic change.

As the demand for slaves continued to grow, opportunities for restrictive and monopolistic practices arose. Richard Nelson Bean, who has collected the best data on prices, joined with Robert Paul Thomas to argue that the Atlantic slave market was competitive and did not allow for monopoly profits, since European shippers could escape price gouging in one African port by going to another.³⁵ The contrary position is based on the argument that, since European shippers required a speedy turn-around and good relations with their African suppliers, they were tied to a

³¹ Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast*, 322–36.

³² Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, 1: 157–68.

³³ LeVeen, "The African Slave Supply Response," *African Studies Review*, 18 (1974): 9–28.

³⁴ Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey*, 40–42; and Northrup, *Trade without Rulers*, 55.

³⁵ Richard Nelson Bean and Robert Paul Thomas, "The Fishers of Men: The Profits of the Slave Trade," *Journal of Economic History*, 34 (1974): 885–94.

single port. Even without monopoly profits, however, some African slave exporters may have collected high rates of profit through economic rent—that is, those merchants who were able to obtain slaves at unusually low cost still sold them at the prevailing market price. The African revenues from slave exports, which rose along with prices at the turn of the eighteenth century, were almost all turned into expenditures on imported goods: the value and volume of these imports thus increased dramatically at the same time that export prices rose.

The sudden increases in mercantile profit and in the volume of imported goods simultaneously began to restrict African population size. The technique of using New World inventories of slaves to project the ethnic origins of slave exports has established that, for the Bight of Benin, slaves came almost entirely from the Aja-speaking peoples in and around the kingdom of Danhomè, near the coast. The full demographic drain on the Bight of Benin was concentrated on this group, which experienced a loss estimated at over 3 percent of the population each year for over forty consecutive years. This loss was sufficient to reduce the Aja population substantially over the course of a century, both in absolute terms and in relation to the surrounding ethnic groups, notably the Yoruba.³⁶

The increase in New World slave prices influenced the slave trade in the northern savanna of Africa. The higher prices attracted male slaves from the interior regions, where demand for them was low, to the coast for sale. Female slaves tended not to be sent on the long march to the coast, since the high prices for female slaves in the African and Middle Eastern markets removed the incentive to sell them to Europeans.³⁷ But the higher New World prices for slaves also tended to raise the prices for slaves in the Middle East. The result was to choke off demand and to limit the volume of slave exports across the Sahara and the Red Sea.

The coastal exports of young adult slaves, twice as many men as women, tended to transform the structure of the population and the organization of society. A surplus of women developed, so that polygyny was reinforced, and work done by women in some places replaced that done by men. African traditions of family structure and division of labor, no matter how deeply instilled, could not but bend before these demographic pressures. The tradition of female agricultural labor in the matrilineal belt of Zaire and Angola may have been strengthened as an accommodation to the shortage of men for production.³⁸ Similarly, although the institution of polygyny preceded the slave trade, its extent was reinforced by the surplus of women. In addition, a surplus of women meant that men did not need to wait until their late twenties and thirties to marry their first and second wives. Indeed, the fear of enslavement may have encouraged men to marry at a young age.³⁹ In the savanna areas, despite the relative shortage of women caused by slave exports to the Middle East, polygyny remained widespread. But, in those areas with a shortage of women, polygyny was a privilege reserved to the old and the

³⁶ Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey*, 32–33, 335–43.

³⁷ Manning, "The Enslavement of Africans," 552.

³⁸ It should be noted, however, that women predominated in the agricultural labor force in areas of southern Africa from which few slaves were exported.

³⁹ That is, the situation might have been analogous to the tendency of men to marry early as they are being called off to war.

powerful, whereas, in areas with a surplus of women, polygyny was within the reach of most adult men.

Historical and anthropological studies of African slavery often include efforts to classify systems of slavery that generally use pairs of terms to distinguish two main types. Thus, "Islamic" slavery of the savanna is distinguished from "lineage" slavery of the coastal regions; "market-based" slavery of plantations is distinguished from "kin-based" slavery with its "absorptionist" character.⁴⁰ These historical and anthropological categories fit rather neatly, however, with the demographic distinctions between the western coast of Africa and the northern savanna: coastal slavery was primarily the enslavement of women, while savanna slaves were predominantly men. Thus "lineage," "kin-based," "absorptionist" slavery included women drawn into families, where they lived in the households of their owners, became wives or concubines, and whose children came to have rights within the family. "Islamic" and "market-based" slavery included men who were placed apart in slave villages, who produced for the market, often had no family at all, and thus clearly formed a separate and subordinate, servile class. This predominantly male slavery of the savanna had existed as long as the Saharan slave trade carried a surplus of women; the slaves produced for the palaces and served the local market. Though of relatively long standing, this system did not grow sharply until late in the eighteenth century. But the predominantly female slavery of the coast did grow rapidly, in region after region, along with the growth in the export slave trade: important changes in coastal family and institutional structure may thus be traced to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴¹

The demand for slaves affected African polities by causing them not only to participate in slave exports but also to attempt to end it. The kingdom of Benin successfully withdrew from supplying slaves early in the sixteenth century. The Oyo Empire, though by reputation long tied to the slave trade, probably contributed only minimally to the export of slaves from Africa until late in the eighteenth century. And Boubacar Barry has interpreted the political events of the late seventeenth century in the Waalo kingdom of Senegal as an abortive attempt to withdraw from the slave trade.⁴² It is for the kingdom of Danhomè that the issue of attempted withdrawal from the slave trade has caused the most controversy. There is a certain plausibility to the notion that, in an area that was ravaged by trade in slaves and that experienced depopulation along with internecine wars, one state should attempt to conquer the whole region to end such conflicts and prevent social collapse. The question remains whether King Agaja's wars of the 1770s were an

⁴⁰ Martin Klein and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Slavery in West Africa," in Gemery and Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market*, 203; Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, 3–81; and James L. Watson, "Slavery as an Institution, Open and Closed Systems," in Watson, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), 1–15.

⁴¹ Meillassoux, "Rôle de l'esclavage dans l'histoire d'Afrique occidentale," 123–28; and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Plantations in the Economy of the Sokoto Caliphate," *Journal of African History*, 19 (1978): 349–51. For peoples of the Congo basin, according to Wyatt MacGaffey, "not only the degree of stratification but the matrilineal emphasis is a function of the influence of the Atlantic trade on a fundamentally bilateral system"; MacGaffey, "Lineage, Structure, Marriage, and the Family amongst the Central Bantu," *Journal of African History*, 24 (1983): 184.

⁴² Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*; Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, c. 1600–c. 1836* (Oxford, 1977), 151, 158, 176–77; Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey*, 31; and Barry, *Le Royaume du Waalo: Le Sénégal avant la conquête* (Paris, 1972), 142–59.

attempt to do so. But Danhomè's invasion and subjugation by the distant yet powerful Oyo made any such expanded Aja state impossible, and from 1730 to 1830 Danhomè faced a ring of weakened but by no means vanquished enemies; the internecine wars provided the New World with an inordinately large proportion of its slave laborers.⁴³

The case of Asante, to the west, represents a slightly different resolution of the same problem. Asante rose in the late seventeenth century to challenge Denkyira, the Gold Coast's dominant power, and eventually succeeded in incorporating virtually all the Twi-speaking peoples. As a result, the export of the people of Asante declined after about 1730, and the large number of slaves exported from the Gold Coast in succeeding years came increasingly from the interior Voltaic peoples.⁴⁴ In Oyo, only with the constitutional crisis and a series of factional disputes that began in the 1770s did that kingdom's export slave trade become significant, and the magnitude of slave exports grew with the decay of the state.⁴⁵ Thus, although the slave trade certainly affected politics, the nature of the trade's impact varied sharply from polity to polity; sometimes, as in the case of Oyo, politics influenced the trade in slaves more than the trade influenced internal affairs.

THE AGGREGATE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPACT OF THE SLAVE TRADE ON Africa reached a peak in the late eighteenth century, when slave exports averaged some one hundred thousand per year, and this high level of export continued into the early nineteenth century. During this period, the foci of enslavement tended to move from west to east and from coast to interior. For this period, then, it is most appropriate to assert that slave exports diminished the African population.

One method of assessing the population drain on individual ethnic groups entails, as mentioned above, making a New World inventory of slaves' ethnic origins.⁴⁶ A second approach focuses on whole regions, assessing the ability of regional populations to reproduce themselves in the face of the population drain resulting from slave exports. Roger Anstey, David Northrup, and, most effectively, John Thornton have used this procedure to good effect.⁴⁷ Thornton's results indicate a decline in the population of the whole Congo-Angola region during the eighteenth century, and his analysis further suggests that, during the height of the export trade, most of the regions of the West African coast could have withstood the pressure from the trade in slaves only with difficulty. A third approach, continental in scope, has been adopted by Joseph Inikori. His method focuses not so much on the actual reduction in population as on the difference between the actual population of Africa and the counterfactual population that might have existed in the absence of slave exports.⁴⁸

⁴³ David Henige and Marion Johnson, "Agaja and the Slave Trade: Another Look at the Evidence," *History in Africa*, 3 (1976): 57–68; and Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey*, 42.

⁴⁴ K. Y. Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720* (Oxford, 1970).

⁴⁵ Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 265–66, 281–82; and Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey*, 45. For a contrary view, see Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983), 78–80.

⁴⁶ See note 36, above.

⁴⁷ Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, 79–82; Northrup, *Trade without Rulers*, 81–82; and Thornton, "Demographic Effect of the Slave Trade on Western Africa," 709–14.

⁴⁸ Inikori, Introduction to *Forced Migration*.

Yet another approach involves the estimation of the impact of the slave trade through computer simulation. In this case, a model African population is postulated, divided into raiding and raided groups, and assigned a series of demographic and slave-trade rates: fertility, mortality, age-sex composition of the captured population, division of the captives between domestic and exported slaves, and so forth.⁴⁹ Preliminary projections of the model's results suggest that the slave trade caused losses that, if not devastating to the continent, were certainly severe. For the western coast, a region with an estimated population of twenty-five million in 1700, some six million slaves left in the course of the eighteenth century. The total number enslaved is projected at some twelve million, with four million retained in domestic slavery and over two million lost to death in the course of enslavement.⁵⁰ Under these conditions, the African population in 1800 was substantially less than it would have been in the absence of the trade in slaves. For the northern savanna and Horn, whose exports rarely exceeded twenty thousand per year, losses in slave exports were felt more acutely than the numbers alone suggest, because of the predominance of women exported. As a result, the northern savanna and the Horn were probably unable to experience any increase in population during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The demographic drain of the slave trade interacted with Africa's periodic droughts and famines. As the experience of the nineteenth century suggests, the incidence of drought and famine served at once to increase and to decrease slave exports. The onset of bad times caused the destitute to sell themselves or their children into slavery; but the decline in population resulting from famine tended to reduce the number of slaves.⁵¹ Stephen Baier and Paul E. Lovejoy have documented the great drought of the northern savanna in the mid-eighteenth century, which caused hardship, migration, and economic decline. Climatic recovery in the following decades led to economic growth, which was reflected both in the increase in slave exports and in the rise of the Sokoto Caliphate.⁵² Jill Dias and Joseph C. Miller have documented a cycle of drought, famine, and epidemic in Angola that severely limited population growth.⁵³ These Malthusian checks on population provide the primary evidence for revising downward Inikori's estimates of the counterfactual African population: Africa's population would surely have been substantially greater without the slave trade, but to know how much so requires a better knowledge of the effects of famine and disease than we now have. Miller may, however, have gone too far in arguing that the limits imposed by disease and

⁴⁹ Patrick Manning, "The Impact of Slave Exports upon Africa: A Demographic Simulation," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of African Studies, held in Toronto, May 11–14, 1982.

⁵⁰ Note that these figures are estimates of the total number of persons enslaved, and so forth, during the course of a century; the number of persons in domestic slavery at the end of the century would be a different, and perhaps smaller, figure.

⁵¹ Gerald W. Hartwig, "Demographic Considerations in East Africa during the Nineteenth Century," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 12 (1979): 658–72.

⁵² Lovejoy and Baier, "The Desert-Side Economy of the Central Sudan," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8 (1975): 570–74.

⁵³ Jill R. Dias, "Famine and Disease in the History of Angola, c. 1830–1930," *Journal of African History*, 22 (1981): 360–62; and Miller, "The Significance of Drought, Disease, and Famine," 17–62.

drought were so great that these factors, rather than the slave trade, provided the fundamental limits on Angola's population.⁵⁴

The selective export of women from the coastal regions had its greatest impact in the late eighteenth century. The results of the simulation model suggests that, while the sex ratio among those populations that lost slaves remained roughly equal, the proportion of adult women to men rose substantially for the western coast as a whole: the estimated ratio of adult women to men rose to roughly six to five among the raiding populations.⁵⁵ But in those areas with the heaviest participation in slave exporting, the disparity in the sex ratio became greater. John Thornton's analysis of the Portuguese censuses for Angola indicates that the ratio of adult women to men was as much as two to one. On the one hand, this sex ratio shows how African societies could attempt to cope with an enormous drain on the population with losing their ability to reproduce; the people of Angola virtually became a livestock herd to be harvested. On the other, one woman was exported for every two to three men, and the loss of the women's reproductive potential made it all the more difficult for the population to maintain itself. The bulk of the agricultural labor fell on the women who remained in Angola, and the incidence of polygyny remained high.⁵⁶

By the end of the eighteenth century, the New World's demand for slaves persisted at a somewhat reduced rate. Only then did the quantity of slaves supplied by western Africa begin to decline—and for two reasons. First, the region just could not continue to supply slaves at the previous rate, and, second, the prices of slaves sold on the western coast declined (in real terms). The first of these factors sent European slave traders around the Cape of Good Hope to seek supplies in East Africa; the second allowed buyers in Africa and the Middle East to expand their purchases of slaves as prices fell into the range of their purchasing power.

The East African slave trade began its expansion in the late eighteenth century as a direct result of changes in the trade from western Africa. This trade, which rose and fell within a century, had two branches: one fed into European slave plantations, first in the New World and then on the islands of the Indian Ocean, and the other fed into the growing system of slavery in the Middle East, including the plantations of Zanzibar and the Kenya coast. The first called for exports of male slaves, but the second was predominantly female in its oceanic portion.⁵⁷

The increased African and Middle Eastern demand for slaves also led to an expansion of slavery and the trade in slaves in the northern savanna. A related rise in volume of slaves exported from northern Nigeria to the coast can be traced to the 1780s. We do not know whether the increased Nigerian exports resulted from wars on Curtin's political model, in response to rising religious fervor, or whether the higher demand for slaves resulted in more wars, which called forth religious

⁵⁴ Miller, "The Significance of Drought, Disease, and Famine," 30.

⁵⁵ Manning, "The Impact of Slave Exports upon Africa," 8.

⁵⁶ Thornton, "The Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Angola," 422–25; and Manning, "The Enslavement of Africans," 521–23.

⁵⁷ Ralph A. Austen, "From the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean: European Abolition, the African Slave Trade, and Asian Economic Structures," in David Eltis and James Walvin, eds., *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Madison, Wisc., 1981), 117–40.

justification. The reforming zeal of Usuman dan Fodio can be seen, on the one hand, as having led to the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate, with the captives and the slave trade as a side effect, or, on the other, as the political reorganization of a society that was becoming increasingly dependent on slave labor for production.⁵⁸ Whatever the causal relations, the interconnections were clearly of importance.

Even after slave prices began to inch downward, the wealth garnered by slave merchants remained remarkable. In real terms, slave prices were four times greater in the eighteenth century than they had been in the seventeenth, and much of that increase must have reflected profit, inasmuch as the physical cost of delivering slaves cannot have increased to that extent in the course of a century. The cost of capturing a slave was always low, and the prices of slaves purchased near the point of capture, which Curtin aptly characterized as the price of selling stolen goods, were low at all times.⁵⁹ The remainder of the price was made up of the cost of transporting, feeding, and otherwise providing for slaves, and by the fees, commissions, and bribes that had to be paid either to hold or to move slaves. The need to feed and provide for slaves led to the growth in market demand for food along slave trade routes. The fees and profits provided the basis for the growth of a wealthy commercial and aristocratic class, which used its wealth not only to purchase imported goods but to buy its way into positions of influence in domestic society. As Paul Lovejoy pointed out about the eighteenth century, "rather than the state controlling the trade, the merchants dominated the government."⁶⁰

Yet, even though the slave trade led to the rise of a wealthy and exclusive class, only a small portion of imported goods properly qualified as luxuries. The greatest value of imports was usually in textiles, produced first in India and then, with the rise of Manchester, in England. Luxury textiles in Africa were African-made; the imports qualified as cheap if colorful material, which reached a large number of consumers.⁶¹ The next most important import was money—cowrie shells from the Maldives, gold from Brazil, European silver coin, copper rings, brass manillas, and cloth currency. The export slave trade was thus closely tied to a substantial expansion of the money supply in several regions of Africa.⁶² And here, too, all segments of society, not just an elite, were linked to the slave trade. Iron, salt, and alcoholic beverages were other major imports, for European supplies of these commodities were cheaper than their African counterparts. Iron imports, for instance, served to constrict iron mining in Africa, although the imported iron did

⁵⁸ Lovejoy, "Plantations in the Economy of the Sokoto Caliphate," 349–51; Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey*, 30, 45; and R. S. O'Fahey, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in Dar Fur," *Journal of African History*, 14 (1973): 29–43.

⁵⁹ Philip D. Curtin, "The African Diaspora," *Historical Reflections*, 6 (1979): 14–16.

⁶⁰ Lovejoy has limited this characterization, however, to market towns and seaports; see his *Transformations in Slavery*, 101; and Robert W. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade* (New Haven, 1981), 30–39, 43–47.

⁶¹ Marion Johnson, "Technology, Competition, and African Crafts," in Clive Dewey and A. G. Hopkins, eds., *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India* (London, 1978), 259–69.

⁶² On cowrie currency, see Jan S. Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, "A New Money Supply Series for West Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade: The Import of the Cowrie Shell from Europe," in *Slavery and Abolition* (forthcoming), and *Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (forthcoming). On imports of gold, see Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast*; on cloth currency imports, see Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, 1: 237–39; and, on copper currency and manillas, see Northrup, *Trade without Rulers*, 161–65.

help expand the blacksmith trade. Finally, imports of firearms—though not of the militarily decisive character they assumed in the nineteenth century—were sufficient to decide the outcome of several military engagements. Although firearms rarely exceeded a small portion of the value of imports, their importation did show a correlation with the volume of slave exports.⁶³

BY THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, a dramatic reversal in the character of the Atlantic slave trade had taken place. Most New World areas had dropped out of the slave trade, and slave imports were illegal in the remaining areas of demand—Cuba and Brazil. As a result, although the prices of slaves in the New World rose because of the scarcity of new imports, the export demand for slaves at any given price on the African coast had fallen significantly, and the price of slaves in Africa fell almost as significantly. The relatively scarce price data available for the early nineteenth century are somewhat contradictory, so the precise timing of the price decline remains to be confirmed. But it is clear that, sometime between 1780 and 1850, the price of slaves on the African coast fell, in real terms, by one-half.⁶⁴ The mechanisms of slave supply remained in place, however, so that a glut on the slave market became evident. This nineteenth-century glut brought a pervasive change in the character of African slavery: as slaves, particularly male slaves, came within the purchasing power of African buyers, the scope of African slavery expanded greatly in the mid-nineteenth century, although the total number of people captured may not have changed greatly.

As more women remained in Africa, the number of births dramatically increased; and, as more men stayed, the previous drain on the adult male population ended, although the process of enslavement for the African market still implied a significant mortality. These changes resulted in rapid population growth.⁶⁵ In addition, the large number of cheap male slaves now made the situation on the coast much more like that in the savanna, where male slaves were used for agricultural labor. Thus the coastal areas now developed slave plantations that produced for palace populations, for the African market, and for export. The mid-nineteenth-century growth in the export of palm oil, coffee, and peanuts thus reflected not only the rise in European demand for these products but also a significant decline in the cost of production because of the fall in slave prices.⁶⁶

⁶³ J. E. Inikori, "The Import of Firearms into West Africa, 1750 to 1807: A Quantitative Analysis," *Journal of African History*, 18 (1977): 339–68.

⁶⁴ The prices shown in Figure 2 for the (see page 000, above) for the 1790s through the 1850s are based on E. Phillip LeVeen, *British Slave Trade Suppression Policies, 1821–65* (New York, 1977), 3, 113. These prices are there listed only in summary form and without sources, so that it appears that the work of documenting them will have to be duplicated. Philip Curtin's carefully calculated prices for the Senegambia show an increase to a peak in the 1830s, followed by a decline; Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, 2: 51–53. Also see David Tambo, "The Sokoto Caliphate Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 9 (1976): 187–217; and Gwyn Campbell, "Madagascar and the Slave Trade, 1810–1895," *Journal of African History*, 22 (1981): 203–27.

⁶⁵ Thornton, "Demographic Effect of the Slave Trade on Western Africa," 426.

⁶⁶ A. J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar, 1600–1891* (Oxford, 1973), 91–96; and George E. Brooks, "Peanuts and Colonialism: Consequences of the Commercialization of Peanuts in West Africa, 1830–70," *Journal of African History*, 16 (1975): 49–50.

The growing population moved rapidly to an overall parity in the sex ratio. Wealthy and powerful men were still able to collect harems, but there no longer existed such a surplus of women that many men could expect to have second wives at an early age. Thus, the "kin-based" slavery of the coastal regions in the previous era tended to be replaced by a "market-based" slavery, in which men lived in isolated slave villages and lost any ability to rise in the social order and in which many women, also in isolated slave villages, became part of an oppressed class rather than retaining the ability to experience progressive integration into their masters' families.⁶⁷

The decline in slave prices brought a substantial transfer of wealth in Africa. Previously, the wealth from slavery and the slave trade had gone to the merchants and fee collectors who gathered in the great difference between the initial cost of capturing slaves, which remained low, and the market price of slaves. The price of slaves fell once it was no longer supported by New World demand, but the supply continued to be large as long as the price exceeded the initial cost of capturing slaves: the mercantile profit margin was squeezed unmercifully by market forces. Some merchants simply lost their fortunes, as did the Bobangi merchants of the Congo River and Francisco Felix da Souza in the Bight of Benin.⁶⁸ Others were able to invest their fortunes in land and benefit from the direct exploitation, rather than the sale, of slaves. Thus, this period saw the growth of an active land market, as wealthy speculators sought through purchase and state action to gain control of prime agricultural land, and, through exploitation of slave labor, to become large-scale planters.⁶⁹ Both rapid population growth and disputes over land ownership, therefore, are phenomena that Europeans observed in the early colonial years, but these phenomena may be traced back beyond the European conquest of Africa to the end of the export trade in slaves.

The East African slave trade hit its peak in the mid-nineteenth century, and the movements of immense numbers of people brought political turmoil to the region and spurred the spread of disease; cholera and smallpox in particular followed the paths of the slave trade. East African merchant fortunes never grew to the size of those in the earlier West African trade, because of the lower level of prices, although the boom in ivory provided some compensation to merchants. Instead, slave plantations arose in East Africa, as elsewhere on the continent, serving both the domestic market and, especially in the production of cloves, the export market.⁷⁰

The European conquest of Africa enforced, almost immediately, the end of slave raiding and the trade in slaves. But no firm act of emancipation followed to liberate those enslaved: so protracted and incremental was the process that the active New World term "emancipation" is replaced in much of the African literature with the

⁶⁷ Latham, *Old Calabar, 1600–1891*, 94–96, 121.

⁶⁸ Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow*, 156–59; and J. Michael Turner, "Les Bresiliens: The Impact of Former Slaves upon Dahomey" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1975), 88–98.

⁶⁹ A. G. Hopkins, "Economic Imperialism in West Africa: Lagos, 1880–92," *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968): 580–606.

⁷⁰ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*.

passive "decline of slavery."⁷¹ With the conquest, many slaves, particularly males, ran off, and many others, particularly females, remained under their masters with renegotiated conditions of servitude. Colonial administrations, unwilling to compensate slave owners but equally unwilling to face the wrath of owners who had been forced to liberate slaves without compensation, generally tended to ensure that all children born after a given date would remain free.⁷² But, with few exceptions, the force of the European conquerors as well as the voluntarism of African slaves ended slavery in Africa rather than any action of leading figures within African society.

African slave owners, therefore, recognized the fundamental threat of the onset of European conquest: they stood to lose not only their sovereignty but also the full benefits of the economic system on which their strength was based. Thus it is that one more major African religious revolution, the Mahdist movement of the Nilotic Sudan, is susceptible to interpretation as an economic movement as well as one of faith. In 1877, the Khedive Isma'il, the Egyptian ruler of the Sudan, concluded an anti-slave-trade pact with Britain and appointed Major-General Charles George Gordon as governor of the Sudan. Those who then joined with the Mahdi to proclaim a rightly guided, theocratic state included slave merchants and planters, whose slave villages produced grains and manufacturers for domestic sale and export.⁷³ Their defeat of Gordon in 1885 granted them more than an additional decade in which to direct an economic system based heavily on slave labor.

Quite aside from the European pressures to dismantle the newly expanded African slave-labor mode of production, the African system of slavery tended to evolve in two—essentially contradictory—directions under the pressures resulting from the expansion of the scale of slavery. The continued enslavement of large numbers of people and the low prices of slaves were at the root of both developments. At one extreme, so many people had been placed in slave villages that the problem of social control became serious. In the Sokoto Caliphate and Zanzibar, slave owners realized that providing women for the slave men helped them maintain social control, and, in the Sokoto Caliphate, slavery tended to evolve toward serfdom and, therefore, toward a limit on the abuses and human destruction of the system.⁷⁴ At the other extreme, the declining value of slaves led them to be increasingly considered as expendable. In the military actions of the western savanna in the late nineteenth century, male captives, whose ability to resist made them a threat and whose market value was low, were sometimes simply executed. Similarly, the reported increase in the number of human sacrifices in the kingdoms

⁷¹ For an excellent case study that uses this terminology and also indicates why it has been adopted, see Richard Roberts and Martin A. Klein, "The Banamba Slave Exodus and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan," *Journal of African History*, 21 (1980): 375–94.

⁷² Patrick Manning, "Un Document sur la fin de l'esclavage au Dahomey," *Notes africaines*, 147 (1975): 88–92; and Frederick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London, 1922), 365, 372, 375–76.

⁷³ Gabriel R. Warburg, "Ideological and Practical Considerations Regarding Slavery in the Mahdist State and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881–1918," in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1981), 248–57.

⁷⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy, "Characteristics of Plantations in Nineteenth-Century Sokoto Caliphate (Islamic West Africa)," *AHR*, 84 (1979): 1269, 1290–92; and Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, 221–23.

of Danhomè and Benin can be related not only to the pressures of imminent European conquest but also to the declining value of slaves. The frequency of witchcraft accusations and attendant executions, moreover, also seems to have risen in this period, which provides another example of both the declining value of humans and the psychic pressures on societies facing conquest.⁷⁵

The European conquerors, in crushing the African slave-labor system, tended to bring about an equalization in African society. The slaves used their increased freedom to seek improved status, while those whose wealth had been based in slaves had to contrive to transfer that wealth into other resources or simply lose it. But the change in Africa's labor systems, while substantial, was by no means absolute. One case makes explicit the connection between precolonial and colonial systems of labor migration: the Gaza state in Mozambique captured and exported slaves to Madagascar and the Mascarenes from mid-century to the 1870s, and thereafter sent men who were similarly recruited as contract laborers for the mines in South Africa.⁷⁶ Of the many other parallels between precolonial and colonial labor systems, one more may suffice: the migration of Mossi laborers to work on the cocoa farms of the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast in the twentieth century closely resembles the earlier movement of Mossi slaves to the same area.

ETHNOGRAPHERS OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY, writing in the last days of slavery, described the institution as relatively benign, emphasizing the legal and societal protections available to slaves as well as their potential for upward mobility.⁷⁷ These reports—written after slave raiding and the trade in slaves had ceased and after slaveholders had lost the support of the state—stand in sharp contrast to the travelers' reports of the late nineteenth century, which tell of brutal raids, immense loss of life, and massive exploitation of slaves by masters.⁷⁸ Each of these views of African slavery was appropriate to the precise time at which it was written. Both views, but particularly the former, have in turn been taken by subsequent scholars as appropriate characterizations of African slavery across the centuries.

The vision of emergent Africa, based on the assumed existence of continuous pressures for change within African societies, tends to suggest that both of these static views of servile institutions were invalid, without posing an alternative. The vision of *Afrique engagée*, by explicitly reintroducing external forces of causation into a framework that assumes an African dynamism not only confirms that

⁷⁵ Wyatt MacGaffey reported that "Monteiro, describing Angola in the 1860s, wrote that witchcraft accusations were the chief source of slaves for shipment, and argued that the reductions of the slave trade had caused the number of executions to rise." MacGaffey, "Economic and Social Dimensions of Kongo Slavery (Zaire)," in Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, 254. Also see Meillassoux, "Rôle de l'esclavage dans l'histoire d'Afrique occidentale," 130; and Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, 247.

⁷⁶ Patrick Harries, "Slavery, Social Incorporation, and Surplus Extraction: The Nature of Free and Unfree Labour in South-East Africa," *Journal of African History*, 22 (1981): 317–20, 328–39.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Northcote W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, 4 vols. (1913–14; New York, 1969), 1: 103–07, and 2: 111–25; and Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 33–46.

⁷⁸ The writings of David Livingstone were outstanding in this regard. Livingstone and Livingstone, *Expedition to the Zambesi*, 412–13, 481–98, 620–23; and Livingstone, *Last Journals* 1: 62–65, 88–89, 97–98.

suggestion but indicates the nature and timing of some important African social changes. In so doing, this historiographical approach must admit to a range in the type of interactions. In some cases, domestic forces dominated the interactions; the expansion and transformation of polygyny under the influence of the slave trade, for example, took place in the context of a previous African attachment to multiple marriage. In other cases, external forces dominated the interaction; both depopulation and the impact of imported goods, for instance, represent the domination of outside influences. And the precise combination of domestic and external forces provided the key impetus to certain changes, notably in the rise of Asante and Danhomè, the collapse of Kongo, and the mutual reinforcement of the slave trade, famine, and epidemic.

The return on this increased complexity in analytical framework is a clearer time-perspective on African society.⁷⁹ African slavery, along with a range of associated institutions, underwent successive transformations in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries under the impact of changing economic, demographic, and political conditions. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, in an essay that sits firmly within the emergent Africa tradition of analysis, have gone so far as to criticize the use of the term "slavery" in Africa on the grounds that it implies a greater uniformity in African institutions of servitude than is warranted.⁸⁰ Their emphasis on the specificity, in sociological cross-section, of African systems of slavery is valid in principle if somewhat exaggerated in practice. To their sociological specificity must be added, however, the specificity of African societies in historical time-perspective, as they changed through the action of the diverse creative powers within them and the varying external pressures upon them. In the era of the slave trade, the external influences were so powerful as to set in motion comparable trends in social change in many parts of the African continent two centuries before the colonial conquest did in a vastly different fashion.

⁷⁹ Analogous approaches are being applied to other aspects of precolonial African history. On domestic and Islamic influences in state growth, for instance, see O'Fahey, *State and Society in Dar Fur*.

⁸⁰ Miers and Kopytoff, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," 3-7.

