Alicia Schrikker and Nira Wickramasinghe (eds.), *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020 [Critical, Connected Histories], 331 pp. ISBN 9789087283445, price: EUR 52.50 (paperback).

Historians will look back on 2020 as a signal year in slavery and Indian Ocean historiography because it witnessed the publication of no fewer than three books dedicated to reconstructing the life histories of slaves in European establishments in the Indian Ocean. The first of these, Matthias van Rossum, Alexander Geelen, Bram van den Hout, and Merve Tosun's *Testimonies of Enslavement: Sources on Slavery from the Indian Ocean World*, draws on the records of the Court of Justice at the Dutch East India Company (VOC) settlement at Cochin on the Malabar Coast to examine what the lives of ten male and female slaves reveal about the dynamics of bondage, caste, and social control in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century India. Nira Wickramasinghe's *Slave in a Palanquin: Colonial Servitude and Resistance in Sri Lanka* uses judicial and other records to reconstruct and contextualize the lives of slaves in early nineteenth-century British colonial Ceylon. In the third of these books, *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean*, Alicia Schrikker and Wickramasinghe seek to expand our understanding of slavery in the Indian Ocean world still further by assembling a collection of articles that seek to encourage interdisciplinary approaches to studying the lives of enslaved men, women, and children in European colonial possessions in this oceanic basin from the perspective of those who had to endure enslavement.

In an introduction that follows a short preface by Réunionnaise feminist activist, educator, and writer Françoise Vergès, Schrikker and Wickramasinghe establish the conceptual framework for the essays in this work by noting that they want to establish a dialogue between the history of slavery and slavery's legacies in the Indian Ocean world by encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to studying the lives of, and the impact of abolition on, the hundreds of thousands of enslaved South and Southeast Asians transported across the Indian Ocean by Europeans between 1500 and the mid-nineteenth century. The book's eleven chapters are organized into two sections, the first of which focuses on slave mobility, emotions, and identities. Marina Carter inaugurates this section by providing a broad overview of Indian slaves in the colonial Indian Ocean world, especially those who reached the Ile de France (Mauritius) during the eighteenth century. Herman Tieken follows with a discussion of small-scale slave trading between Ceylon and the Cape of Good Hope from 1728 to 1737 based on letters written by the Ceylonese Chettiyar Nicolaas Jurgen Ondaatje who was sent to Cape Town as a convict. Alexander Geelen, Bram van

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den Hout, Merve Tosun, and Matthias van Rossum then examine the experience, mobility, and control of slaves in eighteenth-century southwest India, an exercise that includes comparing slavery in Cochin with that in Batavia. Kate Ekama in turn explores the nature and dynamics of slave life in eighteenth-century VOC Colombo. Lodewijk Wagenaar's chapter rounds out this section by considering how court records can be used to imagine the life and experiences of Boenga van Johor, a slave maid sent as a convict from Batavia to Cape Town's Robben Island in 1735.

The second section's six chapters focus on issues of legacy, memory, and absence. Yvette Christiansë leads off with a discussion of what archival sources can reveal about slavery and indenture in the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean when viewed from the perspective of a specialist in Africana studies and English literature. Paul Brij, who teaches comparative literature, argues for the need to treat slave memoirs as "acts of equality" in which the individuals who wrote these memoirs viewed themselves as being equal to free persons. Pamela Scully's discussion of what documented cases of slave infanticide can reveal about the ways in which freedom, motherhood, sexuality, and authority were defined in colonial South Africa is a reprint of chapter 7 in her 1997 book on family, gender, and British slave emancipation in the western Cape Colony between 1823 and 1853. Anne Marieke van der Wal in turn analyzes the ways in which folk songs can function as a site of memory among enslaved persons and their descendants. Sarah Longair's chapter considers how examples of slave material culture associated with David Livingstone that were collected by colonial explorers and officials and are now held in museum collections can be interpreted. Lastly, interdisciplinary researcher Guno Jones compares how transatlantic slavery and Indian Ocean slavery have been treated in Dutch historiography and public culture. In a brief afterword, historian of South Africa Robert Ross observes that since there are few instances in the archival record in which slaves controlled the ways in which their words were transmitted to us, it is more enlightening to look at what slaves did rather than what they said as we seek to understand the slave experience.

Being a Slave is a welcome addition to the literature on slavery and its legacy in the Indian Ocean world, and Schrikker and Wickramasinghe are to be commended for assembling an interesting and often provocative collection of articles that will challenge historians of slavery within and beyond the Indian Ocean to draw on the insights that cognate disciplines can provide. In some instances, the results of these endeavors are ultimately less compelling than their authors hoped they would be—Wagenaar's imagining the life of Boenga van Johor and van der Wal's analysis of sea shanties come to mind—while Christianë's chapter reflects the problems that can arise when non-specialists

attempt to evaluate and interpret the often problematic archival sources upon which efforts to reconstruct the complex history of slavery, abolition, and indentured labor in the Indian Ocean world rest. Brij's concept of "acts of equality" is, on the other hand, representative of how literary analysis can encourage historians and others to view slave agency from a different perspective, while Longair's chapter highlights the need for historians to seek out and make use of surviving examples of slave material culture. The complexities of slavery and bondage in the Indian Ocean world mandate that we must be willing to expand our conceptual and interpretative horizons as we seek to better understand the nature and dynamics of the slave experience in this vast world, and *Being a Slave* provides a number of welcome templates for how we might go about doing so.

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