

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Slavery, Mobility, and Identity on the Western Coast of India, Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries

Ananya Chakravarti

History, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., USA  
Email: [ac1646@georgetown.edu](mailto:ac1646@georgetown.edu)

## Abstract

In the wake of the establishment of the Portuguese in the region, slavery was fundamentally constitutive of early modern society on the west coast of India. While indigenous hierarchies and existing systems of slavery shaped Portuguese slavery, over time, indigenous society too was transformed by the extensive reliance on enslaved labor facilitated by European trafficking networks. Centering slavery in the study of South Asian history underscores the importance of considering the difference between elite projects of enforcing boundaries, both spatial and social, and the ways in which enslaved people negotiated these projects. Thus, instead of taking for granted the classificatory labels of race, caste, and blackness imposed upon enslaved peoples by elite institutions, a social history of slavery elucidates instead the evolution of these mechanisms for policing identity, and the centrality of the expropriation of labor in identity formation.

**Keywords:** labor; slavery; caste; race; Blackness; Goa; Marathas; Portuguese Empire; early modern India

Like much of South Asia, slavery stirs in popular memory in the western coast like a snake slithering through paddy marsh, subterranean and subtle. Take for example, the temple of Khāpro Ravalnāth, part of a complex of such shrines that dot the precincts of the village of Narve in Goa, the center of a sacred landscape dominated now by the Saptakoteśvar temple. Whereas the latter's recent renovation was marked on social media by Prime Minister Modi himself, the temple of Khāpro Ravalnāth, past a rural convenience store on a dusty road, lies in its shadow in relative obscurity. Ravalnāth is a ubiquitous figure across Goa, a protector deity or *rākhandār* often associated with the meting out of justice. His particular aspect in this temple, as Khāpro, is more unusual. The name itself is a variant of *khāpri*, which denotes blackness in Marathi and Konkani usage in contemporary Goa and Maharashtra. It is likely derived from the Portuguese *cafre*, itself a borrowing from the Arabic *kāfir*. The etymology is reflected in the theology: local elders tell variants of a tale in which Ravalnāth appeared to a dying African, who, depending on the telling, had either run away to the village in an attempt to escape slavery or had been trafficked there.

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Society for the Comparative Study of Society and History. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

Ravalnāth promised him justice in the form of remembrance. In the continued worship of the deity, he lives on.

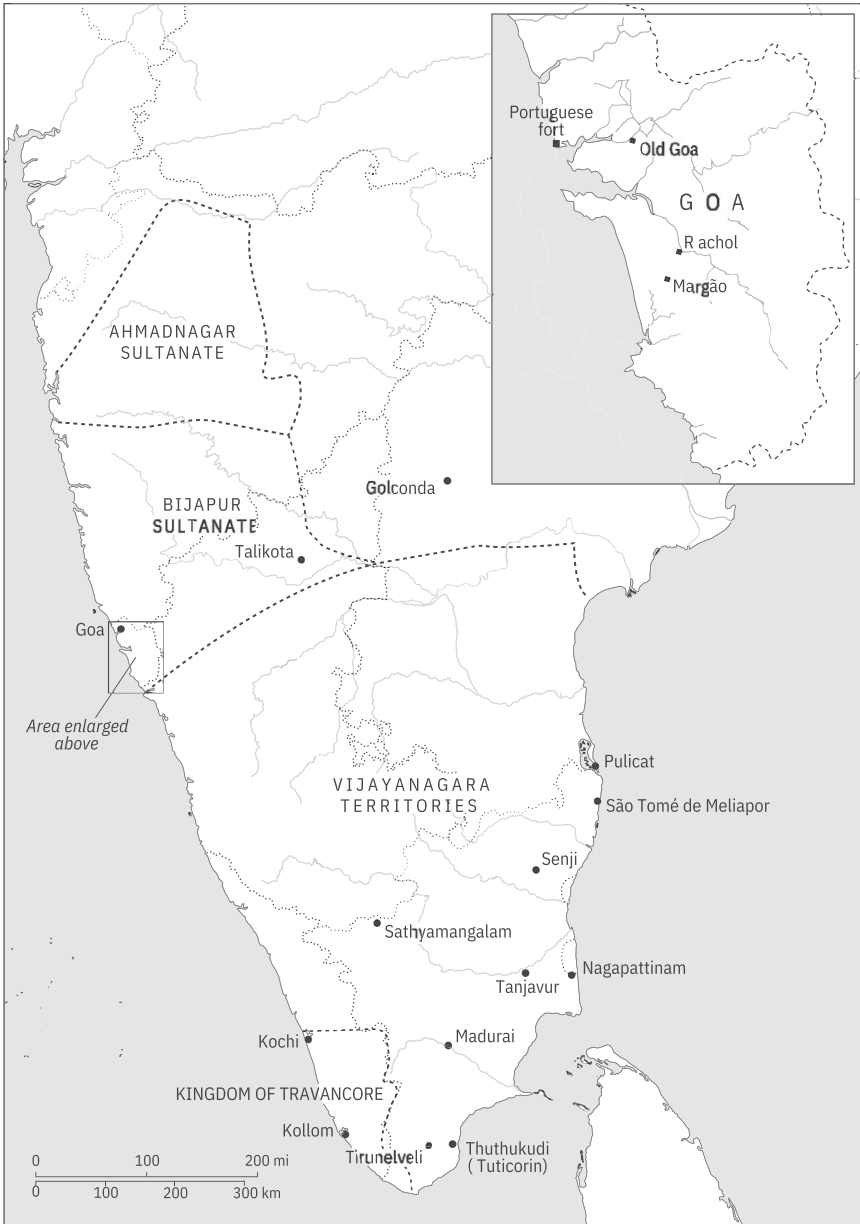
Such shrines dot the length of the coast, all the way to the southern city of Kochi, where, should you find yourself lost in the dizzying by-lanes of Mangatumukku in Mattancherry, Kochi, the helpful spirit of *kappiri muthappan* may well appear to guide you.<sup>1</sup> Put another way, the legacies of enslaved people are apparent across the landscape of the coast in these shrines, a living reminder of the complicated trajectories of enslaved people, and the creative spatial practices they pursued to escape the strictures that confined them. Yet, despite this oblique form of commemoration, South Asians remain largely blind to the history of slavery—or its relevance to a present marked by its historical harms, including the ubiquity of forced labor, maintained in part through systems of hierarchy that evolved through the practice of slavery. In other words, spaces and communities shaped by histories of mobility and slavery are obscured in South Asia, in itself both a symptom and a cause of our ongoing historical amnesia around slavery.

To address the ongoing harms of forced labor in South Asia today, we must recognize slavery as a central feature of its past, in the manner that historians of the Atlantic World routinely do. In that spirit, this essay argues that the early modern western coast of India, although fragmented across several polities, both European and indigenous, was both interlinked and shaped fundamentally by slavery. Secondly, slavery in this mixed zone of sovereignty was undergirded by elite projects of enforcing boundaries—both spatial, as in licensed and surveilled pathways and borders, and social, as in carefully policed structures of identity. By the same token, tracing how enslaved peoples negotiated these boundaries allows us not only to look beyond the inherently porous boundaries of early modern states in apprehending the coast, but also brings into view the entangled evolution of ideologies of race, caste, and anti-blackness in the region (see [Map 1](#)).

Certain caveats are important to make at the outset. Firstly, the western coast was a complex zone of sovereignty, involving various European imperial outposts, Deccan sultanate territory, and little kingdoms, sometimes but not always adumbrated loosely by interior imperial formations, including Vijayanagara before its fall. It follows that the archives that may be brought to bear for studying the history of the coast are vast and far-flung. This essay relies heavily on Portuguese imperial archives, including diplomatic correspondence with neighboring states and missionary and Inquisitorial records. While slavery on this Indian Ocean coast undoubtedly predated the arrival of the Portuguese, they played a key role in accelerating and transforming pre-existing modalities of enslavement in the region. Thus, while my archival base is by no means exhaustive, it is indicative of important dynamics that had relevance beyond the territory of the Estado, as borne out by the Maratha and Kochi archives, with which I supplement my

---

<sup>1</sup>These deities are part of a class of non-brahmanical guardian deities, as we can discern from the use of alcohol in cult rituals, deities to whom the lower castes in particular might well turn. For a general discussion of this class of deities, see Alf Hildebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). See also Neelima Jaychandran, “Geographies of Death Memory: Shrines Dedicated to African Saints and Spectral Deities in India,” *South Asian History and Culture* 11, 4 (2020): 143–46.



Map 1. The early modern western coast after the establishment of Portuguese Goa.

reading. This essay is thus best read alongside older and emerging work on slavery along the western coast and in the Deccan hinterland.<sup>2</sup>

Here, I hold apart the important body of work on Gujarati networks of slavery that radiated across the ocean and overland into the interior further north. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has persuasively argued in a recent essay, this network continued to be dominated by Arab, African, and Indian merchants, with the Portuguese playing at best a predatory role through piracy.<sup>3</sup> This corpus provides a useful counterpoint to the case study presented here, in which Europeans played a transformative and dominant role in the trade in people. Thus, to take one example, the experience of enslaved Africans explored in this essay contrasts with the image of elite military slavery drawn from the archives of these networks, and which must supplement the dominant view of enslaved Africans in South Asian historiography. While their experience did contrast sharply with other world regions in many respects, this does not reflect all the institutional contexts within which enslavement was occurring in early modern South Asia.

Secondly, the boundaries between various modalities of forced labor were fuzzy, particularly in rural or homestead settings, and in the country-trade in people along the coast that co-existed and overlapped with oceanic networks of trafficking and enslavement. Richard Eaton's useful and capacious definition of slavery, as "the condition of uprooted outsiders, impoverished insiders—or the descendants of either—serving persons or institutions on which they are wholly dependent," precisely captures this broad continuum of human bondage.<sup>4</sup> Despite its many forms, the control of labor, including sexual labor, was central to the various institutional arrangements that characterized slavery in South Asia, including those undergirded by caste.

While formal enslavement must be analytically viewed in light of this broader context of coerced labor, for the purposes of this essay, my main focus will be on individuals defined legally and socially as slaves. This is in part due to the importance of this class in the Portuguese archive of commodified slavery. The Portuguese no doubt adopted and adapted other pre-existing modalities of enslavement, including labor under obligation and forced labor extracted on a communal basis through practices such as untouchability. Still, the approach has advantages: by focusing on individuals defined formally as enslaved, I demonstrate the particular vulnerability of low-caste but touchable communities to enslavement in domestic settings and for the coercion of sexual labor.

Thirdly, centering slavery in the study of South Asian history underscores the importance of considering the difference between elite projects of enforcing boundaries, both spatial and social, and the ways in which enslaved people negotiated these projects of confinement. Here, I rely on the approach of Márcio de Sousa Soares, who argues that enslavement, trafficking, slavery, and manumission are all parts of the same process of the institutionalization of slavery. Thus, the enslaved

---

<sup>2</sup>In the interests of space, and with the forbearance of the editors of *CSSH*, a short supplementary bibliographic essay can be found under my profile at DigitalGeorgetown, <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1088558>.

<sup>3</sup>Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Between Eastern Africa and Western India, 1500–1650: Slavery, Commerce, and Elite Formation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, 4 (2019): 805–34, 813.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Eaton, "Introduction," in Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, eds., *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1.

person could transit from the status of being rendered an absolute social outsider, a status necessary to the process of enslavement, to becoming a member of society, albeit marked as “freed,” through a process of liminal incorporation.<sup>5</sup> The institutionalization of slavery was undergirded at every step by mobility, both social and spatial, and by elite modes of classification, and concomitantly, of identity formation. This makes the study of mobility, as well as of identity, crucial to understanding slavery. As a corollary, as this essay will demonstrate, the history of slavery is vital to understanding the entangled evolution of race, caste, and anti-blackness in South Asia.<sup>6</sup>

### Vectors of Enslavement: Poverty, Trafficking, Caste, and Debt Bondage

The networks of the Indian Ocean, as well as a variety of indigenous practices, subtended slavery in the region long before the first Portuguese ship loomed over the horizon. It did not take long for the Portuguese to insert themselves into this system. Their adoption of the practice and terminology of *begār*, for example, reflected labor arrangements that predated their arrival and which were then incorporated into the constitution of the early colonial state: one provision of the 1526 charter which regulated the land tenure system of the fledgling colonial state, and represented a compact between the Portuguese crown and Goa’s village communities, enjoined landholding village chiefs or *gancars* to supply residents as “*begarins*, who are workers, every year at their expense, to clean the walls and plaques [*chapas*] of this city of the weeds that grow on them, and other necessary and urgent services that may sometimes arise.”<sup>7</sup> Conflict over extraction of *corvée* labor from the *comunidades* became a perennial theme of colonial politics.

Furthermore, the Portuguese state continued to allow the extraction of labor from communities on the basis of caste. The famed physician Garcia d’Orta, writing in 1563, described such labor extraction from communities deemed untouchable in Portuguese Bassein: “In every village, there is a people despised and abhorred by all, who do not touch others, who eat everything, even carrion [*as cousas mortas*]. Each village gives them its leftovers to eat, without touching them. Their concern is to cleanse the houses and streets of dirt. They are called *deres* or *farazes*. They also serve as executioners.”<sup>8</sup>

Aside from these indigenous modalities of coercing labor, the Portuguese also extended their own institutions, first elaborated in Iberia, to their imperial outpost,

<sup>5</sup>Márcio de Sousa Soares, “A promessa da alforria e os alicerces da escravidão na América Portuguesa,” in Roberto Guedes, ed., *Dinâmica imperial no antigo regime português: escravidão, governos, fronteiras, poderes, legados (Séculos XVII–XIX)* (Rio de Janeiro: MAUAD X, 2011), 37.

<sup>6</sup>Here, I follow the insight of Indrani Chatterjee, who laid out the historiographical elisions that the inattention to the history of slavery in South Asia has created, which takes as given both the spatial and ethnic contours of “South Asia.” Indrani Chatterjee, “Renewed and Connected Histories: Slavery and the Historiography of South Asia,” in Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, eds., *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 22–23.

<sup>7</sup>Afonso Meixia, “Foral de usos e costumes dos gancars e lavradores desta Ilha de Goa e outras anexas delas, 1526,” in Joaquim Heliodoro da Cunha Rivara, ed., *Arquivo Português Oriental*, vol. 5, pt. 1 (Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1865): 126.

<sup>8</sup>Garcia d’Orta, *Colóquio dos simples, e drogas e coisas medicinais da Índia* (Goa, 1563), 213.

introducing for example, the system of penal exile in Goa.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the state had a complex system of compensating its officials in people who were assigned a variety of juridical states, but who effectively served at the pleasure of and were dependent upon the state.<sup>10</sup> The enslavement of individuals thus existed on a continuum of forced labor practices and dependency, within a variety of institutional contexts.

Enslavement was undergirded in part by poverty, which ensured the relative cheapness of enslaved labor. Writing from Kollam in 1550, the Jesuit Nicolò Lancilotto noted that the market in enslaved people was fueled by the phenomenon of people either selling themselves or their kin out of desperation and that the prices for slaves fluctuated with the availability of food.<sup>11</sup> That enslaved labor was cheaper is indicated by the instructions the future saint Francis Xavier gave to the Jesuit Kaspar Berze in 1552 regarding the economic administration of their college in Goa: he advised him to “buy a pair of *mainatos* [members of a washermen caste], who are in charge of doing the laundry [since] it will be cheaper to buy *mainatos*, than give the laundry to *mainatos* from outside.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, wage labor extracted from free people was more expensive than acquiring enslaved people from the same caste. A few decades later, the abundant supply and low prices of enslaved people in Goa was also attested by the French navigator François Pyrard, who wrote that all the slaves displayed in the auctions held on the Rua Direita were “very cheap, the dearest not being worth more than 20 or 30 *pardaus*.”<sup>13</sup>

That the agrarian poor were particularly vulnerable to enslavement, as Lancilotto suggested, is evident in a register of people manumitted in Goa in the late seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup> Bearing in mind that the manumitted were more likely to be those most cheaply acquired and easily replaced, the most heavily represented caste in the register was the “*curumby*” (*kuḍumbi/kunbi*), an agricultural caste (103 out of a total of 724 people, or about 14 percent of the manumittedes). Garcia d’Orta described this community as those who “work and sow the earth for rice and other legumes,

<sup>9</sup>Timothy Coates, *Convicts and Orphans. Forced and State-Sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550–1755* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup>In 1635, the judicial officers of the Crown in Goa, including the chancellor, chief justices for criminal and civil matters, the judge of deeds, the crown prosecutor, and the chief judge for probate as well as four judges at-large, each received two “*escravos da liberdade*” worth 190 *xerafins* each to make up their total salary. Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP), António Bocarro, *Livro das plantas de todas as fortelezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental* (1635): f. 79v., at <https://purl.pt/27184>.

<sup>11</sup>Nicolò Lancilotto letter to Ignatius of Loyola, Kollam, 5 Dec. 1550, in *Documenta Indica*, vol. II, Joseph Wicki, S.J., ed. (Rome: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1950), 129–30.

<sup>12</sup>Francis Xavier letter to Kaspar Berze, Goa, Apr. 1552, *Monumenta Xavieriana*, vol. 1, Alexandro Valignano, S.J., ed. (Rome: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1899), 902–3.

<sup>13</sup>François Pyrard, *Voyages de François Pyrard, de Laval: Contenant sa Navigations aux Indes Orientales...*, vol. 2, 3d ed. (Paris: Samuel Thiboust & Remy Dallin, 1619), 65. Since Pyrard was writing in the early seventeenth century, he was referring to the silver *pardau* current by then, rather than the gold Vijayanagari currency also called by that name and which was more prevalent earlier.

<sup>14</sup>Goa State Historical Archives (GSHA), 860, “Cartas de Alforria aos Escravos,” 1682–1759. The record has been discussed in Teotonio de Souza, “Manumission of Slaves in Goa during 1682 to 1760 as Found in Codex 860,” in Kiran Kamal-Prasad and Jean-Pierre Angenot, eds., *The African Diaspora in Asia: Explorations on a Less Known Fact* (Bangalore: Jana Jagriti Prakashana, 2006): 167–81. My discussion focuses on the seventeenth-century records only, which form the vast majority of the records in the Codex, thus allowing some confidence in basic statistical analysis.

who they call *curumbins* and we [call] farmers.”<sup>15</sup> A further twenty-five people were also described as *śudra*; that is, from other touchable but low-caste communities.

It is notable that there were vanishingly few manumitted subjects in the register who were explicitly listed as hailing from the community of *farazes* deemed untouchable. Given that the vast number of these manumitted people likely served in domestic settings in the city of Goa, it seems that slave-owners, particularly indigenous converts and their descendants, preferred to enslave people from the touchable community of *kunbis*. It is revealing, therefore, that the owner of the *faraz* Pascoela was listed as the *casado* João Pinto Ribeiro, a Portuguese resident of Rachol, and of Ilena as the noblewoman Dona Joana de Sousa, residing in Goa. For Portuguese slave-owners, the strictures of untouchability clearly did not prevent them from enslaving individual members of the *faraz* community. By and large, the combination of low status, economic vulnerability, and touchability seem to have made *kunbis* particularly vulnerable to enslavement: indeed, we will see that, for the neighboring Marathas, the caste name would come to serve as a synonym for “slave,” particularly for enslaved women, whose sexual exploitation was dependent on their touchability.

At the other end of the social spectrum, far fewer people from dominant castes were represented in the register of manumitted people. Nineteen manumitted were “*charado*,” a martial caste, and only ten hailed from the mercantile *vania* caste. There was also one Dorotea, described as *botta*, who may have had brahmin origins and was enslaved by a woman. *Botto* was a Portuguese borrowing for *bhat*, a designation for brahmin priests learned in Sanskrit. Dorotea’s gender may have made her more vulnerable to enslavement than male members of her caste.<sup>16</sup> Thus, even under Portuguese rule, caste status clearly played a role in structuring slavery.

Apart from poverty and, interrelatedly, caste status, slave-raiding and trafficking was crucial to the structure of the trade in people along the coast. In 1545, the vicar-general of Goa, Miguel Vaz, wrote a detailed memorial to the king in which he noted that the Portuguese were not only routinely taking enslaved boys from the Coromandel Coast and other parts, but were also selling them for profit to Muslims in Bhatkal, Dabul, and other areas outside Portuguese jurisdiction.<sup>17</sup>

What is interesting is that contemporaneous descriptions of these ports do not seem to indicate that they were important nodes for the trade in people. Thus, an anonymous geography of roughly the same period described the brisk trade at Bhatkal in coastal products such as rice, coconuts, and palm wine or *urraca* from the Kanara and Malabar coasts; products from the interior hinterlands, including cotton and marble; as well as oceanic commodities, including war horses, pearls, and

<sup>15</sup>d’Orta, *Colóquio dos simples*, 213.

<sup>16</sup>This does not mean that there were no brahmin men among the enslaved people of Goa. In Bengal, where entire villages of people could be kidnapped and trafficked en masse, brahmins were also not immune to the depredations of Portuguese and Arakanese slave raiders. Thus, it is possible that some of the manumitted people described solely as Bengali were also brahmins.

<sup>17</sup>“Apontamentos do Vigário Padre Miguel Vaz sobre o Estado da Índia apresentados a El-Rei D. João III, Évora, Novembro, 1545,” in António da Silva Rego, ed., *Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Portugues do Oriente*, vol. III (Lisbon: Divisão de publicações e biblioteca agência geral das colónias, 1950), 211. Vaz was not objecting to the institution of slavery as such, but rather to the transfer of enslaved people to non-Christian ownership, asking only that such sales be prohibited.



spices, particularly pepper.<sup>18</sup> Nowhere in this detailed inventory, which included estimates of the value of the trade conducted at the port, was there mention of trade in enslaved people. It may thus well have been that it was the Portuguese who introduced or at least intensified commodified slavery along such ports.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Vaz' memorial suggests that by the time of his writing there existed a country trade in people organized along a network of ports mediated by Portuguese slave-raiding along the subcontinent's coast.

By 1557, the roster of the residents of the Jesuit College listed the following captive people (*moços cativos de casa*): the Africans (*cafres*) Gaspar Velho, João Pirez, Christovão Agostinho de Sousa, and Gaspar; the Javanese Bastião; the Malabari Tomé, and the Ethiopians Joane and Pedro.<sup>20</sup> The range of points of origin is illustrative of the different networks of trafficking that brought people to the slave emporium of Goa from across the Indian Ocean.

The legalities and ethics of this phenomenon certainly troubled some observers since the prevalent practice of slave-raiding had no justification in canon law. In 1567, the Jesuit Pedro Boaventura wrote to Francisco Borges from Cochin, urging him to pass an order that, even if it could not be made law within Portuguese territories, should at least made incumbent upon Jesuits that slaves "should not be kept against their will as is done, who are certainly stolen by thieves and sold to the Portuguese." Boaventura went on: "This is such a great abuse in this part that despite having no war (except with the Turks ... and sometimes with some Malabares), there happen to be forty thousand slaves in Goa and forty in our college, of whom it is true that a twentieth part were taken against divine and human law. Despite this, we treat them worse than slaves."<sup>21</sup>

As Boaventura made clear, these modes of enslavement had no theological justification within Christian doctrines of just war, and that local practice was vastly different from canonical treatises on the subject. Describing how captives walked "with very thick irons or are often well muzzled, which shuts their mouths to outsiders," he lamented that they were unable to exercise freedom though "they never lost it." Moreover, "it does not hinder them that there are laws in this land of Preste Juan [Ethiopia], China, and Japan that they cannot be sold (and the same reason pertains to Bengal and *Cafraria* [Africa], with whom we have never had war)."

Despite these concerns, enslavement and trafficking flourished and nearly forty years later little had changed: Pyrard observed that Portuguese had little scruple in carrying off children, "both small and big, and as many as they could, even if they were the children of friends, and even if there was a peace treaty by which they are forbidden to enslave them, but [despite which] they do not stop to sell and kidnap them in secret."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Luciano Ribeiro, *Uma Geografia Quinhentista* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1961), 240–42. Ribeiro convincingly dates the text as being no earlier than 1540 and no later than 1557.

<sup>19</sup>Scholars have noticed the role of the Portuguese in expanding demand for enslaved people in other regions. See, for example, Sinnaph Arasaratnam, "Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century," in K. S. Mathew, ed., *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995): 197–99.

<sup>20</sup>Catalogue of Indian Province of Society and boys in the college of St. Paul, Goa, December 1557, in *Documenta Indica*, vol. III, Joseph Wicki, S.J., ed. (Rome: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1954), 788.

<sup>21</sup>Pedro Bonaventura letter to Francisco Borges, Cochin, 24 Apr. 1567, in *Documenta Indica*, vol. VII, Joseph Wicki, S.J., ed. (Rome: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1962), 247.

<sup>22</sup>Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 40.



The trafficking networks that fed the western coast's slave economy radiated in three directions. The first involved the hinterlands of the coast as both a target for slave-raiding, as well as a thoroughfare to interior polities, where a thriving demand for enslaved people also existed. The second vector was the country trade in people along the coast itself. Lastly, oceanic networks that radiated in multiple directions—westward into the Gulf of Arabia and toward the Horn of Africa, southwest toward Mozambique, and eastwards into the Bay of Bengal and beyond—carried enslaved people to and from the shores of the west coast.

We can glean something of the dispersal of people trafficked to or enslaved in the region through João Delgado Figueira's *Reportório geral de tres mil oito centos processos* (General report of 3,800 cases), which lists the prisoners tried by the Inquisition of Goa from 1561 to 1623.<sup>23</sup> The jurisdictional boundaries of the Inquisition of Goa means that this dataset does not adequately represent the full dispersal of people trafficked from the region. The records of other Inquisitorial offices, for example, reveals the presence of people born in Goa, whose trajectories of trafficking and enslavement took them outside even the vast ambit of the Goan Inquisition.<sup>24</sup>

Still, given the jurisdictional boundaries of the office, the *Reportório* is a useful gauge of how mobility structured the institution of slavery. Its records of both prisoners and denouncers, who were enslaved (*escravos*—261 people), freed (*forro*—twenty-two people), or described as captive (four people), comprise 224 men and sixty-three women. It is evident that enslaved people were born across the entire swathe of Asia, from Aleppo to Nagasaki. Trafficking clearly concentrated people from these far-flung corners of the Indian Ocean into important hubs on the western coast of the subcontinent, particularly Goa (see [map 2](#)).

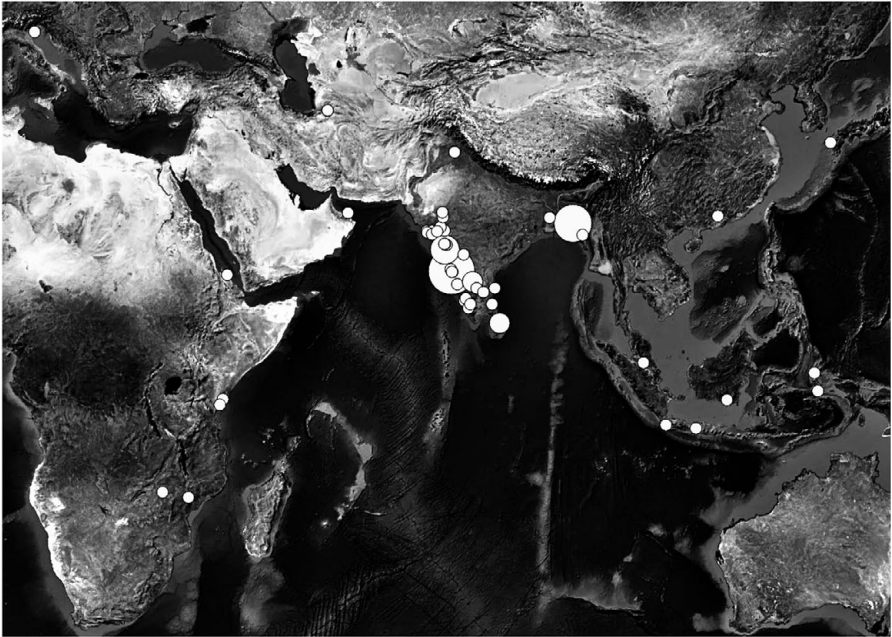
Of the thirty-eight people born in the west coast, not including Gujarat, only five were known to be residing there. (This does not even capture trafficking along the coast itself: many people classified as Malabaris, for example, were living in Goa). Conversely, of the eighty-eight enslaved people living in the region, at least twenty-four were not born there (see [Table 1](#)).

The role of trafficking in undergirding the system of enslavement is also apparent in the register of manumitted people, mentioned above. The sample recorded in this register is unlikely to be representative of the actual population of enslaved people during the period in question. One must bear in mind that the manumissions were effected in part through the intercession of religious authorities, in particular the *Pai do Cristãos*, which unquestionably had bearing on who was manumitted.<sup>25</sup> For religious authorities, the sexual enslavement of women in domestic settings threatened the Christian sacrament of marriage, a fact reflected in the demographic balance of

<sup>23</sup>Bruno Feitler has made this important source readily available through a searchable and downloadable database: Feitler, *Repertorio: Uma base de dados dos processos da Inquisição de Goa (1561–1623)*, <http://www.i-m.mx/repertorio/repertorio/home.html> (accessed 13 Nov. 2018). I reconstructed a separate database of relevant records from this larger list for this analysis, selecting for enslaved, freed, and captive people.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Évora, Processo 7717 (Processo de Constantino Mascarenhas, 1588); ANTT, Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, Processo 979 (Processo de Jacinto, 1653).

<sup>25</sup>On this point, see Patrícia Souza de Faria's perceptive analysis in "O Pai dos Cristãos e as populações escravas em Goa: zelo e controle dos cativos convertidos (séculos XVI e XVII)," *Revista História* 39 (2020), e202001: 1–30.



**Maps 2a and 2b.** Birthplace and residence of enslaved, captured, or freed subjects in the Reportorio. Size of location marker corresponds to the number of subjects.

**Table 1.** Mobility of enslaved, captive, or freed subjects mentioned in the *Reportório*, from or into the west coast, excluding Gujarat. Source: Bruno Feitler, *Reportório: Uma base de dados dos processos da Inquisição de Goa (1561–1623)*, <http://www.im.mx/reportorio/reportorio/home.html> (accessed 13 Nov. 2018)

Total number of enslaved, captive, or freed subjects	287
Number of enslaved, captive, or freed people born in the west coast	38
Number of enslaved, captive or freed people born in the west coast who were known to be residing there	5
Number of enslaved, captive, or freed people living in the west coast	88
Number of enslaved, captive, or freed people living in the west coast who were not born there	24
Number of enslaved, captive, or freed people living in the west coast, place of birth unknown	59
Number of enslaved people from Africa living in the west coast	8

the register: over two-thirds of the manumitted people were women.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, manumitted people were also more likely to have either outlived their usefulness or be more easily and cheaply replaceable, such that only one “Abexim” (Abyssinian or Ethiopian) is listed in the sample of 724 people. This is less a signal of the rarity of Africans in Goa than an indication perhaps of the higher cost of enslaved Africans and concomitantly the relative reluctance of slaveholders to manumit them.<sup>27</sup> The Portuguese court chronicler António Bocarro, whose 1635 survey of Portuguese fortresses and settlements provides a range of estimates on the share of enslaved people in the population, repeatedly emphasized that the majority of the enslaved people in the city of Goa were *cafres* (Africans), with the rest comprising “other nations of the Indies” (*outras nações da Índia*).<sup>28</sup>

With these caveats in mind, the biggest group in the register, “*gatuais*,” accounted for half the people, or 362. The term most likely described people hailing from the mountains in the hinterland of the coast (see [map 3](#)).<sup>29</sup>

This interpretation of “*gatural*,” as a way to describe people from the mountains edging the coast, is also consonant with contemporary usage: in Goa today, “*ghāti*” is often pejoratively used to refer to poor migrant workers hailing from the mountainous border regions. Moreover, it carries negative connotations of blackness and Scheduled Tribe origin: in 2019, the Goa Tourism Minister Manohar Ajaonkar attempted to parry criticism of his deployment of the term against migrant workers by claiming that it is used solely to indicate geographical origin in the mountains, a claim few Goans were duped by.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>The first few records were damaged and not all records were fully legible. Also bear in mind in the following discussion that not all records had complete information, omitting for example the age of the manumitted person.

<sup>28</sup>Bocarro, *Livro das plantas*, f. 77v–78.

<sup>29</sup>Teotónio de Souza dismissed this possibility for the geographical nature of *gatural*, arguing that the term “*balaghati*,” also used in the register, already served this function. However, “*balaghat*” refers more specifically to the high plateaus or tableland and not the mountains themselves. Note that the classification of *gatural* and *balaghaty* seem to be mutually exclusive; that is, none of the manumitted people in the register were described as being both, further bolstering the idea that these were markers for different geographical origins.

<sup>30</sup>“Ghatis’ can’t come, Goans to be preferred for work: Goa Tourism Minister,” *Indian Express*, 26 Jan. 2019, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ghatis-cant-come-goans-to-be-preferred-for-work-minister-manohar-ajgaonkar-5541279/>.





Map 3. Abraham Ortelius, Map of Malabar, 1580.

The nature of the relationship between mountain communities and coastal peoples can be garnered from a fascinating account of Jacome Ferreira's 1603 journey from the coast to make contact with the Toda. The expedition was mediated by two key go-betweens: a guide from the mercantile *chetty* caste, and a Christian named Errari, who not only spoke Kannada in addition to his native tongue but was the nephew of the Sāmathiri king and thus helped facilitate their travel across political boundaries. The cultural gulf that these go-betweens felt between the mountains and the coastal world they came from was profound: "Errari, seeing himself in those mountains, claimed God had punished him for his sins and that in ascending and descending those mountains he had cut ten years of his life. The Chetty who guided us, looking up at a mountain from below, said: 'O my mother, who only looks from below, if you could only see my eyes,' and at other times the Nairs said much the same in similar places."<sup>31</sup>

The Toda themselves, who Ferreira estimated to number no more than a thousand, were spread across four mountains. Two of these mountains were in present-day Kerala (one of which Ferreira visited), where around a third of the population lived, and which fell within the territory of the Sāmathiri. Another three hundred lived in the lands of the Naiks, in present-day Karnataka, while the rest lived in the territory of another unnamed king. Their closest interactions were with the Badagas, to whom they paid tribute. The Badagas, who spoke Kannada and occupied

<sup>31</sup>Jacomé Ferreira letter to Vice Provincial, Calicut, 1 Apr. 1603, in *Chronista de Tisuary*, vol. 30 (June 1868): 137. This foray predates the most commonly cited European encounter with the Toda by a century.

the lower reaches of the mountains, clearly had deeper connections, through trade and warfare, with coastal peoples than the more remotely located Toda. Nonetheless, as the expedition wound through the mountains, it was clear that such coastal interlopers were viewed with suspicion, in part because they might take captives. Ferreira himself reported that, after exchanging objects like mirrors and establishing communication, he had eventually asked the Todas for two boys to take back with him, a request they naturally declined. The small expedition, dependent on their guests for survival in the mountains, may have been unable, rather than merely unwilling, to press the point. As the expedition reached the foot of the mountain on their return they passed a village of Badagas, who feared they were a warring party. (Indeed, at the start of their journey, they had been forced to change routes to avoid the conflict raging in the region.) Ferreira reported that the villagers abandoned the settlement and fled into the forest. Even when their guides shouted that they were “people of peace” and had been to see the Todas, they found the men armed with spears, while the women and children hid in the bush. A little further, when they passed a few houses, all the women with children in their laps retreated into the woods. (Given that there was also an enslaved person explicitly identified as Badaga in the dataset constructed from the Goan inquisitorial trials, these fears were absolutely justified.)

Coastal slave-raiding’s role in enslavement is also clear in the register: thirteen manumittes were from the *koli* fishing caste from the northern provinces along the western coast; one was from the Fishery Coast, where the Portuguese had long maintained a client group among the Parava fishermen. A Muslim convert hailed from Masulipatnam, a key port in the Bay of Bengal, and another was identified as Bengali. Again, bear in mind that the demographic balance of the manumittes was likely not representative of the enslaved population in general, and enslaved people from more distant climes in the Bay of Bengal may well have been considered too expensive for slaveholders to manumit freely in large numbers. We do know that the Portuguese, building on the Arakanese commercial system, maintained an active slaving hub in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>32</sup> The Mughal chronicler Abdul Hamid Lahori (d. 1654) claimed that when the Mughals, concerned at the loss of agricultural rent caused by the trafficking of cultivators, attacked the Portuguese, they freed “nearly 10,000 inhabitants of the neighbouring country who had been kept in confinement by these tyrants.”<sup>33</sup> It is thus hardly surprising that some of this huge number of enslaved Bengalis would end up in Goa. As Pyrard remarked in his account of his voyage in the region in the closing years of the sixteenth century, not only was “one of the greatest traffics” of Bengal in enslaved people, but Bengalis constituted “most of the slaves of India.”<sup>34</sup>

Outside the subcontinent, as Bocarro’s survey suggests, Africans were clearly trafficked in large numbers. Even prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, Africans were an important element of coastal society. The peculiar history of Sidi Asim is

<sup>32</sup>See Rila Mukherjee’s excellent analysis of this network, especially “The Struggle for the Bay: The Life and Times of Sandwip, an Almost Unknown Portuguese Port in the Bay of Bengal in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Revista da Faculdade de Letras História*, series III, vol. 9 (2008): 67–88; “Mobility in the Bay of Bengal World: Medieval Raiders, Traders, States and the Slaves,” *Indian Historical Review* 36, 1 (2009): 109–29.

<sup>33</sup>Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Badshahnama*, in Henry Miers Elliot, trans., Shah Jahan (Lahore: Sh. Mubarak Ali, 1875): 38.

<sup>34</sup>Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 354.

instructive here: a Muslim merchant of African descent from Surat, Sidi Asim was captured during a business trip to Pate in 1678, one of the most powerful polities of the Swahili coast, and eventually sold to a Goan Christian fisherman in Bardez. Baptized as Paulo, he recognized his own brother in January of 1683, who was serving as the headman of a boat in the company of the Mughal ambassador. Using the disorder caused by Sambhaji's forces in the region, he fled to Surat where he married his erstwhile fiancée, Lakṣmī (whose name implies her Hindu origins), and they had a son. Emboldened perhaps by his privileged status and the passage of time, he returned to Goa and was living in the house of the Mughal ambassador when he was denounced by his former slaveholder to the Inquisition.<sup>35</sup> Thus, a Muslim merchant and relatively well-connected subject of the Mughal Empire found himself enslaved further south by a Goan Christian, a fisherman by caste and occupation, and a subject of the Portuguese Empire.

To make sense of the jarring turns in the life and fortunes of Sidi Asim, it is necessary to understand both the long-standing nature and the vagaries of the trade in enslaved Africans in South Asia. The avid demand for Africans in the military labor markets of the subcontinent had sustained a vigorous transoceanic commerce between Ethiopia and South Asia dating to at least the first century of the common era, dominated by merchants who were Arab and South Asian, particularly Gujarati.<sup>36</sup>

The most prized people during the period when the oceanic trade centered on the Gulf of Arabia hailed from the Horn of Africa. In Ethiopia, the central Christian polity would enslave and send non-Christian captives raided from the fringes of its empire to the coast for sale to Arab brokers, who would then convert them on board. According to one mid-sixteenth-century Jesuit account, approximately ten to twelve thousand people were exported annually.<sup>37</sup> They were dispersed to markets in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean, so only a fraction of this number would have entered South Asia. South Asian records refer to them as Habshis (Abyssinians), Sidis (a corruption of Saiyyad), or *kāfir*, again indicating the mediation of Islamic merchants and their categorization of Ethiopian slaves.<sup>38</sup>

The Portuguese disruption of the Indian Ocean's commercial world reshaped the traffic in people from Africa to South Asia. For one, the nature of the labor for which Africans were in demand expanded. What Sidi Asim's purchase by a Goan fisherman should make clear is that the demand for enslaved Africans was not limited to their value as soldiers. When François Pyrard was captured and brought to Kochi, the bailiff who took charge of his party was accompanied by "seven or eight slaves, Christian *cafres* of Mozambique," who were called *pions* (*peão* in Portuguese, or peons) and who, Pyrard wrote, always accompanied Portuguese judicial officers in significant numbers. Arriving in Goa, they were borne to the hospital by *cafres*, who

<sup>35</sup> ANTT, Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, Processo 3672 (Processo de Paulo). On the use of such records for the history of slavery, see Stephanie Hassell, "Inquisition Records from Goa as Sources for the Study of Slavery in the Eastern Domains of the Portuguese Empire," *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 397–418.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Diaspora to India: The Role of Habshis and Sidis from Medieval Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century," in Shihan de S. Jayasuriya and Richard Pankhurst, eds., *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), 189–90.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Borderlands: Essays in Regional History from Ancient Times to the End of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (Lawrence: Red Sea Press, 1997), 253.

<sup>38</sup> Pankhurst, "Ethiopian Diaspora," 189–90.

did the work of porters and carriers in the absence of carriages. Enslaved African women were particularly prized for sexual labor: in the slave markets on Rua Direita, Pyrard reported, buyers were most attracted to the “*cafre* girls from Mozambique and other parts of Africa.”<sup>39</sup> Enslaved Africans worked the galleys, where the ships vital to the Portuguese enterprise were built and repaired: in 1635, Bocarro noted that 132 Africans (*cafres*) were in the galleys.<sup>40</sup> Given the range of occupations for which they were prized, the Portuguese were clearly bringing in large numbers of enslaved Africans: in 1564, the Jesuit Pedro Fernandes explained that the ship he was on had to spend eight or nine days in Mozambique before it could sail to Goa, “because there were many who had to buy some *cafres*.” On that single ship alone, the chaplain baptized ninety-one people purchased during that stay.<sup>41</sup>

The increasing importance of the Portuguese in these oceanic networks meant that the demographic composition of Africans in South Asia changed, as more captives were taken not from the Horn of Africa but further south.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the Portuguese term *cafre*, itself derived from the Arabic term used to describe non-Muslim Africans, may be better indexed to people hailing from around present-day Mozambique. It is likely that the ancestors of communities such as the Christian Sidis of Haliyal *tāluka* in Karnataka originated in these regions of Africa.

As with the older Arab- and Gujarati-brokered networks in the Horn of Africa, captive-taking by indigenous brokers in Mozambique fed Portuguese slaving networks: as the Dutch merchant Jan Huyghen van Linschoten stated in a chapter devoted to Mozambique in his 1596 *Itinerario*, when captives were taken in war they were sold to the Portuguese, often in exchange for cotton linen and other South Asian wares.<sup>43</sup> It is likely that, just as in the case of the Christian Ethiopian state, the Portuguese Estado, and the South Asian states described above, captive-taking in these areas of Africa concentrated in geographical peripheries of more centralized states.

Imputing ethnicity or geographical origin from the traces of premodern bureaucracies that were themselves implicated in the institutionalization of slavery is difficult. Thus, while the slave Domingos, brought before the Goan Inquisition in September 1581, was classified as “Mozimba,” when Antônio, born in Sena, Mozambique, was brought before the same tribunal in 1599 he was described instead as *cafre*.<sup>44</sup> To parse these archival traces requires the kind of investment in African studies for South Asianists that has been so characteristic of and vital to recent scholarship on slavery in Brazil.

## Policing Mobility

Inasmuch as trafficking was vital to slavery, unsanctioned mobility was also a severe threat to the system. Thus, maintaining slavery required the careful policing of

<sup>39</sup>Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 65.

<sup>40</sup>Bocarro, *Livro das plantas*, f. 88v.

<sup>41</sup>Pedro Fernandes letter to Tiago Mirón, Goa 23 Nov. 1564 in *Documenta Indica*, VI, 301.

<sup>42</sup>Hugo Cardoso, “African Slave Population of Portuguese India: Demographics and Impact on Indo-Portuguese,” *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 25, 1 (2010): 95–119.

<sup>43</sup>Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Itinerario, Voyage Ofte Schipvaert Van Jan Huygen Van Linschoten, Naer Oost Ofte Portugaels Indien* (Amsterdam: Cornelius Claesz, 1596), 129.

<sup>44</sup>Feitler et al., “Repertório: uma base de dados dos processos da Inquisição de Goa (1561–1623), Ficha 2332 and 556.



boundaries. These boundaries were social, since manufacturing the identity of people as outsiders was crucial to the process of enslavement, and also spatial, since mobility was both a conduit into slavery and an escape from it. The enforcement of these boundaries by elite institutions, and their transgression by enslaved peoples, thus reveals much about the landscape of power in the region.

The Portuguese maritime system was built around the *cartaz*, or sea pass, which allowed them to tax and control access to the Indian Ocean. The fairly typical *cartaz* issued in January 1621 by Fernão de Albuquerque to the sultan of Ahmadnagar allowed his ship to travel to Ormuz, Mecca, and Malaka from Chaul “without taking or bringing anything, namely, Turks [a generic term for Muslims], Ethiopians [presumably, enslaved], steel, pitch, copper, lead, tin, iron, pepper, cinnamon from Sri Lanka nor cassia, solid bamboo, saltpetre, sulphur ... nor carry any Portuguese, nor rare horses without license.” The ship could carry “male and female slaves from your nation only,” and if there was any suspicion that any of them were Christians, or children of Christians, then an examination in accordance with the guidelines of the Catholic Provincial Council of Goa would be undertaken. Before the ship could sail, it would be examined by the Portuguese and a bond would have to be given “for the treasury of His Majesty to ensure that the ship returns directly to the said port.”<sup>45</sup>

As the *cartaz* tells us, the Portuguese were intent on controlling the flow of people, particularly those who were enslaved, as much as of goods. Threats to this system were stringently punished, including through enslavement: when Marakkar navy men, deemed to be corsairs and pirates by the Portuguese, were captured in war, they “would remain all their life as forced laborers in the galleys of the king, whom none could redeem,” while any individual who took a Marakkar prisoner would be granted ten *pardaus* from the Crown and the right to enslave him for life. Yet, when hostilities on sea would cease, the same Marakkars sought and were granted *cartazes* to alight safely and trade their loot in the Portuguese ports of Goa and Kochi.<sup>46</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the presence of mobile enslaved people was vital to the maintenance of the Estado: enslaved women, in particular could cross the border into Goa in order to bring goods to market for the price of 8 leals.<sup>47</sup> Overland routes came to be monitored carefully.<sup>48</sup> This system of surveillance was designed to protect an important stream of revenue from taxing merchandise and passage on overland routes, but also to prevent people, including enslaved subjects and Portuguese renegades who might seek employment with rival sultans, from escaping the reach of Portuguese law.

Surveillance extended also to the many rivers that watered the Konkan. In 1618, the Senate of the city of Goa ordered boatmen to post a bond to the municipal clerk because of the many slaves who had crossed over to non-Portuguese territory in the past with money, stolen objects, and even weapons.<sup>49</sup>

Yet, despite the best efforts of state authorities, the peculiar historical geography of the coast meant that it was a hybrid zone of sovereignty, and mobility between coastal

<sup>45</sup>GSHA, 1043, “Livro da Consulta,” fl. 59.

<sup>46</sup>Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 1, 480.

<sup>47</sup>GSHA, “Provisões, alvarás e regimentos,” Codex 3928, fls. 166. Women in general could enter from the mainland for the price of 4 pequeñiños.

<sup>48</sup>Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 35.

<sup>49</sup>GSHA, MS 7795, *Livro de Posturas (1808–1832)*, fls. 14–15v; fls. 16–17v; fls. 59–60.

polities was hard to curtail.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the very fragmentation of political authority on the coast created the conditions for escape. From the very beginning, the Portuguese attempted to coordinate with neighboring powers to curtail the mobility of enslaved subjects. Thus, in the treaty the Portuguese effected with the sultan of Gujarat recognizing their right to several key ports, including Daman and Mangalore, one clause ensured that any enslaved people escaping into neighboring territory would be resold, with the proceeds of the sale being given to the slaveholders from whom they had fled.<sup>51</sup> Later treaties showed a special concern with the religious status of the enslaved subject: thus, a treaty concluded with the Nizam Shah in 1539 granted enslaved escapees who converted to Islam in sultanate territory or Christianity in Portuguese territory their freedom, while those who chose not to convert were to be handed back.<sup>52</sup> This short-lived loophole quickly began to close as religious authorities put greater pressure on the state: the treaty with Ahmadnagar of 1548 provided that converted slaves would be resold, with the proceeds going to their previous slaveholders, while those who chose not to convert would be handed back to those they had escaped from.<sup>53</sup>

These treaties tell us that enslaved subjects fled in both directions between the Portuguese state and indigenous polities. News had reached the ears of those living in other polities of Portuguese laws which afforded Christian converts the status of freedmen, erasing the social boundaries and strictures which held there: in 1555, the Jesuit Vice Provincial Balthasar Dias wrote that this provision had allowed them to bring many into the fold of the Catholic Church.<sup>54</sup> Thus, even though the legal provision promising emancipation to slaves after baptism was formally rescinded in 1559, escapees continued to come to Portuguese India.<sup>55</sup> The Jesuit Gomez Vaz, for example, in the annual report of 1567, reported that a brahmin living in the *terra de mouros* (land of the Moors) and a former low-caste servant of the temple came to Portuguese-held Salcete in order to marry.<sup>56</sup> At the other end of the social spectrum from this brahmin, we have the example of a figure like “Gabriel.” Likely born into the Beta Israel community on the Agaw-speaking fringes of the central Christian polity in Ethiopia, he was captured by Christians and sold to Arab slavers as a boy. He was

<sup>50</sup>The port of Chaul, for example, remained a gateway both into the Sultanate territories of the Deccan interior as well as the Portuguese strongholds of the Konkan coast, even after the *detente* between the Portuguese and Ahmadnagar ended in 1571. See Pushkar Sohoni, “Medieval Chaul under the Nizam Shahs: A Historic and Archaeological Investigation,” in Laura Parodi, ed., *The Visual World of Muslim India: The Art, Culture and Society of the Deccan in the Early Modern Era* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 53–75.

<sup>51</sup>“Treslado do Contrato que o Governador Nuno da Cunha assentou com Nizammede Zamom sobre Cambaya o Ano de 537,” reproduced in Rodrigo José de Lima Felner, ed., *Subsidios Para a Historia Da India Portuguesa, Part II: Tombo do Estado da India, Simão Botelho (1554)* (Lisbon: Typographia da Academia Real da Ciencias, 1868), 231–32.

<sup>52</sup>“Treslado do contrato que o visor rey D. Garcia de Noronha fez com O NizamXa, que de antes se chamava Nizam Maluquo, April 22, 1539,” reproduced in *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>53</sup>“Treslado d’outro contrato que o governador Garcia de Sá fez com o memso Idalxa, August 22, 1548,” reproduced in *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>54</sup>He also mentioned the ongoing debates among the various orders in the city regarding the issue of compensation for infidel owners of such captives. One proposal included selling the now Christian captive and giving the proceeds of the auction to the former owner. Balthasar Dias letter to Tiago Mirón, 20 Dec. 1555, Goa, in *Documenta Indica*, III, 407.

<sup>55</sup>J. H. da Cunha Rivara, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, vol. 5, doc. 291.

<sup>56</sup>Gomez Vaz, “Annual of 12 December 1567,” *Documenta Indica*, VII, 371–405.

converted to Islam on the journey to the Sultanate port of Chaul, whence he was taken into the interior. During his inquisitorial interrogation, he revealed that he had come to Portuguese territory in the company of his master's Christian slave, Mixa, with whom he had fallen in love. For enslaved people, too, an unsanctioned relationship of this sort could well pose grave dangers. Yet, escape brought no relief: the Christian Ethiopians in whose home the newly converted Gabriel was placed pressured him to abandon his lover and marry a more "honorable" woman, suggesting the disdain they felt for the enslaved Mixa. Gabriel would thus pass once again into "the land of the Moors," until, discovered by a Portuguese captain, he found himself in the clutches of the Inquisition.<sup>57</sup> Thus, escape entailed not only evading the spatial boundaries erected by states to keep people in confinement; it also meant circumventing the social boundaries that maintained regimes of hierarchy, including caste, which subtended slavery.

Nonetheless, we must be cautious in reading mobility uncritically as an index of the resistance of enslaved people. As mentioned, unaccompanied enslaved people could cross the border of the Estado in order to sell goods on behalf of their masters in the mainland. By the same token, upper-caste attempts to evade the authority of the Portuguese may well have entailed another layer of the trafficking of people dependent upon their masters. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, as religious institutions expanded in the city of Goa and wielded greater influence, a series of measures taken by the Portuguese state curtailed the economic and social rights of those who chose not to convert. These measures prompted the migration of a section of the Hindu community southward along the coast, taking with them their servants and their gods, spreading all the way to the kingdom of Kochi in Kerala.<sup>58</sup> The viceroy Francisco Coutinho observed an alarming rate of depopulation that left "villages ruined," which led him to reverse course and declare that the property would be returned if the escapees returned within six months.<sup>59</sup>

In Kochi, the Jesuit Amator Correia wrote to his confreres in Portugal on 20 January 1564 about the upheaval caused in the city by the new arrivals, "who came from Goa to rob this city." Among their crimes was encouraging enslaved people to thief and to sell their masters' goods to the Konkani migrants, an exchange perhaps facilitated by a shared language.<sup>60</sup> Despite the missionaries' efforts over the past six years, Correia lamented that the Konkani-speaking community had proved impossible to dislodge "due to the interest that came from some of the city's regiments." Over time, the brahmins, in particular, parlayed their network of connections across the coast to pivot to trade, becoming as important a community of merchants as the mercantile *vaiśya* caste. They were also crucial as

<sup>57</sup>Ananya Chakravarti, "Mapping 'Gabriel': Space, Identity and Slavery in the Late Sixteenth-Century Indian Ocean," *Past & Present* 243, 1 (May 2019): 5–34.

<sup>58</sup>In Goa, this practice of removing tutelary deities beyond Portuguese jurisdiction is well-studied. See Paul Axelrod and Michelle A. Fuerch, "Flight of the Deities: Hindu Resistance in Portuguese Goa," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, 2 (1996): 387–421. I am grateful to the members of the Konkani Vaiśya Vaniya community of Mattanchery, Kochi, who let me into their homes during my summer 2019 fieldwork to look at the consecrated vessels still kept there, which contain the tutelary deities they brought with them from Goa.

<sup>59</sup>On depopulation following Constantino Bragança's decree to strip those who escaped forced conversion of their property, see GHSA, "Livro Vermelho," vol. 1, ff. 5–6.

<sup>60</sup>*Documenta Indica*, VI, 177. Interestingly, Pyrard described a thriving informal market, held at night in the square in Goa, where vendors did a brisk business in stolen goods. Bearing in mind that many of the vendors were enslaved, this may well have been a common feature of urban slave society along the west coast. Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 69.

go-betweeners for various states, serving as procurators and diplomats in courts across the region, including on behalf of the Portuguese and the Dutch.<sup>61</sup>

While Portuguese, Dutch and Kochi records are full of the doings of the upper-caste Konkani-speaking communities, the lower castes are relatively invisible. Yet, evidence suggests that enslaved people were enmeshed in and vital to the connections maintained by the Konkani community across the coast, including Portuguese Goa. Thus, for example, the brahmin Malopa, a member of the state-licensed group of physicians known as the Thirty, petitioned the Portuguese to travel to Cochin in 1600 in order to settle the property of his deceased slave with his heir.<sup>62</sup>

That lower-caste communities migrated too is apparent in the presence of Kuḍumbi community in the city today, who have retained the caste name so visible in the Portuguese records related to enslavement.<sup>63</sup> It is notable that communities considered untouchable are not represented among the microcosm of Konkani-speaking castes in Kochi today.<sup>64</sup> Considering our evidence that indigenous slaveholders in the Portuguese Estado clearly preferred to enslave members of touchable communities in general, and Kuḍumbis in particular, it is likely that many of the ancestors of the present-day Kuḍumbi community were trafficked by their migrating masters to Kochi. (Elderly upper-caste members of the Konkani community remembered Kuḍumbi servants working in their homes in Kochi at least as far back as the 1940s.) Moreover, given the evidence we have in Goa of the trafficking of people from other parts of coastal South Asia to that entrepot, it is entirely possible that traffickers were bringing members of that community to Kochi's markets too. Nonetheless, for members of the community today, the memory of enslavement has been completely erased.<sup>65</sup> Like other communities harmed historically by slavery, the Kuḍumbi are economically and socially marginalized. Given that the community is excluded from both Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe status by dint of touchability and their history of migration, respectively, their predicament shows the need for the expansion of the meagre mechanisms of distributive justice in India to account for the history of slavery.

## The Estado as Slave Society

Given the number of people captured by his survey, Bocarro provides an important and systematic view into the demographics of the coast, bearing in mind the presence

<sup>61</sup>For the Portuguese, see Pandurang Sakharam Pissurlencar, *Agentes da Diplomacia Portuguesa na India (Hindus, Muquimanos, Judeus e Parses)* (Bastora, Nova Goa: Tipographia Rangel, 1952). For the Dutch, see, for example, Hugo K. s'Jacob, "Babba Prabhu: The Dutch and a Konkani Merchant in Kerala," in Leonard Blussé, ed., *All of One Company: The VOC in Biographical Perspective* (Utrecht: HES, 1986): 135–50.

<sup>62</sup>"Registo da petição e despo de malopa fizico," 7750 GHSA Senado de Goa, Cartas Patentes (1596–1601), fol. 213v. On the Thirty, see Anna Weerasinghe, *Stuck Knowledge: Medicine and Immobility in Goa, 1510–1759*, PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2022.

<sup>63</sup>Members of the same community were also trafficked to Sri Lanka at the behest of the Portuguese state, when the colony there faced a shortage of agricultural workers in the seventeenth century. "Assento sobre a cultivação das vargeas e terras de Ceilão...," Goa, 17 Mar. 1646: GSHA, 1164, *Assentos do Conselho de Fazenda*, 1643–1647, fl. 164. I thank Dale Menezes for this reference.

<sup>64</sup>The city's microcosm of Konkani castes includes Sonārs, and the performing caste of *kalāvants*, who have adopted the caste name of Śārasvata non-Brahmins in the wake of the abolition of the *devadāsi* system in 1930.

<sup>65</sup>This was borne out by interviews with community elders during my 2019 fieldwork in Kochi.

of large swathes of non-Portuguese territories. Even without taking into account other forms of forced labor, the sheer ubiquity of individuals legally and socially defined as slaves along the coast in Bocarro's survey is astonishing. What is striking is the presence of enslaved people regardless of the size of the settlement. For instance, the village located by the fortress of Tarapur on the Maharashtrian coast had some fifty Portuguese *casados* and some two hundred non-European Christians, with a total of one hundred enslaved people held by the two groups combined.

Even in the absence of plantations, larger ports and towns were home to huge numbers of slaves. As one Jesuit reported, in larger coastal entrepôts like Daman the melting pot of slavery brought together "Blacks of a thousand types and nations."<sup>66</sup>

The scale of slaveholding in the capital was of a completely different order again, according to Bocarro's estimates (see Table 2). Furthermore, as a trading entrepôt, Goa also saw the temporary presence of large numbers of enslaved people before they were trafficked to other ports: little wonder then, that Pyard had observed about the enslaved people of the city, "They are of infinite number and of all the Indian nations, and a very great traffic is done in them [for] they are exported to Portugal, and to all places under the Portuguese dominion."<sup>67</sup>

While Bocarro excludes religious houses from his account, these institutions were major slaveholders: the Convent of Santa Mónica in Old Goa complained that their hundred and twenty slaves were insufficient on the basis that even individual slaveholders in the community "could have fifteen or twenty female slaves, or twenty-six women and girls, while a *juiz ordinario* or a *desembargador* held eighty-five female slaves ... and some rich ladies over three hundred."<sup>68</sup>

As the Convent's complaint indicates, women were ubiquitous slaveholders. In the register of 724 people manumitted in Goa in the late seventeenth century, over 16 percent had female slaveholders, a number of whom clearly enslaved many

**Table 2.** Enslaved population resident in Christian lay homes (excluding religious houses) of the city of Goa in 1635. Source: António Bocarro, *Livro das plantas de todas as fortelezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental* (1635), 77–78v, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal

Portuguese married settlers ( <i>casados</i> )	800	Men capable of bearing arms enslaved by Portuguese <i>casados</i>	~1,600	People unfit for military service ( <i>escravos inúteis</i> , lit. useless slaves), including women, children (" <i>bichos</i> ," literally beasts), the disabled and elderly, enslaved by Portuguese <i>casados</i>	~6,400
Non-European Christian married men ( <i>cazados pretos cristãos</i> )	2,500 (of whom 2,000 could bear arms)	Men capable of bearing arms enslaved by non-European Christian <i>casados</i>	1,250	People unfit for military service enslaved by non-European Christian <i>casados</i>	~3,500–4,000

<sup>66</sup>Martim de Egusquiza letter to Juan Polanco, Daman, 4 Dec. 1566, in *Documenta Indica*, VII, 113.

<sup>67</sup>Pyard, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 64.

<sup>68</sup>Jeanette Pinto, *Slavery in Portuguese India (1510–1842)* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1992), 27.

people.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, indigenous slaveholders abound in the archive. The baptismal and married records of Loutulim and Chorão described below, showed indigenous *gancares* held enslaved people. In the city of Goa itself, in 1682, Luis Borges, a *charado*, manumitted João, known as Quima prior to his conversion.<sup>70</sup> Later records from the eighteenth century reveal that indigenous women, too, held enslaved people.

We can take from Pyrard's vivid description of the central market of the city that enslaved people were vital to every aspect of economic and social life in the city, as market vendors, porters, sex workers, go-betweens, and artisans.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the dependence on enslaved labor may well have hindered the development of the city: enslaved people carried water from a spring in the surrounding hills to sell in town, thus preventing investment in an aqueduct system as slave-owners enriched themselves through the private trade in water.<sup>72</sup> Given that this state of affairs may well have fueled the devastating water-borne epidemics that periodically hit the city, the dependence on enslaved labor had severe costs.<sup>73</sup>

The public presence and relative autonomy of urban slaves also worried authorities. In 1618, describing the slaves as "roving menaces," the Senate of the city of Goa passed a series of market ordinances to bring them to heel, banning the sale of alcohol to them, and forbidding masters from allowing them to run shops in the city unsupervised.<sup>74</sup>

Bocarro's survey largely focuses on Portuguese fortresses and coastal enclaves with a significant presence of Portuguese *casados*, where it is clear the reliance on enslaved labor at every scale of settlement was enormous. Unfortunately, Bocarro provides little insight into the indigenous *comunidades* which comprised the majority of the population of the Estado, or even the four thousand non-Christians, including the Konkani and Gujarati merchants whose trade in staples sustained the city of Goa.<sup>75</sup> Bocarro estimated that the island of Goa had 3,062 Christian *gāunkārs*, or village headmen, capable of bearing arms, while Salcete's indigenous Christian population included some 13,844 men capable of bearing arms, a number that comprised over half of the total militarily able-bodied men of 22,840 men from the core territories of Goa and its surrounding areas of Chorão, Divar and Jua, Bardez, and Salcete. Therefore, to omit such communities from consideration would represent a serious lacuna in our understanding of slavery.

Some insight can be gained, however, from village level records maintained by parish priests. It is impossible to speculate on the nature of precolonial slavery in these communities on the basis of such records. Conquest, we know, transformed village communities, eliminating Muslims and replacing the temple with the church

<sup>69</sup>GSHA, 860, "Cartas de Alforria aos Escravos," 1682–1759.

<sup>70</sup>It is difficult to ascertain the true percentage of indigenous slaveholders in the register, given that the names recorded are of Portuguese Christian origin and only occasionally did the scribe record information regarding the slaveholder's social status.

<sup>71</sup>Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 66.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>73</sup>For an example of the waterborne diseases to which the city was vulnerable, see the description of the cholera epidemic of 1543 in Gaspar Correa, *Lendas da Índia*, vol. 4 (Lisbon: Acadêmia real das ciências, 1866): 288–89.

<sup>74</sup>GSHA, MS 7795, "Livro de Posturas," fls. 14–15v; fls. 16–17v; fls. 59–60.

<sup>75</sup>Bocarro, *Livro*, f. 78, 85v.



in their ritual economy, thus displacing a class of ritual specialists who previously enjoyed lands given to village servants.<sup>76</sup> Bearing these structural changes in mind, village records must be read with particular care in order to understand the dynamics of enslavement in the *comunidades*, and speculation on how they may illuminate precolonial forms of enslavement must be duly tempered.

The earliest extant baptismal records are from the village of Loutulim in Salcete.<sup>77</sup> In general, relatively few people were described as enslaved or freed in such records, particularly when compared to Bocarro's estimates for the ratio of enslaved people in Portuguese settlements. This may well have been a function not so much of the rarity of enslavement in these communities than of the imperfect ways in which Portuguese modalities of classifying enslaved people captured social arrangements of forced labor and dependence with precolonial antecedents. We have seen that arrangements of labor under obligation, such as the *begār* system, and of labor extracted through practices of untouchability, continued in the Estado, although they were without doubt transformed under the auspices of the colonial state. Still, it does indicate the rarity at this stage in the evolution of the Estado of individual enslavement consonant with Portuguese systems of enslavement in these village communities.

*Gāunkārs*, the landed village chiefs recognized as the original settlers of the village by the Portuguese state, were exempt from enslavement. It is clear that they, as much as local representatives of the Portuguese state and the church, enslaved others. Many enslaved people were classified as *śudra*, whose touchable status must have made them desirable as domestic slaves. At least some, such as the enslaved Malabari Francisca, baptized on 27 July 1617, were trafficked from further afield. The long tendrils of trafficking networks were visible even in a small agricultural village like Loutulim.

These records also reveal the ways in which enslaved people were integrated, albeit liminally, into village life. Unlike the caste and class hierarchies that governed kinship based on marriage, the introduction of the Catholic practice of godparenthood allowed new ways to form relationships that cut across these boundaries. Not only were slaves included among the baptized, but they also served as godparents for free people, albeit mostly for those belonging to the *śudra* caste. For example, Martinho, the son of the *śudra* Aire Saldanha and Isabel, was baptized on 2 January 1618, with Juliana, enslaved by one Luis de Freitas, serving as his godmother. Similarly, Luzia, the daughter of the *śudra* Antonio Anu and Domingas, was baptized on 21 April 1652, with Bastião, enslaved by Francisco Colaco, and Luzia, wife of the *śudra* Antonio Porugo, serving as her godparents.

The intimate violence of slavery in a village is hinted at by the presence of the children of enslaved women with unknown fathers, whose baptisms were sponsored

<sup>76</sup>On displacing Muslims, see, for example, "Carta da mercê e doação, que elRey nosso Senhor fez aos moradores desta cidade de Guva das fazendas e terras desta Ilha," in J. H. da Cunha Rivara, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, fasc. 5, pt. 1 (Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1865), 13. The state's doctrinal and fiscal reasoning for redistribution in favor of the church is perfectly captured here: "Assento de conselho de Fazenda reconhecendo que os gancares e christandades de Salsete fizeram muitos gastos nas feituas das igrejas, ornamentos e festas a oragos e confrarias," in Felipe Nery Xavier, ed., *Bosquejos históricos das comunidades*, vol. 1 (Bastorá: Typographia Rangel, 1903): 230–32. On the transformation of village communities, see Rochelle Pinto, "The Foral in the History of the Comunidades of Goa," *Journal of World History* 29, 2 (2018): 185–212.

<sup>77</sup>GSHA, 137, Loutulim Baptisms. These records are in very poor condition and my analysis is based on a sample of four hundred baptisms recorded in the seventeenth century.



by powerful village elites. Thus Estevão, born to Anna, enslaved by the bailiff Pedro de Quadros, was baptized on 2 January 1618, with the official translator (*lingua*) Antonio de Sá serving as his godfather, while Sabina, daughter of Luzia, enslaved by Thomas Xavier, was baptized on 21 June 1670, with the *gāunkār* Pero de Quadros and Maria, widow of the *śudra* Thomé, serving as godparents. More direct evidence of the terrible kinds of sexual exploitation to which enslaved people were vulnerable can be found in the Inquisition trials of enslaved children as young as eight, charged with sexual crimes, namely being the passive partner of an act of sodomy.<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, for formally enslaved people, when they outlived their usefulness as labor, the cruelty of slaveholders was no less horrific than the worst forms of chattel slavery familiar to us from the Atlantic world. The Jesuit Luís Frois described a chilling practice prevalent in Goa: “There is a custom in this land of great cruelty and inhumanity and that is that some rich men who have many slaves, or better to say who lack charity and love of God, if their slaves sicken and have a prolonged illness, and cause expense or disgust in the house, are left outside, to die abandoned on these dunghills.”<sup>79</sup> Despite the intervention of missionaries intent on stopping the practice, it apparently continued unabated: in a report dated 1663 to the Congregazione di Propaganda Fide, a Theatine missionary described similar practices of sick enslaved people being left to die like beasts.<sup>80</sup>

Enslavement may also have made people vulnerable to coercive conversion: on 3 November 1676, Ignacio, a toddler described as freed (*forro*) and living in the house of Sebastião Mascarenhas, was baptized with the apparent consent of his mother Raulem, whom the parish priest described as a gentile and who apparently did not convert with her son. It is possible that his freedom had been made conditional upon allowing him to become a catechumen.

The earliest marriage records still extant are from the village of São Bartolomeu on the island of Chorão. Of the roughly four hundred marriages conducted from 1605 to 1622, only fifteen involved people described as either currently or formerly enslaved.<sup>81</sup> Again, it appears that Portuguese modalities of classification were inadequate to capture the nature of enslavement in these settings. In several mixed-status marriages, it was recorded that the bride had agreed to the marriage knowing the enslaved status of the groom, thus entering into a state of dependence herself. For example, in September 1605, Madalena, the daughter of a poor freed woman (*pobre forra*) and a father unknown, agreed to marry Lucas, enslaved by the widow Isabel de Andrade. Andrade promised on the occasion to manumit the groom, in exchange for the nominally free Madalena promising to serve her for a period of time. These records suggest that the lines between poverty, low-caste status, formal enslavement, and other forms of dependency, including orphanhood, were often blurred in such communities. What degree of freedom, as we might understand it, was enjoyed by the orphan Ana, who married Lourenço Faraz in April 1618 while both were residing in the house reserved for *farazes* beside the church, is unclear. That

<sup>78</sup>See, for example, Feitler, *Reportorio*, Fichas 7859, 6623.

<sup>79</sup>Frois letter to Society in Portugal, Goa, 8 Dec. 1560, in *Documenta Indica*, vol. VI, 793.

<sup>80</sup>Reproduced in Teotonio de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socioeconomic History* (Goa: Broadway, 2009 [1979]), 222.

<sup>81</sup>Bocarro, writing a decade after these records, mentions that the island had some fourteen thousand inhabitants, of whom between five and six thousand were capable of bearing arms, and that the population were all fishermen and agricultural workers, with a few sailors. Bocarro, *Livro das plantas*, f. 87

the couple were living in caste-segregated quarters demonstrates that conversion itself was no panacea for the practices of untouchability.<sup>82</sup>

These records also indicate the prevalence of many kinds of mixed marriages across caste and ethnic lines, made possible in part by the diverse groups of people brought together along the coast through the institution of slavery. More interestingly, it signals that the policing of endogamy was far less stringent outside the elite echelons of society. Other evidence also bears this observation out. The register of inquisitorial trials shows that the mobility which undergirded the trafficking and enslavement led to all kinds of intermarriages. For instance, the freed woman Domingas, described as a “*mulata*,” was born in Goa to an African man of unspecified ethnicity (“*cafre*”) and a woman from the Bago region of present-day Myanmar (“*pegúa*”).<sup>83</sup>

### Slavery along the Eighteenth-Century West Coast

If Bocarro’s survey provides us with a snapshot of enslavement in the seventeenth century, a remarkable census carried out in the old conquest provinces of Ilhas, Salcete, and Bardes in 1720 gives us a useful benchmark for comparison. The census was collated through the reports sent in by individual parishes of the number of people in their jurisdiction. The share of the population that was non-Catholic (including Muslims) had fallen since Bocarro’s day to about 9 percent, or about nineteen thousand people out of a total population of 208,000.<sup>84</sup>

The granularity of the data differed from parish to parish, making comparison within the sample complicated. Thus, only for the village of Neura does the priest recording the information acknowledge the continuing existence of caste among converts, noting that the Christians native to the land comprised brahmins and *śudras* (*bragmenes e sudros*). The progressive Christianization of old *comunidades* meant that this census provided more data than Bocarro’s survey in certain cases. Take the island of Chorão, the census of which reports a total of 6,968 residents, a precipitous fall since Bocarro’s day, where he reported fourteen thousand people living there, mostly fishermen and some farmers and soldiers. Of these, 195 were gentiles, 389 were enslaved people of African or other origin, seven were Chinese women, fifty-five were white, and 6,308 were Christians native to the land. Thus, about 5 percent of the population was formally enslaved. We also have other evidence of the deeper penetration of oceanic networks of trafficking into village communities. For instance, of the 2,882 people living in the village of Loutulim, discussed above, twenty-one were listed as captive Africans.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> GSHA, Bundle 22 Sr.107, São Bartolomeu Marriages 1605–1622.

<sup>83</sup> Feitler, *Repertório*, Ficha 2436.

<sup>84</sup> GSHA, “Monções do Reino,” 86, fls. 10–56v (Lista de toda gente que tem esta cidade e jlha de Goa com todas as outras adjacentes asim brancos, reynoos e filhos da Jndia, como tãobem Naturaes da terra, christãos liures e escrauos, mouros e Gentio, não entrando a gente obrigada ao seruiço de Sua Magestade que Deos goarde). There are discrepancies between some of the summaries provided and my own calculations based on individual entries. I have generally used my own calculations, except when I have had to extrapolate missing or illegible entries using given summaries.

<sup>85</sup> In the seventeenth-century records I was able to peruse, I found no evidence of enslaved Africans in Loutulim. The furthest an enslaved person seems to have been trafficked from was the Malabar coast.

Of the 8,386 people resident in the city of Goa,<sup>86</sup> 377 were whites born either in Portugal or India, 2,991 were Christians native to the land (*naturais da terra*), thirty were Muslims, and 2,702 were Hindus (*gentios*). There were sixteen Gujaratis, whose religion was unlisted but may have been Jain, all residing in the parish of Nossa Senhora da Luz. Fifty-one Chinese people were in city, with another fifteen people in the parish of Santo Aleixo described as *mestiços* and *chinas*, though it is impossible to disaggregate this number. A group of fourteen native-born and *cafre* men were described as being *casados* in the parish of Nossa Senhora do Rosario. Though there is no way to disaggregate this data, it does indicate that Africans were establishing themselves as privileged subjects of the city by this period.<sup>87</sup> Across the parishes in question, a total of 1,765 people, representing 20 percent of the population of the city, were described as being captive, enslaved, freed, or in servitude, and they were listed as being of African, Bengali, Timorese, Chinese, or Malabari origins. Focusing solely on Christian households, this would suggest a decline in the ratio of enslaved people in the city from the seventeenth century.

It is apparent, however, that the census was not necessarily able to capture who was enslaved within the non-Christian community. For all of Ilhas, only 203 people were reported as being enslaved by gentiles or Muslims, which would represent a ratio of only two enslaved people for every hundred non-Christians. This more likely indicates the limited insights the census-takers, as Catholic priests, had into the non-Christian population, as well as the proliferation of other forms of dependence beyond formal enslavement in such households that the census did not capture.<sup>88</sup>

By the eighteenth century, the fortunes of the Portuguese had changed considerably, as had the contours of their territorial holding along the coast. The key port of Kochi had fallen to the Dutch. Over the following decades, the northern provinces would fall to the Marathas. Still, two centuries of the Portuguese presence, and the ensuing transformation of the trade in people in the region had had an effect on indigenous society. That indigenous communities were now relying heavily on enslaved labor is suggested by the records of the Maratha archives. The same continuum of forced labor practices found in the Estado also existed in indigenous polities. In the Maratha lands, the use of bonded labor (*vēṭh*) existed alongside slavery and free wage labor. Moreover, these forms of coerced labor were heavily mediated by the state, which could thus also provide relief. The villages of Rajpur district around 1743, for instance, were ordered to compensate the state in lieu of the bonded labor that the *māhārs* of the area had traditionally been forced to provide, effectively freeing them from this form of bondage.

As Hiroshi Fukazawa's prescient work on slavery in the Deccan put it, slavery in the Maratha kingdom, far from being confined to private use, "was also recognized, supported and made use of by the government," which directly enslaved and sold

<sup>86</sup>This includes the parishes of the city's See; Nossa Senhora da Luz; Nossa Senhora do Rosario; Santo Aleixo; São Tomé; Santíssima Trindade; and Hella and Panelim, which were both described as being part of the city in the *Lista* itself.

<sup>87</sup>The admittance of Africans among the ranks of the *casados* in the eighteenth-century city is worth contrasting to the existence of *habshis* as *foreiros* in sixteenth-century Daman. See Subrahmanyam, "Between Eastern Africa and Western India."

<sup>88</sup>Certain parishes documented which priest visited the houses of non-Christians to ascertain who was living there, while indicating that the number of Christians was drawn from baptismal rolls. Other parishes did not indicate how the data related to non-Christian residents was collected.

people. Thus, the Maratha state used both bonded and enslaved labor routinely to reward its officers, or to compensate them in lieu of salary, and bought and sold slaves directly.<sup>89</sup> Around 1750–1751, Hari Bhikaji, a servant of the Maratha government, was given the use of twenty people under obligation (*asāmi*) for eight days in order to build a house in Pali in the Konkan.<sup>90</sup> In the same period, when the absconding female slave (*baṭīk*, a word that also connotes sex work) of Mahadeo Bhat Bapat Puranik was found in a cavalry camp and resold by the state to someone else, it was ordered that a meek (*garīb*) and guileless (*sālsūd*) woman should be selected among the state's female slaves (*kuṇbini*, literally female members of the agricultural caste) and given to Mahadeo Bhat to reside in his house in the Konkan.<sup>91</sup>

Just as in Portuguese territory, poverty, too, likely played a role in these regions in fueling enslavement.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, trafficking was crucial to slavery in areas under indigenous authority. Thus, a Sawantwadi functionary wrote to officials in Portuguese Goa that the wife of the slave (*bandechi baiko*) of one Bhojulinga Dahlvi was kidnapped by Suryaji Kinekar and sold for 31 rupees to Rangana Kalawant of Dicholim. Upon official inquiry, she was found in the house of one Kalawant Majadkar, who claimed she purchased the girl without knowing the full circumstances but would return her if restitution for the sale was made. Visaji Mahadev accordingly requested that an order to the effect be made for the commander of Dicholim to make the payment and return the girl. The letter not only indicated the role of indigenous women as slaveholders, but showed how enslaved subjects might be protected through institutions like marriage and through elite patronage networks from trafficking.

If trafficking across political boundaries was common, escape beyond territorial jurisdiction was also rife. Indigenous states coordinated with the Portuguese to monitor and curtail the mobility of enslaved people. In a not atypical missive sent from the neighboring Sawantwadi court to the Portuguese secretary of state, the *vakīl* requested that two *kuṇbi* women (*kuṇbini*) who had escaped to Panaji, to live with a Christian woman of the same caste, Paula Kuṇbi, be returned to their owner Ramchandra Nilkantha Araondekar.<sup>93</sup> Thus, caste solidarities may well have transcended confessional boundaries in providing networks of safety.

<sup>89</sup>See docs. 292, 294, and 297 in Ganesh Chimnaji Vad, ed., *Selections from the Satara Rajas and the Peshwa's Diaries II, Balaji Bajirao Peshwa, Volume II* (Bombay: Indu Prakash Press, 1908): 288–90.

<sup>90</sup>Doc. 286 in *ibid.*, 287. Bonded labor could be compensated at rates set by the state: in 1719, the rate for *vēṭh* was announced to be 8 annas per worker (the nature of the work, or its comparability to wages is uncertain). See doc. 282 in *ibid.*, 285.

<sup>91</sup>Doc. 299 in *ibid.*, 290.

<sup>92</sup>Around 1747–1750, workers might earn as little as 30 rupees annually, based on the price of grinding corn, an occupation often performed by women. In the same period, the purchase price of enslaved women ranged from 40 rupees for a Gujarati woman who was resold, her owner being unknown, to 100 rupees paid for a woman called Sabi. Though their age is unknown, even if unskilled, it is likely their lifetimes wages would have outstripped their purchase price. By the same token, a relatively nutritionally balanced daily caloric intake based on a vegetarian diet for one adult might require an annual salary of over 30 rupees. Workers might thus have struggled to support their own subsistence, making them vulnerable to enslavement. Calculations are based on docs. 271, 273, 274, 279, 280, 292, 294, 297 in *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup>GSHA, Modi doc. 999, Visaji Mahadev letter to Jose Ferreira Barroco, 25 Oct. 1789. The letter is transcribed in *nāgri* characters in *Purabhilekh-Puratatva: Journal of the Directorate of Archives, Archaeology and Museum, Goa* 9, 2 (1991): 41–42.

By the same token, the Portuguese state received the cooperation of indigenous authorities in their attempts to curtail the movement of its enslaved subjects. On 17 December 1747, Jñanlingaye Navaru, the Sarsubhedar or head administrator of Ponda under the Sunda kings, wrote in Marathi to the Portuguese Secretary of State regarding a demand to hand over two runaway Black slaves (*khāpri*). When they were found, they argued that they were owned by one Francis who, having boarded a ship, gave them a paper allowing them to find a job “to fill their stomachs” wherever they could. Nonetheless, the Sunda official handed them over as soon as the Portuguese secretary’s letter arrived.<sup>94</sup>

As this letter indicates, Africans trafficked by Europeans were ending up in the territory of indigenous polities. Enslaved Africans may even have been specifically coveted as symbols of status by indigenous kings: the Kochi king, Rama Varma IX (1751–1805), was so acquisitive of Africans that he strong-armed the incoming Dutch governor Johannes van Angelbeeck into gifting him five of his own slaves despite the governor’s protestations of the affection his household felt for them. Of the enslaved Africans in the king’s court, we know of at least one eleven-year-old African boy, whom he purchased from one Antonio Francisco Fernandes for 200 rupias.<sup>95</sup>

### Caste, Race, and Blackness

In Marathi letters as much as in the Portuguese records, we must be careful not to impute modern notions of racial identity upon the classification systems of premodern elites. This is particularly important when considering the category of blackness. Recall that the Portuguese applied the descriptor of *negro* or *preto* to enslaved South Asians. If it is possible, even likely, that the term *khāpri*, when used to describe enslaved people escaping from Portuguese territory, signified African descent, blackness in Maratha usage was likewise a quality ascribed to enslaved people of South Asian origin. In a letter to Krisnaji Viswanath, then deputed in Khandesh, the Maratha government made known its need (*prayojana*) of some worthy *kunbinis*, “black” (*kālyā*), tall, and strong, and ordered him to purchase ten such women.<sup>96</sup> Not only is the caste name used as a synonym for slave in this request, the attribution of blackness clearly does not imply African descent. The slipperiness between low-caste status, blackness, and race requires us to leave aside typological views of such categories and instead see them as part of a dynamic process by which people were enslaved. Blackness then is best read as a category of labor in this context.

This points to the need to investigate the different, if connected, genealogies of the ideologies of caste, race, and anti-blackness. If anything, in Portuguese Goa, the globalized process by which these ideologies were co-elaborated is visible. As Pyrard observed, the Portuguese freshly arrived from Europe ruled the social roost, followed by *castiços*, born of Portuguese parents in the east, “that is to say of their caste and race.” Below them on the social ladder were the *mestiços* (children born to Asian mothers and Portuguese fathers) and *mulatos* (born to African mothers and

<sup>94</sup>GSHA, Goa Daftar 583. Reproduced in *Purabhilekh-Puratatva* 2, 1 (1984): 78. That there was an official agreement to return “Blacks” running away from Portuguese territory is referred to in another letter from the Sunda official at Ponda, dated 1750 in GSHA, Modi doc. 1301.

<sup>95</sup>Ernakulam State Archives, D17.85, deed of sale, 11 Oct. 1793, Kochi.

<sup>96</sup>Doc. 308 in Vad, *Selections*, vol. II, 195.

Portuguese fathers). Still, even among *mestiços* those with brahmin mothers “regard themselves highly.”<sup>97</sup> If the origins of *casta* lay in Iberian notions of blood purity stemming from the *Reconquista*, in India these ideas dovetailed with existing ideological systems of policing endogamy, which also depended on genealogical fictions.<sup>98</sup>

Yet, looking beyond elite discursive constructions, it is apparent that the sexual exploitation of enslaved women was deeply imbricated in the elaboration and enforcement of these ideologies. If caste structured slavery in seventeenth-century Portuguese Goa, then slavery structured caste in eighteenth-century Maratha country. The penalty for adultery under the Marathas could include the enslavement of the woman, unless she were lucky enough to have either her husband or powerful community members intervene on her behalf.<sup>99</sup> Thus, around 1755–1756, while a girl from a Powar family was sold to the brahmin Gangadhar Bhat Karve for the crime of adultery, when the affair between a girl from a Patil family and a lower-caste Gosavi man was discovered, the intervention of the community and a hefty fine of Rs. 7,000 ensured their freedom. When we consider that another adulterous woman was redeemed by her husband in exchange for an enslaved person, who would likely not have cost more than a hundred rupees at most, this enormous sum tells us that rather more was at stake than the liberty of a woman; rather, the payment was in order to prevent communal excommunication for contravening caste practices.

By the same token, the state specifically protected brahmin women from slavery: around 1734–1735, Fod Sawant Bhonsle was reprimanded for allowing a married brahmin girl to be kidnapped and kept in captivity by a subordinate, an act described as one that even Muslims (*yavana*) would not commit.<sup>100</sup> Still, he did not learn his lesson: the following year, he was again reprimanded for confining the wife of the brahmin Gopal Ramrao and was reminded that this went against “the *dharma* of Maharashtra.”<sup>101</sup> In accordance with the same logic, around 1752–1753, when it was discovered a “defiled female slave” (*baṭīk bātagī*) had engaged in excommunicable (*avyavahār*) acts with Muslims, orders were made to purify the owner.<sup>102</sup> The sacralization of caste went hand-in-hand with the policing of enslavement.

The children born from enslaved women could also challenge existing social hierarchies: when a bitter conflict arose with the succession of the landholding (*watan*), the government eventually invited all parties to Pune before it was

<sup>97</sup>Pyrard, *Voyages*, vol. 2, 39.

<sup>98</sup>Max-Sebastián Hering Torres, Maria Elena Martinez, and David Nirenberg, *Race and Blood in the Iberian World* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2012). On the discursive evolution of *casta* from sixteenth-century Goa to eighteenth-century Portugal, see Ángela Barreto Xavier, “Languages of Difference in the Portuguese Empire: The Spread of “Caste” in the Indian World,” *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 43, 2 (2016): 89–119.

<sup>99</sup>See the case of a husband who rescued his adulterous wife from slavery by offering another slave in exchange: doc. 370 in Ganesh Chimnaji Vad, ed., *Selections from the Satara Rajas and the Peshwas Diaries, I, Shahu Chhatrapati Volume. 1* (Satara: Sahasrakar Press, 1906): 204.

<sup>100</sup>Doc. 221 in *ibid.*, 204.

<sup>101</sup>Doc. 379 in *ibid.*, 217–18. On the emergence of the idea of a Maharashtra *dharma* as a complex of brahmanical values particularly related to the maintenance of *jāti*, rather than a geographically defined set of ethics, from the fifteenth century onward, see Irina Glushkova, “A Philological Approach to Regional Ideologies,” in Rajendra Vora and Anne Feldhaus, eds., *Region, Culture, and Politics in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 51–82.

<sup>102</sup>Doc. 399 in Vad, *Selections from the Satara Rajas*, vol. I, 228.



decided that a son of a female slave (*dāsiputra*) could not succeed, thus upholding the claims of his father's (socially legitimated) kinsmen (*bhāūband*).<sup>103</sup> Indeed, marriage and slavery were carefully distinguished: in several cases, the state found that the owner of a female slave had forfeit his rights to her as a slaveholder if he had contracted a marriage for her. Thus, when Ranaji Bhonsle applied to the state to reclaim Yesi, it was found that since he had previously married her off to someone else, he could no longer lay claim to her as a slave and she was free to live wherever she chose.<sup>104</sup> The Maratha state was as assiduous in adjudicating the sexual and marital lives of enslaved people as it was in governing other kinds of practices relevant to the maintenance of caste, from adoption to marital fidelity, precisely because these were not separable. After all, the sexual exploitation of enslaved women posed a threat to the fiction of elite endogamy, upon which the ideology of caste rests.

Analyzing the quotidian bureaucratic categories through which slavery was institutionalized in both indigenous and European territories allows one to view social phenomena in ways not clouded by the legacies of the elite discursive ideologies which upheld that system. Instead of taking for granted the classificatory labels imposed upon enslaved peoples by elite institutions, a social history of slavery elucidates the evolution of these elite mechanisms for policing identity and the centrality of expropriating labor involved in such processes of classification. We must resist the naturalization of such categories when they serve to obfuscate the consolidation of power and resources and the expropriation of labor, without losing sight of the importance of the ongoing production of such categories as part of the exercise of power. As Mahatma Phule argued, only by desacralizing and denaturalizing caste could slavery be truly abolished. In a meaningful sense, the history of slavery *is* the history of caste in South Asia.<sup>105</sup>

By the same token, as we have seen, the very mutability of these categories could sometimes be used by subaltern subjects to challenge the strictures that sought to bind them. The trajectories of many enslaved people reveal the porosity and fragility of the social boundaries asserted by elites. In turn, it demystifies the legacies of such elite projects and serves as a salutary corrective to our imaginations that are too often shaped by such fictions of power.

## Conclusion

Much of the archival record of enslaved people was created within the confines of the very institutions that helped enslave them. Thus, it demands a kind of radical care for historians not to impose categories upon historical actors, which are themselves legacies of elite systems of classifying enslaved people and which were an important mechanism through which slavery was institutionalized. This commitment has been central to the method of analysis employed here.

This essay also demonstrates the sheer ubiquity of slavery as a historical and *archival* phenomenon. The prevalence and scale of South Asian slavery, and the enormous range of archival traces it has left, require the kind of large-scale, ongoing

<sup>103</sup>Doc. 44 in *ibid.*, vol. II, 27–30.

<sup>104</sup>Doc. 369 in *ibid.*, vol. I, 213. For a similar case, see doc. 371 in *ibid.*, 214.

<sup>105</sup>This theme runs through Phule's most important works, *Gulāmgiri* (literally "Slavery"), which he dedicated in 1873 to the African-American people of the United States in recognition of the success of their abolitionist movement, and *Śetkaryācyā Āsud* (literally, "farmer's whipcord"), composed a decade later.



and collaborative work that has come to define the study of Atlantic slavery. To do justice to the history of slavery in the region under discussion alone might well require specialists capable of reading documents in, at the very least, Persian, Portuguese, Dutch, French, English, Marathi, Konkani, Kannada, Malayalam, Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Gujarati, in a wide variety of scripts. The archival basis of the present essay is thus a small part of a much larger puzzle that demands coordinated investment from the field as a whole. To that extent, this essay is intended as a call to arms.

**Acknowledgments.** This paper has benefitted immensely from the comments of participants at various workshops. I would like to thank the organizers of those meetings for the opportunity to present this work: Rohit De; Verônica Calsoni Lima, and Livia Bernardes Roberge; Pedro Machado, Olimpia Rosenthal, and Janie Cole. A special thanks to Rochelle Pinto, my colleagues at Georgetown, particularly Kate DeLuna, and to David Akin for the care with which they engaged with this paper. Thanks to Mark Pinto for his assistance in checking some references in the Goan archives. Peter Petson was invaluable as a research assistant and interpreter during my fieldwork in Kerala. Thanks to Bill Nelson and Rajeev Kozhikkattuthodi for the maps. This research was supported by the American Institute of Indian Studies and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

**Cite this article:** Chakravarti, Ananya 2024. "Slavery, Mobility, and Identity on the Western Coast of India, Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1–30, doi:10.1017/S0010417524000203