African Population and Capitalism

Historical Perspectives

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MAP 1 WEST AFRICA IN THE ERA
OF THE SLAVE TRADE *

Map 1

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LOCAL VERSUS REGIONAL IMPACT OF
## SLAVE EXPORTS ON AFRICA

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MATERIALIST ANALYSIS IN THE
HISTORY OF AFRICAN SLAVERY

Years ago, Philip Curtin noted that the volume of slave exports from the African coast fluctuated sharply, presumably in response to changing local political conditions. Yet Curtin is perhaps best known for his 1969 study of the aggregate volume of the Atlantic slave trade that shows—in contrast to the local fluctuations—a remarkably smooth overall pattern of expansion, peak (in the late eighteenth century), and contraction. Some time later, Kopytoff and Miers (1977) assembled a volume of studies of the institutions of African "slavery" (the quotes are theirs) aimed at showing the uniqueness and variability of unfree states; yet the editors were forced to title and to organize their volume in terms of an approach to slavery that treats it as one institution, albeit a most variable one. These dilemmas, posed implicitly by writers who do not label themselves historical materialists, highlight the potential benefits of a materialist approach to African slavery, in the sense that such an approach is aimed in part at resolving the apparent contradiction between the boundless variability of individual events and the evolution of broad historical patterns. It thus seems appropriate to begin with a comment on materialist contributions to the study of African slavery.

Although there are Marxian writers on African slavery, it is not possible to isolate a specifically materialist literature on the subject.
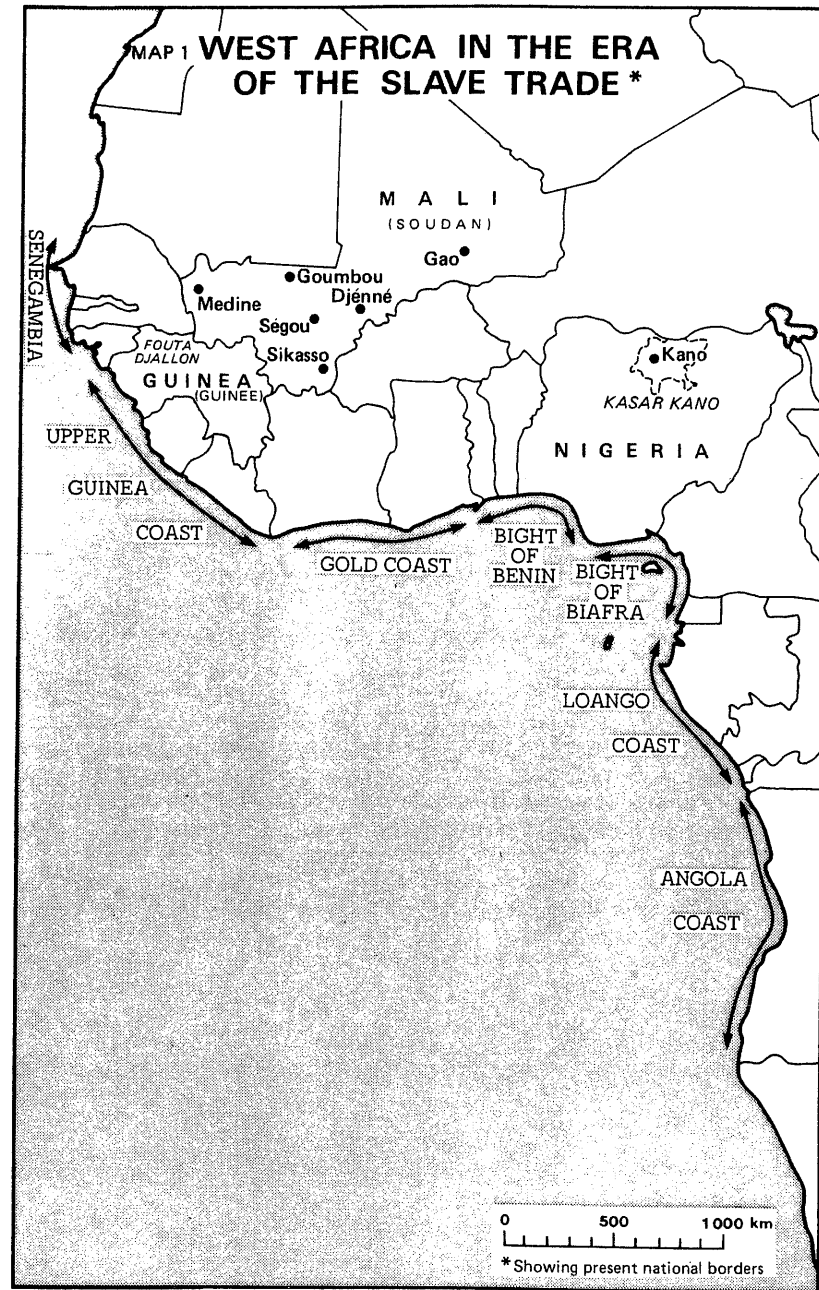
So much research on the subject has been restricted to establishing basic facts—the need to establish the structure of African slavery seems logically to precede the ability to discern the contradictions within them—that a great deal is shared among authors following and opposing historical materialism.

How will we know materialist analysis of African slavery when we see it? Presumably identification depends more on content than on the label attached by the author, so I propose four criteria for identifying a materialist approach: It is first of all comprehensive. By *comprehensive,* I mean geographical breadth, a multidisciplinary analysis of relations among the several spheres of human activity and analysis over a substantial period of time. It requires analyzing slavery as an institution interacting with other institutions. Second, materalist analysis focuses on the study of *contradictions* within the system, however defined, and on the changes brought about by those contradictions. Third, it gives great weight to the *material conditions* of life—hence the economics of slavery—but also requires a sensitive and nuanced analysis of the interaction among material, social, and ideological conditions. Fourth, a materialist approach is *critical*—not necessarily in the sense of being negative but in the dual sense of expressing moral judgment on willful perpetrators of social oppression, and, more important, of giving close attention to those factors that produce social change, whether for good or for ill. A materialist approach focuses on discontinuity, contradiction, and interaction rather than on continuity, harmony, and social inertia. One need not be a materialist to focus on breadth of analysis, on contradictions, on the passage of time, and on a critical approach, but it is only the materialist framework that in principle calls for all of these ingredients.

Two great projects are linked in the materialist analysis of African slavery: the elucidation of contradiction and change in slavery itself and the linking of slavery to capitalist development. But the overall picture in each of these areas is still too dim to allow a full-scale materialist interpretation. Such a comprehensive picture will require linking the rise and fall in the volume of slave trade, the changing economic role of slavery in the New World, changing prices and values of slaves, the demographic impact of slavery in Africa, and changing institutions of African slavery. Nor does this overall picture arise naturally out of the assembly of smaller studies. For instance, the analysis of social contradictions entailed in African slavery has been based on data from the nineteenth century, but the conditions of slavery in the eighteenth century were quite different. Forty years ago,

Williams (1944) criticized capitalism from the vantage point of West Indian slavery, but the argument has yet to be generalized to account fully for the African role in the rise of capitalism.

At this stage of the enterprise, very little of the work on African slavery can be called materialist if one insists that it meet more than one of these criteria; on the other hand, much or perhaps most of the recent work on African slavery could be called materialist if meeting one of the four criteria is sufficient.

Another method for identifying materialist contributions to studies of slavery is to identify alternative approaches. Two fairly standard alternatives may be posed. The first may be labeled *neoclassical.* It is most easily discussed in terms of general equilibrium economics: It focuses on a self-regulating market and, while it recognizes the intense conflict between buyer and seller, it emphasizes the harmonious resolution of their differences. Bean's work (1975; Thomas and Bean, 1974) is representative of this outlook. The second alternative may be labeled *institutionalist.* It is most easily discussed in terms of social anthropology: It focuses on the uniqueness of social institutions and on the power of social structures to transform economic relations. The transhistorical synthesis of Patterson (1983) fits into this category, as does the more specific analysis of Kopytoff (1979). And yet the work of such major contributors to the literature as Eltis (1977), Curtin (1969, 1975), and Miller (1975) is not easily lumped into any of these three categories.

Perhaps the key contribution of a materialist outlook, at present, is its critical approach. Many contributors to the literature on African slavery still manifest a remarkable tendency to minimize the damage inflicted on Africa by the slave trade, and to allow for African consequences of slave trade only in the moral and ideological spheres. This, in a world which still undervalues the morality and the thought of Africans, can lead to a dangerous underestimation of the impact of the world economic system on African life. Surely all agree on the remarkable ability of African societies to resist, survive, and adapt in the face of the pressures of slave trade—the Livingstonian image of African society being laid waste by slave trade is now abandoned in most cases (but see Inikori, 1982, and Mahadi and Inikori in this volume). Yet the emphasis writers give to the emerging factual picture is crucial. Ony may choose to minimize the impact of slavery on Africa—thus emphasizing the continent's isolation—or to explore the limits of the impact, thereby emphasizing the links between Africa and the wider world.

REGIONAL LEVELS OF DEMOGRAPHIC DRAIN:
A SIMULATION APPROACH

Analysis of the demographic impact of the slave trade may occur on three levels. The continental level, the whole of the African continent or some large portion of it, is useful for intercontinental comparisons and the assessment of broad trends in the Atlantic economy. The regional level, focusing on the comparison of regions such as Angola, the Bight of Benin, and Senegambia, is appropriate for distinguishing slave-trade regions from each other (see Map 1). But as these regions are still larger than most modern African nations, there remains ample scope for local analysis, aimed at discerning the great variety of local experience. This section estimates the regional demographic impact; the next goes on to consider implications at the local level.

A number of authors have assessed the regional and local demographic impact of slave exports, including Anstey (1975: 79-82) for Angola, Loango, and the Bight of Biafra; Patterson (1978: 80) for Gabon; Northrup (1978: 81-82) for the Bight of Biafra; Manning (1982: 32-34) for the Bight of Benin; and Thornton (1981) for each of the regions from Senegambia to Angola. Some of these are analyses of regions in isolation (e.g., Patterson and Manning); others are related to an assessment of the continental impact of slavery. Thus the analyses of Anstey and Northrup are linked to the assumptions of Fage (1969), who concluded that slave exports halted but did not reverse population growth in West Africa.

Similarly, my approach derives from my simulation modeling of the continental impact of slave exports (see Manning, 1985; Manning and Griffiths, 1985, for a description of the technique and a justification of the levels of parameters). This simulation projects, for each ratio of annual slave exports to estimated regional population, an African population structure and growth rate. Results on the continental level suggest that the population of the Western Coast of Africa (that area from which the Atlantic slave trade claimed its victims) declined by 10 to 30 percent between 1760 and 1850. The task here is to tailor that continental analysis to the regional level.

The numbers of slave exports by region from 1700 to 1850 are now known within tolerable confidence limits; they are summarized conveniently by Lovejoy (1982) and Eltis (forthcoming). But since the simulation analysis requires a ratio of the flow of slave exports to the stock of African regional population, it is necessary to project populations of the African slave-trade regions over time. We begin by con-

structing high and low estimates of the 1850 population for Gold Coast, Bight of Biafra, and the other countries. These were calculated by accepting official estimates for the populations in 1930 and projecting them back according to growth rates based on known African and European rates of the time: (1) at an annual growth rate of 0.5 percent to get a high estimate of the 1850 population, and (2) at an annual growth rate of 1.0 percent to get a low estimate of the 1850 population.

For each region, and beginning with both high and low estimates of the 1850 population, the procedure was to work backward in time by comparing each decennial rate of slave exports with the estimated population at the end of the decade, and to draw from that ratio the consequences for the regional growth rate and population structure: growth rate and sex ratio were calculated as functions of the export ratio. For ease of calculation, these projected consequences assumed, for each region, export slave proportions of 37 percent female and 20 percent children (the global average), a regional birth rate of 42 per 1000, and a regional death rate of 37 per 1000 (figures drawn from eighteenth-century Angolan data, Thornton, 1980), yielding an intrinsic growth rate of 5 per 1000, and a life expectancy at birth of 27.5 years. The high and low estimates were then calculated for the beginning of the decade, using the estimated growth rate; the procedure was then repeated for the previous decade, using the level of slave exports for that decade, and so on.

Figures 2.1 through 2.7 show the results of these calculations. Before discussing them, I should note that they could be revised in several ways. The projected consequences of any given ratio of slave exports to regional population could be adjusted for the composition of the slave export population appropriate to that region, rather than the overall average. In the case of Angola, for instance, where the proportion of adult female exports was relatively low, this would make the consequences of a given level of slave exports appear less severe than the results shown. A similar result might appear for the Bight of Biafra if the assumed level of mortality upon enslavement were reduced because kipnapping—the region's leading mode of enslavement—involved less carnage than war. And we will *always* be able to argue about the geographic scope and population size of the region from which slaves were drawn.

Figures 2.1 through 2.7 show, for each region, the level of Atlantic slave exports by decade (solid line) and the high and low estimates of regional population as influenced by slave exports (dotted lines). The graphs have two interesting properties, one artificial and one intrinsic.

First, they have been scaled so that, when the line representing slave exports lies below the lines representing population, the regional population continues to grow, albeit often at a reduced rate. When the line representing slave exports lies above the lines representing population, however, the drain is sufficient to cause regional population to decline. The second property is inherent in the logic of retrojecting populations exporting known numbers of slaves: The high and low estimates of regional population get relatively and absolutely closer to each other as one goes back in time. This is because a given number of slave exports might cause a small population to decline but allow a large population to grow: The two estimates of population are necessarily closer together at the earlier time than at the later time.[1] This logical property of population projections is such as to warrant some hope that African population levels in past centuries may one day be known with a certain confidence. With that, we turn to a region-by-region discussion of the results.

For Senegambia, estimates are based on the assumption that the regional population was that within the confines of modern Senegal and Gambia. On that assumption, the region experienced modest population decline for five decades during the eighteenth century and two decades during the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the slave-exporting region could reasonably be interpreted to include the area of modern Mali, which would roughly double the regional population. At the same time, Senegambia thus redefined was the only region exporting significant numbers of slaves both to the Atlantic and across the Sahara. Austen (1979) estimated Moroccan slave imports (which came almost entirely from this region) at 2500 per year in the eighteenth century and 3300 in the nineteenth century, or somewhat more than the volume of Atlantic slave exports. This serves to reinforce the impression that Senegambia, while not seriously depopulated, did not experience population growth in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A further point, suggested for a later period by the analysis of Klein (chapter 3 in this volume) is that slaves may have moved among Senegambia and neighboring regions in significant numbers.

I have followed Lovejoy (1982) in suppressing the Windward Coast region of Curtin's analysis by including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau in the Upper Guinea coast, and by joining Ivory Coast to the Gold Coast. Slave exports from the Upper Guinea coast, thus defined, were sufficient to reduce regional population in the 1760s and 1770s and from the 1810s to the 1830s, and to halt growth in the three intervening decades.
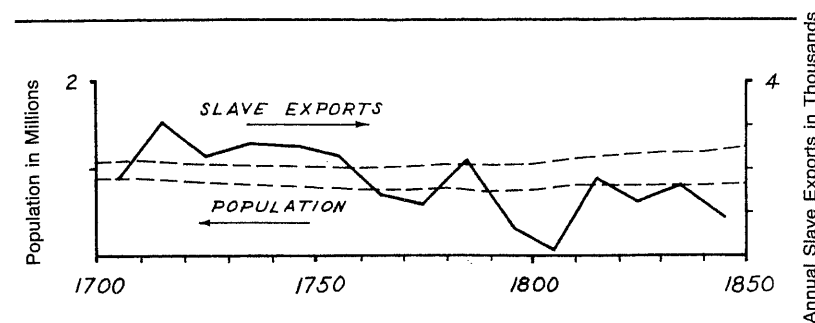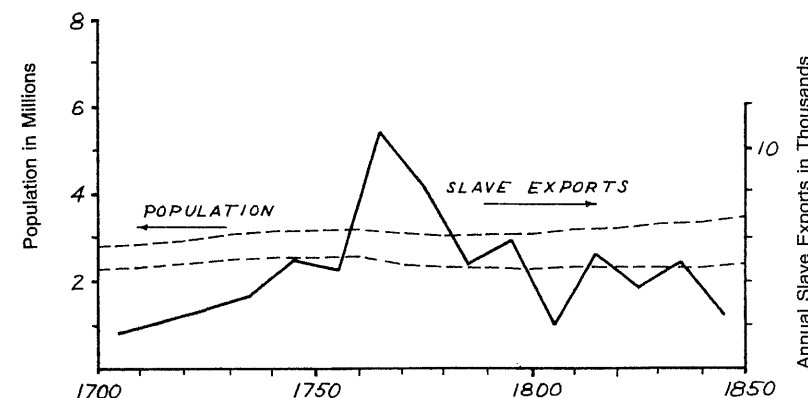

Figure 2.1 Senegambia

Figure 2.2 Upper Guinea Coast

For Gold Coast, the decades following the rise of Asante included enough slave exports to bring about a decline of from 8 percent to 18 percent in regional population; the late-eighteenth-century peak in slave exports brought further decline. The virtual halt of slave exports in the nineteenth century permitted population to grow again.

For the Bight of Benin, population declined almost without interruption from 1700 to 1850. This is the most serious long-term population drain projected for any African region. It shows a more serious decline in the Bight of Benin population than that projected in Manning (1982: 340-343) for three reasons: The impact of a given ratio of slave exports to regional population is assumed to be more serious than before, now that simulation results can replace guesswork; the
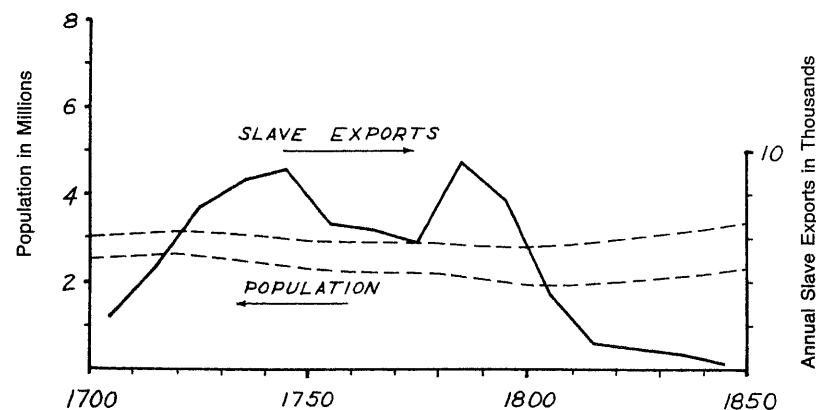
Figure 2.3 Gold Coast

Figure 2.4 Bight of Benin

Figure 2.5 Bight of Biafra

volume of nineteenth-century slave exports is now assumed to have been higher; and the Hausa are now left out of the population from which exported slaves are assumed to have been drawn.

For the last four decades of the eighteenth century, slave exports from the Bight of Biafra were sufficient to cause population decline; slave exports prevented population growth during several additional decades.

Most analyses of the volume of the Atlantic slave trade treat West Central Africa—including the coast from Gabon in the north to Benguela in the south—as one great slave trade region. Reasons for this have included the ambiguity of ships' logs reporting voyages to the area, the tendency of slaves from one hinterland area—Kongo—to be delivered both north to Loango and south to Luanda, and the cultural and linguistic similarity of slaves drawn from the region. Significant exceptions to this tendency are found in the more region-ally specific work of Birmingham (1966), Miller (1975), Martin (1972), and Eltis (1977). Because West Central Africa is so large an area for the regional analysis undertaken here, I have drawn on the work of these scholars to distinguish two regions: the Loango coast and Angola. I have accepted Miller's estimates for exports from Angola, and subtracted them from Lovejoy's totals (1982: 485, 490) for West Central Africa to derive estimates for Loango for the years up to 1810; I have relied on Eltis (forthcoming) for later years.

Since the slave-export estimates for Loango are calculated as a residual, they surely exaggerate the erratic movements of regional

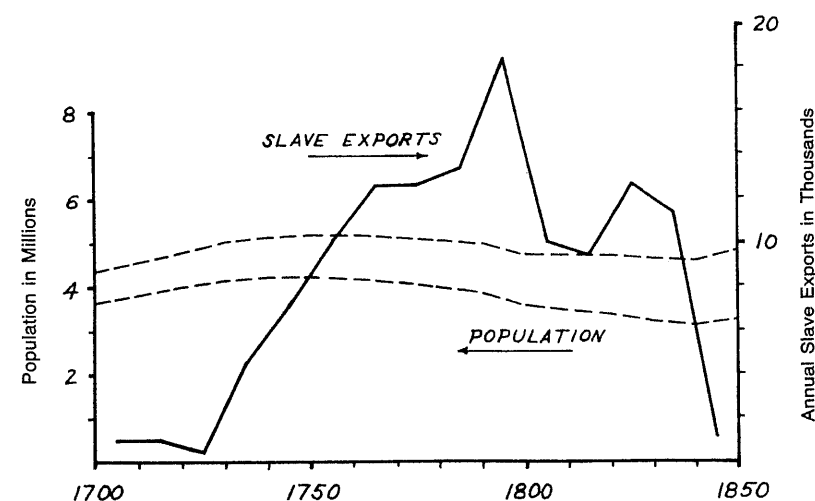totals. Comparing these figures with Martin's qualitative description (1972: 78-92), one is not surprised to see a peak in exports in the 1780s and 1790s, but one is not prepared for such a high level of exports, and one expects a still higher level in the 1760s and 1770s. But even if the slave-export totals were adjusted to conform to Martin's description, the demographic conclusions would be similar: population growth in the early eighteenth century, stagnation in the middle part of the century, very sharp decline at the end of the century, and continued decline until 1850.

The portrayal of Angolan population (Figure 2.7) suggests steady increase in the volume of slave exports, which halted population growth in the mideighteenth century and overcame it from the 1790s through the 1840s. The results indicate a population, which, devastated in midnineteenth century, did not return to its eighteenth-century level until the turn of the twentieth century.
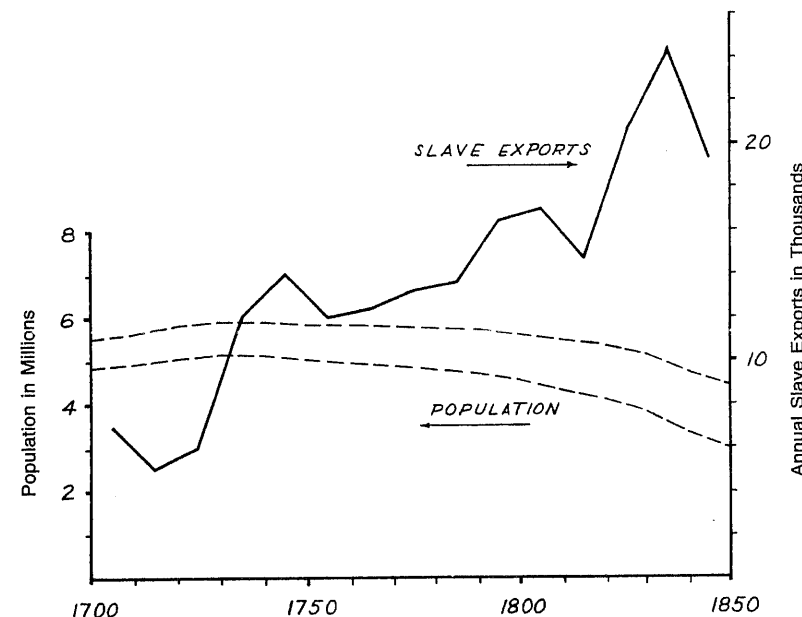

Figure 2.7 Angola

These results are summarized in Table 2.1, which displays the incidence of projected population decline by region and by decade including, in the final column, Western Africa as a whole (the sum of all regions). The table shows that the negative demographic impact of slave exports was most general in the era from 1760 to 1840, and that it was more regionally specific in earlier and later times.

LOCAL VERSUS REGIONAL IMPACT OF SLAVE EXPORTS

The simulation model, in addition to projecting growth rates of African regional population, projects the ratio of males to females in that population. For those numerous cases where slave exports were just sufficient to halt population growth, the ratio of adult men to women was roughly 0.85: 15 percent fewer men than women. For cases where enough slaves were exported to bring about substantial population decline, as in the Bight of Benin for most of the period from 1700 to 1850, and in the Bight of Biafra in the late eighteenth century, the number of adult men exceeded women by 20 to 25 per-

Figure 2.6 Loango

TABLE 2.1
Decades in Which Population Declines Are Projected
for African Regions

Decade	Senegambia	Upper Guinea	Gold Coast	Bight Benin	Bight Biafra	Loango	Angola	West Afri
1700s				X				
1710s				X				
1720s	X			X				
1730s			X	X				
1740s			X	X			X	
1750s			X	X		X		
1760s		X	X	X	X	X		XX
1770s		X		X	X	X	X	XX
1780s			X	X	X	X	X	XX
1790s			X		X	X	X	XX
1800s			X	X	X	X	X	XX
1810s	X	X		X		X	X	XX
1820s				X	X	X	X	XX
1830s	X	X		X	X	X	X	XX
1840s				X		X	X	XX

cent. In the most extreme projection, Loango in the 1780s, the number of adult men would have been roughly half the number of women. (As a rule of thumb, the proportionate surplus of women over men—0.33 for Loango and 0.14 for the Bight of Benin—may be taken as a lower bound to the proportion of slaves in each regional population.)

Just as the population drain from slave exports was uneven within each of the African regions, so also was the variation in the sex ratio. As I have argued elsewhere, males and females were captured in roughly equal numbers, so that the sex ratio remained relatively even among heavily raided peoples; those areas that collected slaves rather than lose them served to concentrate female slaves (Manning, 1985). Thus the Bight of Benin might have been divided into two equal segments, one with an even sex ratio and one with a ratio of 67 (67 males per 100 females), with an overall sex ratio of 80. This sort of reasoning gives additional confirmation to the census of Angola for the years 1777 and 1778 reported by Thornton, in which the sex ratio was roughly 50: this could correspond either to the very extreme conditions of the Loango region as a whole for the brief period of the 1780s, or it could correspond to the conditions for the slave-collecting half of a larger region for which the sex ratio was 67, as in Angola for a number of decades.

For Gold Coast and the Bights of Benin and Biafra, one may offer assertions as to the local foci of depopulation and surpluses of women. Gold Coast had exported few slaves until the late seventeenth century,

when the volume of slave exports rose along with the rise of Akwamu. The rise of Asante after 1710 is associated, on one hand, with a centralization of power in the Akan area, the replacement of Akwamu and Denkyera with Asante power, and the end to fratricidal war in the Akan heartland; and, on the other hand, with a rise in the level of slave exports to a quantity sufficient to reduce regional population during the mid-eighteenth century. Udry, in unpublished work in progress, argues that many of the slaves exported at this time came from the Guang-speaking areas on the northern frontier of Asante. The slaves known as Coromantee, Akan slaves who led the Jamaican revolts of midcentury, were therefore drawn from this area.

Population decline was far more serious in the Bight of Benin, and began three decades before Danhomè made its conquest to the coast between 1724 and 1727. While Danhomè and Asante were in some senses analogous, Danhomè was forced to accept Oyo as its overlord in the 1730s and remained within reach of hostile neighbors until the midnineteenth century. A survey of New World slave populations originating in the Bight of Benin shows that the coastal Aja peoples provided virtually all slaves exported from the region from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century (Manning, 1982: 30). This result is consistent with the political narrative of the region summarized, for instance, by Akinjogbin (1967). Perhaps the population of Danhomè grew while that of its neighbors declined; but since Danhomè was involved in many wars and did not win them all, it is equally likely that the kingdom itself suffered population decline.

In the nineteenth century, Yoruba became the dominant group among the region's slave exports, in large part because of the wars associated with the collapse of Oyo. Population of the Yoruba-speaking areas of the Bight of Benin declined in the nineteenth century, though the depopulation was less severe than that for the Aja-speaking areas in the eighteenth century.

The timing of the rise of the Aro clan and its oracle to prominence in slave exports remains unsettled. Northrup has argued that those Igbo slaves whose origins can be traced came from all over Igbo country, which would imply that the late-eighteenth-century decline in population was shared by all regions. On the other hand, the earlier importance of Ibibio slave exports, along with the fact that Aro and other Igbo clans moved into areas previously occupied by Ibibio, might be taken as evidence that the eighteenth-century trade led to substantial Ibibio population decline (Northrup, 1978).

The projection of severe decline in the populations of the Loango and Angola regions in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries echoes Vansina's impression (1966; 180-207). Available descriptions

indicate that few slaves came from the immediate hinterland of the Loango coast. One major source was the Kongo heartland, south of the river; the other was the middle reaches of the Congo River, where the Bobangi acted as the main intermediaries and transporters (Harms, 1981). The late-eighteenth-century population decline may be somewhat exaggerated, to the degree that slaves were drawn from the area of modern Angola, the population of which I have placed in the Angola region. But on the assumption that the combined levels of export for Loango and Angola are correct, the decline in population must have been in one segment or the other.

In Angola, for which the hinterland is taken to include all of modern Angola as well as Shaba, the results show a population large enough to withstand depopulation until the export of slaves grew to its level of 1750. This gives support to an interpretation of the demographic history of Angola that Miller (1983) has termed the "ring of fire." That is, slave exports in the sixteenth and seventeenth century may have been sufficient to cause decline in the population of the relatively restricted areas—Kongo, Imbangala, the Kwanza Valley—from which they were drawn, but cannot have caused decline in the population of the region as a whole; this view might be elaborated to include both an interior area where slave trade had not yet reached and a coastal area where population had stabilized. In this context, Miller's argument that drought and epidemics were the major factors limiting the size of population may be accepted. But for the end of the eighteenth century and for much of the nineteenth century, the fire seems to have extended its influence to the whole region, and its population declined.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY AND DEMOGRAPHIC HISTORY

The overall impression is one of great physical mobility in Western Africa, a large proportion of the population in dependent positions, unequal sex ratios, and decreasing total population for a century. Some of the analytical assertions made by scholars working on African slavery receive new meaning in this context. Thus, Harms's (1983a) presentation of the Bobangi view of social life as a zero-sum game appears as an optimistic outlook in the context of a declining regional population. Lovejoy's (1983) interpretation of ethnic groups as flexible occupational groups rather than as inherited destiny might be expanded to account for the many slaves who made involuntary changes in ethnic (and occupational) category. W. MacGaffey (1983) has defined the lineage mode of production as a conceptualization of a basically bilateral kinship system influenced by slave trade; he might

have emphasized that the social system was influenced by particularly intensive slave trade which resulted in a severe shortage of men. Meillassoux's (1983a) reluctance to admit to the existence of a slave mode of production in Africa—in the sense of an organic relation of exploitation linking the free peasant sector to the sector of aristocrats and their slaves—might be justified by the reasoning that the demographic turmoil of the continent prevented the coalescence of a coherent social order. The debate about the relative importance of production and reproduction to the value of female slaves will take new turns once it becomes clear where population was declining and where it was growing (Robertson and Klein, 1983).

The resolution of these and other questions on African slavery can only be achieved through closer attention to the continental and Atlantic contours of the phenomenon. In particular, the great variations in the price of slaves—crudely, a sharp increase at the beginning of the eighteenth century and a decline in the nineteenth century—are of crucial importance. For instance, it may be that differences in time and in the price of slaves may help to resolve the Terray-Dumett controversy over the use of slaves in Akan gold mining (Terray, 1975; Dumett, 1979). Even at this early stage of analysis, however, the history of African slavery provides some general lessons for the analysis of African demographic and economic history. First, migration was of fundamental demographic importance. Hence the demands of the problem exceed the limits of analytical techniques based on closed populations and the conventional theory of demographic transition (see Chapter 1 of this volume). Second, the history of African slavery provides a reminder that there exists no clear precontact baseline in African demographic or economic history. One way to evoke the succession of African transitions and intercontinental links is to note the temporal coincidences of the eighteenth-century African slave trade with the European peak of mercantile capital; of nineteenth-century expansion of African slavery with the European rise of industrial capital; and of twentieth-century African labor systems with the world dominance of finance capital.

NOTE

1. For two populations P and R at time $t = 2$, the ratio of which is $P/R = a$, and the growth rates of which are each reduced through equal annual numbers of emigrants $E(t)$, it can be shown in general that the ratio of the two populations in an earlier time $t = 1$ will be less than a.