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MANY MIDDLE PASSAGES

FORCED MIGRATION AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD

EDITED BY
EMMA CHRISTOPHER, CASSANDRA PYBUS & MARCUS REDIKER

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ONE

The Other Middle Passage

The African Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean

EDWARD A. ALPERS

THE MIDDLE PASSAGE, traditionally presented as the most traumatic moment in the entire slave trade, has assumed iconographic significance for many diasporic Africans in the Black Atlantic.[1] As Colin Palmer concludes:

> The Middle Passage was more than just a shared physical experience for those who survived it. It was and is a metaphor for the suffering of African peoples born of their enslavement, of severed ties, of longing for a lost homeland, of a forced exile. . . . It is a living and wrenching aspect of the history of the peoples of the African diaspora, an inescapable part of their present impossible to erase or exorcise. A gruesome reminder of things past, it is simultaneously a signifier of a people's capacity to survive and to refuse to be vanquished.[2]

As in the larger historiography of the African slave trade, the Atlantic dominates both the evidence for and the literature of the middle passage. However, there is no evidence that the middle passage in the Indian Ocean occupies the kind of central role in collective memory that Palmer describes for the African diaspora, although persistent recollections bear witness that Africa is still a presence in many of these communities.

My intention is to bring a measure of balance to this historiography by examining evidence from eastern Africa in order to shed some light on the middle passage in the Indian Ocean. In addition, I contend that the sea

voyage from Africa west to the Americas or east across the Indian Ocean was only one leg of the traumatic journey that forcibly removed free Africans from their homes in Africa to their ultimate destinations. Indeed, I believe that it is a mistake to restrict analyses of the middle passage only to oceanic passages, assuming that enslaved Africans embarked from the African coast as though they were leaving their native country, when in fact their passage from freedom into slavery actually began with the moment in which they were swept up by the economic forces that drove the slave trade deep into the African interior.

I also seek to demonstrate that the middle passage encompasses a much more complex set of forced migrations than is usually assumed. From the moment they were seized and began their movement to the coast, captive Africans had to begin the process of personal survival and cultural adjustment associated with the diaspora. They learned new languages, received new names, ate new foods, and forged new bonds among themselves before they ever had to adjust fully to the work of slavery or the conditions of liberation. I will illustrate how some of these processes worked by presenting an album of individual experiences—of capture, enslavement, and movement to the coast and then across the water—from nineteenth-century eastern Africa. All these accounts refer to events at the height of the slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and must be understood as products of the abolitionist movement.

The earliest of these published freed-slave narratives is the story of Swema, a Yao girl from northwestern Mozambique.[3] In 1865, when she was perhaps ten years of age, Swema was given as a pawn to her mother's creditor, because Swema's mother was unable to repay a debt. The creditor then sold Swema to a passing "Arab" slave caravan.[4] During the caravan to the coast, Swema and the other captives were usually fed a diet of millet or bean porridge, sometimes even roasted bananas or sweet potatoes. According to Swema, "To prevent desertion and at the same time husband the strength of the porters of the merchandise, the leaders take care during the march to feed the slaves well who are under their command."[5] But soon the caravan left the fertile country of Yaoland and entered the dry steppe between the Ruvuma River and Kilwa. Despondent at the failing strength of her mother, who had been allowed to accompany her, Swema had to be force-fed by her captor. In the end, Swema's mother was literally worked to death and left to die by the road. After a long, harrowing journey, Swema finally reached the coast at Kilwa, the principal slaving port for all of East Africa, where, after resting and recuperating for several days, "one beautiful morning" she was

loaded aboard a slaving dhow bound for the principal Indian Ocean slave market at Zanzibar. According to Swema's account,

> The slaves who found themselves in the same group began to tremble all over and to cry out in a strange manner. "Oh!" they said, "we are lost. We are going to Zanzibar where there are white men who eat the Blacks."
>
> Although I was generally indifferent to everything that happened around me, I did not long remain in this state in the dhow, where my suffering redoubled. We were so closely packed that not only could I not turn, but not even breathe. The heat and thirst became insufferable, and a great seasickness made my suffering even worse.
>
> At night a strong cold wind chilled us and covered us at every moment with sea foam that was raised up by the violence of the wind. The next day each one of us received a little drinking water and a piece of dry manioc root. Thus it was that we passed six long and still more painful long days and nights. Hunger, thirst, seasickness, the sudden transition from great heat to insupportable cold, the impossibility of laying down one's head for a moment because of lack of space, finally all these sufferings combined to make me regret for the first time our painful voyage across the desert. But courage! Our existence will change, because there we are at the island of Zanzibar.
>
> A good wind continued to swell our triangular sail [i.e., the lateen sail of the dhow] and soon we found ourselves before the great city. Two cannon shots made the dhow shake. The sail was lowered and the anchor was dropped.[6]

Upon being landed, Swema was examined at the slave market by the Arab who had financed the slaving expedition that brought her to the coast, but because she was so weak, she was discarded as being worthless and buried alive in a shallow grave outside the town. Miraculously, Swema was rescued from her shallow grave, taken to the Catholic mission, and revived.

The exhausted state in which she reached the coast was not unique. According to a report published in 1867 by a member of the British anti–slave-trade patrol, "The second day after leaving Zanzibar we took a dhow with 150 slaves, almost all children, or boys under 14; and as they had only started they were in good health, all but a few who are significantly called the lanterns by the sailors, because, I suppose, you can almost see through them."[7] In the mid-1870s, Sir Bartle Frere, who headed the British Indian delegation to negotiate the final anti–slave-trade treaty with the sultan of Zanzibar in 1873, reported to his government on the plight of enslaved chil-

dren: "[W]henever the child could be got to recount the history of its capture, the tale was almost invariably one of surprise, kidnapping and generally of murder, always of indescribable suffering on the way down to the coast and on the dhow voyage."[8]

Dating to the mid-1870s, the edited journals of J. F. Elton, the British consul at Mozambique who was an ardent enforcer of the recently concluded anti–slave-trade treaty with the sultan of Zanzibar, are full of references to the middle passage. Before he reached Mozambique, Elton had marched south from Dar es Salaam behind the coast toward the great slave depot of Kilwa Kivinje, in what is today southern mainland Tanzania. Along the way, he received reports of numerous slave caravans that were taken overland from Kilwa, north along the coast, specifically to avoid the new ban on slave trading and the intervention of the British anti–slave-trade patrol.[9] Most of these captives were destined for the booming clove plantations on Pemba Island; eventually, they would have been smuggled by sea across the channel separating the mainland from the island, thereby avoiding the sultan's enforcement of the treaty at Zanzibar itself.

In addition, Elton directly observed two such caravans. The first presented a scene of chaos, probably caused by the appearance of Elton's party, although he was under strict orders not to interfere with any mainland slave coffles. Arabs were driving gangs of slaves before them through the long grass into the bush, loose slaves and excited slave drivers running in all directions, whipping furiously all the while; water jars, rice bags, grain, papers, slave irons, boxes, and all the baggage of the caravan lay littered about and thrown aside in the hurry of retreat. A long gang of children, whose chain was tangled in the thornbushes, wailed piteously as they were herded away.

The second caravan included "about 300 in all, in wretched condition" (81–82). Elton continues,

> One gang of lads and women, chained together with iron neck-rings, was in horrible state, their lower extremities coated with dry mud and their own excrement and torn with thorns, their bodies mere frameworks, and their skeletons limbs slightly stretched over with wrinkled parchment-like skin. One wretched woman had been flung against a tree for slipping her rope, and came screaming up to us for protection, with one eye half out and the side of her face and bosom streaming with blood. We washed her wounds, and that was the only piece of interference on our part with the caravan, although the temptation was a strong one to cast all adrift, and give them, at any rate, a chance of starving to death peaceably in the woods. (82–83)

Later in his account, Elton describes several captures of slavers made in the Mozambique Channel by British naval vessels. On March 13, 1874, a large dhow with forty Arab and Comorian crew was seized after a display of cannonade off the northwest coast of Madagascar. As soon as the slavers were imprisoned, the British served "water and food immediately to the poor starving and emaciated slaves, of whom there were 225, many suffering severely from dysentery." This act of liberation did not, however, end the middle passage for the slaves, who were first carried to Mozambique, where they could not be disembarked, then headed toward Zanzibar, during which passage on March 19 the ship "encountered a cyclone, passing through the vortex at 8:30 P.M., and getting clear at noon on the 20th. The sufferings of the poor slaves, notwithstanding everything humanity could suggest, were intense." Eventually, on March 28, 194 freed slaves were landed, "30 having died since leaving Mozambique." Ten days later, Elton encountered seventy-eight of these souls, who had ultimately been transferred to Natal, where they were housed in newly constructed barracks and provided with blankets, utensils for eating, and used clothing. Their rations included mealie-meal (maize) porridge, rice, sweet potato, and meat. When he departed for Zanzibar on April 15, only one more person had died out of the dozen who had been sent to the hospital. "It would be impossible to describe the state of emaciation in which they were when first landed, or the visible change which even on the second day a few spoonfuls of food had upon them, producing an almost intoxicating effect and an instant exhilaration of spirits hardly to be realized unless witnessed," he wrote (112, 114).

At Durban, Elton also recorded several depositions from freed slaves who had been caught up in the Mozambique Channel slave trade from ports in Mozambique to the Comoro Islands and northwest Madagascar. Maria, a Makua woman, said that she was kidnapped by a Muslim man as she searched for crabs along the shore:

> He seized me and put a collar round my neck. He took me to a house in a village and put me in the house. Slaves are put one by one into the house, so that it may not be known they are there. Umkumba Muntu is the Mussulman. He is black, and is set over us by the Portuguese; he takes the people as slaves and barters them. Umkumba Muntu did not actually catch me. The dhow comes, the men catch as many of us as they can, and they pay a royalty for each slave to Umkumba Muntu. Sometimes when a ship comes, Umkumba Muntu gives orders to his men to collect slaves. When the dhow that we left in sailed, there were still four dhows loading with

slaves. The slaves are packed in the night, and they sail during the night. I, with these others (picking out some dozen of the freed slaves), have been six months in one house imprisoned, waiting for a dhow. Mozambique is the nearest town to where Umkumba Muntu lives. All the slaves come from the country around the town of Mozambique. I come from close to Cabaceira [on the mainland, opposite Mozambique Island]. . . . Where the dhow came from is a large river, as large as the Jugda, called Umnapa; the next river to the south of Umnapa is Kivolane [Quivolane]; the next is Umfusi [Infusse]. Dhows come to these rivers constantly for slaves. Umkumba Muntu governs the country under the Portuguese. Slave dhows go to an Arab country. They wear Arab gowns (points one out). This ship was going there. I was slave to Umsaji, Patron Moro. He did not sell me, I was kidnapped. (115–16)

From another group of freed slaves at Durban who also came from the area controlled by Umkumba Muntu, Elton learned further: "We were ten days on board before we were captured. We saw no Portuguese whilst we were being collected. They were Arabs who collected us. We were packed closely in tiers one above the other. Those of us who died, died of starvation; they gave us hardly any food and but little water" (116). In September 1875, Elton joined the HMS *Thetis* to suppress the slave trade from this notorious slaving region. During its patrol, the *Thetis* captured a slave dhow with 250 slaves and fifty-three crew. According to the account of Captain Ward of the *Thetis:*

The slaves were stowed on two decks, squatting side by side in such a position as neither to allow of their standing up nor lying down, nor of moving for the purpose of obeying the calls of nature; indeed, the stench in the hold showed plainly that these poor creatures were compelled to squat in their own excrement. They had been only three days from their last port, and, therefore might be expected to be in exceptionally good condition. Some of them were, however, much emaciated, and fifty-three of them were suffering from a most virulent and loathsome description of itch, which gave us some trouble from the necessity which it entailed of isolating them as much as possible. Notwithstanding every care from the medical officers of the ship, three have died since they were received on board; and from the wretched state of the dhow's 'tween decks, which appeared to me to be a pest-house, in which no human being could live for many hours, I can only conjecture that the majority of her cargo would have perished before reaching any port in Madagascar had we not

fallen in with her, as her passage, judging from the winds we experienced, would have lasted some five or six days longer. (144)

Elsewhere, Elton describes the extremely poor state of a dhow from the Mozambique coast named the *Kunguru* (Pied-Crow) that the *Thetis* scuttled after capturing its crew and liberating its ninety-three enslaved Makua, who were bound for the Madagascar market. He observed that "it was an open question whether she would have reached Madagascar. The water literally poured in between her beams, and the slaves on the lower deck were up to their waists in it, crowded and packed in a solid mass. The wind was strong, and the sea rising with every promise of bad weather" (169–70).

In 1887, a member of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) published a collection of thirteen life histories, *Kiungani,* that were written by child captives who had been liberated by the British and settled at Zanzibar.[10] A Nyasa boy (probably from the region around the south end of Lake Nyasa) remembered living in a state of constant threat by the Ngoni raiders of the paramount chief Mpezeni. Warfare continued and eventually this boy found himself fleeing capture with his mother and sisters in a field of maize. "I soon fell down, for I was quite a little child; perhaps at that time I was as big as C—(about ten years old)" (21). Following his seizure, he was led away to the country of his captors. After staying a while in Mpezeni's country, the boy was sold by his master to a Yao slave trader, who resold him again. The boy stayed about two years at the town of a great Yao chief (probably Mataka, whose town was Mwembe) in what is today northwestern Mozambique. "I learnt the Yao language there, and forgot my own," the Nyasa boy said. Eventually, he was sold to some Arabs from Kilwa. On the long march to the coast, "[o]nly the little children had no slave-sticks or chains, but the grown-up people were all fastened to prevent their running away." After reaching the coast at Kilwa, he was sold to an Arab. "I remember selling mangos in Kilwa, and I remember trying to know the Swahili language." Once again, his master sold him, in this instance "to an Arab of Muscat, who was a very hard master" (24, 25).

Three days afterwards the Arabs started on their journey to Muscat. First we traveled on foot, and came to a place and slept. The next day we stayed in the same place till sunset, and in the evening we started to go on board a dhow, but we did not go on board, but slept at another place. And there we stayed again till the evening. Then at last we went on board the same

> dhow, late at night. There were a great many Arabs, seven in all, and a great many slaves in chains. We sailed for three days, and on the fourth day they said that we should reach Muscat the next day. In the night the mast of the galley broke. It did not break off, but was sprung inside.

Caught in this vulnerable position when two British naval vessels, one sail and one steam, found them, the Arabs surrendered and were removed from the dhow,

> but we were left there, with the sailors, in the vessel. For there were a great many of us, and we could not all get into those two boats. We began to move on again with those two boats, the steam-boat towing the dhow for three days, and going after the ship. . . . On the fourth day we saw the ship, at noon. And we were very much afraid, and said, "To-day we shall certainly be eaten. What can that be?" And they said: "It is a house in the water." Well, we saw rigging going this way and that, and three masts, and were afraid, for we did not yet see that our lives were safe. (26–27)

Finally, they were taken on board the ship and the dhow was scuttled. Four days later, they landed at Zanzibar. They were then received by the UMCA Mission, where "[w]e were all laid up for a very long time" (29).

What befell a Makua boy from the interior of northern Mozambique highlights the trauma of constantly being uprooted and sold from one master to another. By the time he was about eight years old, the boy had already been passed from hand to hand since being pawned by his family to pay for an older brother's transgression. Recollecting a moment when he had been separated from his companions, the boy wrote:

> I kept on thinking and thinking, and fancying, "I shall never get to a quiet, settled place, where there is no more going away and being sold over and over again." I kept on brooding over this, and I could not get my food down; yet some of those people pitied me, but I refused to eat. I used to say I had had enough, because I was very, very sad indeed; and, besides, I had no one to play with. (41)

He was finally sold to an Arab from the Comoros and, after a difficult passage by dhow in which they were grounded on rocks, they soon reached the Comorian village of Nyumashuwa, on Mwali, where the boy remained for only ten days before being liberated by the British. He was then sent to Zanzibar by steamship and ultimately sent to Kiungani. "In this ship by

which we came we were not at all happy, because some people said to us, 'You are all going to be eaten.' This is why we were unhappy; we did not know they were deceiving us" (44).

A second Makua boy was carried by dhow to Madagascar on a trip that took only two days at sea. He remained at Madagascar for a month and then embarked again by sea. Soon after the dhow left Madagascar, its captain thought he spotted a European ship, "[s]o the captain put the dhow about with all speed, the sail was shifted over, and away we went and sailed all day long, and reached Madagascar at sunset. At first we did not go ashore, but remained where we were in the dhow, but in the night we got out and went to the first dhow in which we had sailed and slept there." They then stayed another twenty days in Madagascar and then repeated the scenario: "[T]he dhow hoisted sail, and was at sea three days" (47, 48). They soon reached Nyumashuwa and stayed there for about a month and a half. In the end, like the other Kiungani boy who had been freed at Mwali, this boy was taken to Zanzibar aboard a British naval vessel. His experience aboard ship included hearing the same tale of cannibalism that marked the narrative of his mate, in this case being told by one sailor that the dry biscuits given him to eat "are made of people's bones." Upon reaching Zanzibar, "the sailors made fun of us, 'We have not got to our journey's end yet.' And we asked them, 'Then why has the anchor been let down into the water?' 'Oh! We are resting a little,' said they. So we said, 'Very well.' We were in that ship a whole month and one week" (49). But eventually, they were taken to the British consul and then to Kiungani for safekeeping by the UMCA.

The account of a Bemba boy is especially effective in conveying both the conditions of his confinement on board the dhow that was carrying him to Pemba and the capture of the dhow in which he and others were being transported:

> There were two dhows there, one smaller than the other, but sailing faster than the one we got into. When we got into the dhow, it was quite night time, perhaps the time we go to evening service (8.30 P.M.), and when we went into the water it came up to our necks. Then we got into the dhow, and were arranged in order, and the Arabs weighed the anchor, and we put out to sea, and lay down for three or four days. It was a very large number of people who went on board, with goats, and fowls, and a large stock of food. But the Arabs were very cruel during the voyage, and because we were in a dhow we were told that the Europeans were bad people, but we thought, "Never mind, they can't be worse than you. You torment us for nothing." . . . [When] it was four o'clock in the morning we heard a can-

non-shot over the sail, and the Arabs cried "Oh! Ah! the English!" When the English boarded the dhow, everyone said, "I am a slave, sir." For when we were caught by the English we were glad. But when I thought about my home, I cried. (35)

A final testimony from the Kiungani children comes from a boy whose home was in Bunyoro, in the far west of modern Uganda. He was first captured in a Ganda raid when he was about three years old and lived there in nine different locations until he was sold to a Swahili and marched by caravan to the coast at Bagamoyo, a journey of more than one thousand miles, twice changing owners at Unyanyembe. Sold again at Bagamoyo, he was moved with some other slaves north to Winde, then to Saadani, Mbuyuni, Kipumbwe, Kikwajuni, Pangani, and, finally, Tanga, by which time the group of slaves numbered fifty-two, "many more women than men, perhaps thirty grown women, many young, and only a few with children, about six. Then there were about four boys and seven Arabs."

That very night we embarked in a dhow with five Arabs, two remaining on shore. We embarked in a dhow with five Arabs and sailed. The first day we had bananas to eat, the second day unripe mangoes, and the third day the same as the second, both the third and the fourth. Those three days there was rain with bursts of sunshine on the sea, but water to drink there was not a drop. On the fourth of these days the sea was very rough, but we went on till four o'clock, and then we came near Pemba. (112)

While the Arabs decided whether or not to head into the customhouse, their dhow was found by the HMS *London,* which seized the dhow and released the captives to the British consulate at Zanzibar.

The UMCA continued to encourage its most notable African members to record their life experiences to serve as exemplars to others. In 1937, Padre Petro Kilekwa published his autobiography with the provocative title of *Slave Boy to Priest.* Like the homes of several boys from the Central African interior whose histories are preserved in the earlier UMCA volume, Kilekwa's Bisa home near Lake Bangweulu, in what is today northwest Zambia, was plagued by slave raiders. When he was first seized, Kilekwa's mother tried to ransom him from the coastal slavers who possessed him, but she could not raise the eight yards of calico they demanded. "She was very sad and cried bitterly and I cried bitterly too, 'Woe is me, mother,' because I was leaving my mother and my relations and my country."[11] The rest of this part of his story reprises in many respects the stories of the other boys taken

from this part of the interior: being handed over from one master to another, residence near Mwembe in Yaoland, and finally passage to the coast, which he reached at Mikindani, to the south of Kilwa. He was soon marched for three days north along the coast.

> On the third evening we saw a big dhow and that same night we went on board and all the slaves were placed on the lower deck. We traveled all night and in the morning we found that we were in the midst of the sea and out of sight of land. We went on thus for many days over the sea. At first we had food twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. The men had two platefuls and the women two and for our relish we very often had fish, for our masters the Arabs caught a large number of fish with hooks and line. But because the journey was so long the food began to run short and so we were hungry, and also water was short and they began to mix it with salt water.
>
> After a long time at sea we drew near to land and we went on shore to try to get food and water. We stayed on shore one day and we got a little food and some water. The next day we pushed off. On the third day we heard our masters the Arabs exclaiming: "Land, land! Muscat." But we passed on without landing because the wind was high and our vessel was driven into a harbour in the Persian Gulf.
>
> In the morning the Arabs began to order us down to the lower deck, and those who were unwilling to leave the upper deck were shut in the centre of the lower deck and we were told, "Europeans are coming! They have sighted us. Their boat is a long way off. They do not want us Arabs, certainly not! But they are after you slaves and they will eat you and they will grind your bones and make sweetmeats of them. Europeans are much whiter than we Arabs are—hide yourselves."
>
> All the time the vessel kept moving. We did not stop for an instant, till we heard, "Lower the sail," and they began to lower it. At that time some of the Arabs grasped their swords and one man had a gun. The European boat overtook us quickly and drew up close to our dhow. And one Arab began to dance about with his sword in hand but the other Arabs stopped him. The Europeans demanded, "Have you any slaves on board?" and the Arabs answered, "No, we have not any." However, a European and some black men came on board and searched for us, and officers and sailors were ready in their boat with guns and cutlasses so that if any of the Arabs made trouble they could fight with them. A European and a black man peered down into the lower deck and saw us slaves, ever so many of us, and when we saw the face of the European we were terrified. We were quite certain that Europeans eat people but the European said to the black man: "Tell them not to be afraid but let them rejoice," and the European

began to smile and to laugh. And the sailor and the black man told the other Europeans who were on the boat, "There are slaves here, ever so many of them." (14–15)

After a few days on a nearby island, they were collected by HMS *Osprey* and carried on to Muscat, although the freed slaves still harbored fears of being eaten, so that "we thought that the brown sugar which they gave us was made out of the bones of our fellows who had been captured before us." At Muscat, they remained in the compound of the British consul and helped to take care of other liberated slaves who were disembarked there. "We forgot all our fears when we were slaves and expecting to be killed and eaten and to have our bones made into sugar by the Europeans, but we felt sad about being far from our relations and our homes and we wondered what our end would be" (16, 17). Like Olaudah Equiano and the first generation of Atlantic freed slaves who penned their autobiographies, Kilekwa became a sailor—in the Royal Navy. Kilekwa joined the navy during the period 1885–87, before finally being chosen for education in England and a vocation as an Anglican priest.[12]

A few years later, in April 1893, a British naval lieutenant gave the following detailed account of what transpired upon boarding an Arab dhow flying French colors:

Whilst examining the papers, one of my boats crew lifted the hatch and at once a number of children (17) made a rush on deck, they having been stowed under close hatches amongst the wood cargo; as passengers going of their own free will would certainly not be stowed away in such a manner, and as the passenger list, where ages were mentioned, showed ages from 16 to 40, and these were all children, I considered myself justified in ordering the captain of the dhow to lower his sail, and in instituting a further search, in the forepart of the dhow we found five more stowed in crevices of the wood cargo, and finding the cabin under the poop locked I demanded the key, which after some demur was produced; on entering we found two women and five boys in total darkness, and with no ventilation, the stern and the side windows having sheets of tin nailed over them, and matting again over that; we sent them on deck, and a light being struck, I saw again a small trap hatch in the deck which I at once ordered to be opened; as the hatch was lifted a most piteous cry came from the utter darkness below, and twenty little arms were stretched up to us out of this horrible hole; we lifted one or two at a time, five or six women, and upwards of forty children; the heat and stench were something fearful, the

place being without vestige of ventilation, swarming with rats, cockroaches, and other vermin, and a close hatch over it. When the children were freed they cried most piteously for water, which was at once given them; they then asked eagerly for food, and I saw one of them devouring orange peel.

When the dhow took in to anchorage, the scene was piteous, the women and children struggling for the food; in fact we had considerable difficulty at first in preventing the smaller and weaker ones, the children of apparently 6 or 7 years of age, being injured in the rush. The captain stated that they were all on board and going to Muscat of their own free will, and that had all been before the French Consul [at Zanzibar]. I then had them interrogated, individually, and they all denied that they had ever been taken before the French Consul at all, and seventy of them declared that they had been brought on board at night against their own will during the last three nights and kept under close hatches since whilst seven stated that they were willing to go to Muscat, there being seventy-seven in all.[13]

This moving narrative reflects the same kind of abolitionist fervor that permeated official British anti–slave-trade circles in East Africa and that was expressed twenty years before by Frere and Elton.

There are relatively few first-person accounts from northeast Africa. A missionary-based narrative of capture and transport to the coast comes from a woman named Medina who appears to have been from somewhere in the slaving frontier of the modern Republic of the Sudan, perhaps from the southwest of Bahr al-Ghazal or the far west of Darfur, and who eventually became a Christian convert. Recorded in Bahrain in the mid-1940s, when Medina was about seventy, hers is an exceptional account of the eastern slave route from middle Sudanic Africa to the Red Sea and Arabia.

The first thing that I can remember of my childhood is that some white men, Arabs, came to our village in Africa. The men of our village were all out in the fields. The women and children were forced to gather in the open place in the village. The men had sticks and guns, and of course we were frightened and did as we were told. I think I was about five. My mother had my baby brother in her arms, another brother at her side, and my sister and me on the other. My sister and I never saw them again. I think they were killed. We were forced to leave the village with many other girls of our age.

We were not allowed to take anything with us, not even food. We had to find what we could along the way, gathering leaves from the trees in the jungle. We trudged along day after day, but it was bad and many of us

became sick. My sister became very ill and could not go another step. Then before my eyes they beat her to death. It was terrible. I wanted to die too, I was so lonely and unhappy, but I soon learned that crying did not help for the men with the sticks would beat us more and more.

We walked for weeks and weeks and finally came to the city of Khartoum. Never before having seen a city before, we were frightened and then relieved when they said we were going to the sea in boats. We walked many miles more and finally arrived at the Red Sea, a much smaller group than when we had left our village.[14]

Medina's account of her long journey from beyond Khartoum and thence on to the Red Sea, which was probably undertaken in the late 1870s, has elements of Swema's harrowing caravan experience half a continent to the south. In Medina's short recollection of crossing the Red Sea, a voyage that she says took sixty days due to the absence of wind, everyone was reduced to drinking salty water, which aggravated their thirst, and many captives died. "Some jumped overboard, but the men with sticks prevented many of us from doing so for that would have meant less money for them when we were sold."[15]

At this point, I want to make several observations about the experience of capture and enslavement within Africa. First, the several accounts I have presented illustrate the different ways in which individual Africans came to be caught up in the slave trade, ranging from warfare to large slave raids to kidnapping, debt pawnage, stealing, and subterfuge. These accounts also reflect the different processes by which individuals were transported from the interior to the coast. In some cases, these individuals were marched directly from the time of capture to the coast in the clutches of their original captors or were seized near the coast. In other cases, captives passed through the hands of several owners. For some, the passage to the coast was relatively short, a matter of only a few weeks; for others, passage could take years and involved several distinct African experiences of enslavement. In the most extreme of these cases, individuals such as the unnamed Nyasa boy whose story is recorded in *Kiungani,* and Petro Kilekwa, this process involved the breaking and refashioning of social bonds as these children adjusted to what they thought would be a new life within the family and society in which fate had deposited them. Although we feel deeply the expressions of the severing of real kinship bonds in some of these narratives, we can also see the ties of fictive kinship slowly beginning to form. Sometimes captives were apparently able to speak their native language from the

moment of their seizure to the point of their sale at the coast, but others had to learn new languages in moving from the interior to their ultimate destinations, and some lost their mother tongues altogether. Thus, Petro Kilekwa learned Nyasa, and the Nyasa boy learned Yao and had begun to learn Swahili, even as he forgot his own language. Their experiences confirm what is known from other sources about the importance of language acquisition in the Angolan slave trade, for example, where Kimbundu became a lingua franca for captives on the long passage from the interior to the coast.[16] With the exception of the Makua woman from Cabaceira who was seized near the coast, the one element missing in these particular narratives is the experience of being held at the coast in barracoons, or holding pens, which many contemporary sources reported at the coast. Indeed, the need for captives to communicate among themselves under these circumstances also would have encouraged a process of language change.[17] Taken together, these adjustments during the initial period of capture and transportation are significant because they anticipate the larger processes of adaptation that came to dominate African cultures in the diaspora.

Recent scholarship on the Atlantic slave trade suggests that, rather than being a caesura that separated Africans in the diaspora from all meaningful Africa cultural memory, the middle passage represents an extension of adaptations already begun in Africa from the time of initial capture and a transition to those that would evolve in the different places of the diaspora. For example, the Nigerian historian Okun Uya speaks of "new ties of kinship during that cruel journey" and gives as evidence a variety of names signifying a kinship born of sharing the experience of the middle passage.[18] This phenomenon, I would add, more generally reflects a kind of fictive kinship that also served to incorporate strangers (including slaves) into African family structures. In the case of the Kiungani children, such community was found, if not during the middle passage, then in their common experience within the community created by the UMCA on Zanzibar. For cargoes that included captives from more than a single language group, as was usually the case, the process of learning other languages, both African and European, would also have continued during the middle passage. In other words, for those who survived the middle passage, the likelihood is that they would already have begun a process of cultural transformation that we can call creolization, or hybridization, before leaving the ship, a process that, as I have suggested, began even before they left the continent. In the case of the mission boys whose stories I have examined here, that process seems to have

ended with their Christianization and their adaptation of a different kind of life that was based, at least in part, on their acceptance of a mixture of British missionary and East African coastal (i.e., Swahili) social and cultural norms. Similarly yet differently, Swema found her family within the Catholic order into which she was admitted as a novice.

While there is no equivalent for the Indian Ocean trade to the kind of maritime and commercial record-keeping for the Atlantic trade that has allowed sophisticated computer analysis, the available evidence clearly indicates that the middle passage was not much different to the east of the Cape of Good Hope. Conditions on board both European and Arab ships were wretched, and mortality rates for the French slave trade to Mauritius in the last decades of the eighteenth century resembled those for the Atlantic trade.[19] As Medina's brief glimpses indicate, despite the horrific, deliberately dehumanizing conditions of the middle passage, enslaved Africans did not always surrender meekly to the inevitability of their bondage. Indeed, the same spirit of resistance that she records is evident in the testimony of one Mariamo Halii, a seventeen-year-old Comorian woman from Ngazidja who was kidnapped by a group of Comorian soldiers from the rival island of Nzwani. Their first night at sea, the vessel in which she and about thirty other captives were being transported was forced to take shelter at Mwali by a storm, and because they had neither food nor water, the ship's captain went ashore to replenish their supplies: "We heard him say referring to us: 'They are only children and will be afraid to leave in this strange place.' The moment they were out of sight, I and four of my companions jumped overboard and waded on shore and ran inland till we came to some woods."[20]

Historians now know that shipboard revolts were a much more significant factor in affecting the patterns and practice of the Atlantic slave trade than has previously been imagined.[21] While the evidence is hardly comparable for the Indian Ocean, one record that survives shows that on January 23, 1788, enslaved Makua on board the French ship *La Licorne* staged a revolt while still in sight of land. Although this uprising was subdued in an hour and the leader thrown into the sea, it signaled an endemic problem of the slave trade.[22] Indeed, like their Atlantic counterparts, French slave traders embraced ethnic stereotypes about the docility or aggressiveness of different African groups. Thus, according to Épidariste Colin, writing about different Africans who were available for purchase at the slave market of Mozambique Island in 1804, the Makua "are almost always those who instigate shipboard revolts, and it is necessary to watch them carefully."[23]

What I am suggesting is that enslaved Africans, whether they actively resisted their subjugation through revolt or simply endured the trials and tribulations of the middle passage, did not lose their awareness of being human and of sharing a common experience, whether they thought of themselves as "African" or not. Depending on whether they were enslaved as adults or children, and whether their trip overland from their home area had been direct or interrupted by the kinds of residencies described in several freed-slave narratives, their sense of identity may already have begun to change or, at the very least, have become complicated by their experiences en route to the coast and aboard ship. Put plainly, the middle passage effaced neither what the Africans brought with them from their indigenous cultural heritage nor those elements of other cultures that they acquired in this process, including the middle passage. Like Africans who were transported across the Atlantic or Sahara, those who arrived at their Indian Ocean destination were armed with their own cultural inheritance (however damaged or affected) and the experience of cultural exchange and adjustment that they had learned from the moment of their capture to the moment of their arrival at the first of their external destinations.[24]

NOTES

1. Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen, eds., *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

2. Colin Palmer, "The Middle Passage," in *Captive Passage: The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Americas* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 75.

3. Edward A. Alpers, "The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century East Africa," in *Women and Slavery in Africa,* ed. Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 85–219.

4. In the context of the slave trade in nineteenth-century eastern Africa, *Arab* designated any coastal Muslim who was involved in the slave trade.

5. Alpers, "Story of Swema," 194.

6. Ibid., 212.

7. *Anti-Slavery Reporter,* 15/99 (September 16, 1867), in *A Collection of Documents on the Slave Trade of Eastern Africa,* ed. R. W. Beachey (London: Rex Collings, 1976), 92.

8. Sir Bartle Frere's report of May 29, 1873, in Beachey, *A Collection of Documents,* 28.

9. J. F. Elton, *Travels and Researches among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1968 [1879]), 76 and 87.

10. A. C. Madan, trans. and ed., *Kiungani; or, Story and History from Central Africa. Written by Boys in the Schools of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887).

11. Petro Kilekwa, *Slave Boy to Priest: The Autobiography of Padre Petro Kilekwa,* trans. from Chinyanja by K. H. Nixon Smith (London: Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1937), 10.

12. See Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings,* ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1995). For Kilekwa's experience in the Royal Navy, see *Slave Boy to Priest,* 18–24.

13. A. B. Grenfell, April 11, 1893, Foreign Office confidential print, in Beachey, *A Collection of Documents,* 99–100.

14. R. S. Luidens, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Department of Women's Work, B.F.M., Reformed Church in America, n.d.), reprinted in Cornelia Dalenberg with David De Groot, *Sharifa* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 92–93.

15. Dalenberg and De Groot, *Sharifa,* 93. I owe my ability to date Medina's story to Russell L. Gasero, Archives of the Reformed Church in America, e-mail to author, August 19, 2004.

16. Robert W. Slenes, "'Malungu, Ngoma's Coming!' Africa Hidden and Discovered in Brazil," in *Mostra de Redescobrimento: Negro de Corpo e Alma, Black in Body and Soul,* ed. Nelson Aguilar (São Paulo: Associação Brasil 500 Anos Artes Visuais, 2000), 222–23 and n5; cf. C. Schlichthorst, *O Rio de Janeiro Como é 1824–1826 (Huma vez e nunca mais)* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Getulio Costa, 1943), 139–40.

17. For barracoons around Quelimane in Portuguese East Africa and British naval patrol efforts to destroy them, see (Lieutenant) Frederic Lamport Barnard, *A Three Years Cruise in the Mozambique Channel* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969 [1848]), 37 and 137; (Captain) George L. Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters and on the Eastern Coast of Africa: Narrative of Five Years' Experience in the Suppression of the Slave Trade* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1967 [1873]), 80–81.

18. Okun Edet Uya, "The Middle Passage and Personality Change among Diaspora Africans," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora,* 2nd ed., ed. Joseph E. Harris (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993), 93; see also Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 159–60.

19. Richard Allen, "The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Slavery & Abolition* 24, no. 2 (2003): 39.

20. "Deposition of Mariamo Halii a freeborn native of Grand Comoro. Age 17," 1883, Zanzibar National Archives, AA1/48.

21. David Richardson, "Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001), available at www.historycoop.org/journals/wm/58.1/richardson.html (accessed January 15, 2007); Eric Robert Taylor, *If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

22. Jean Mettas, "Ports autres que Nantes," in *Répertoire des Expéditions Négrières Françaises au XVIIIe Siècle* 2, ed. Serge Daget (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1984), 93.

23. Quoted in Alpers, "Becoming 'Mozambique': Diaspora and Identity in Mauritius," in *History, Memory and Identity,* ed. Vijayalakshmi Teelock and Edward A. Alpers (Port-Louis: Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture and University of Mauritius, 2001), 123.

24. For my thinking on this aspect of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean, see my "Recollecting Africa: Diasporic Memory in the Indian Ocean World," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 83–99, and "Becoming 'Mozambique.'"