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“Scattered Africa” in Asia: Evolution in Research

By Maryam Sharron Muhammad*

Thereupon a young maiden arose from the center of the altar, the well-favored and beautiful Daughter of the Pancalas, heart-fetching, with a waist shaped like an altar. She was dark, with eyes like lotus petals, her hair glossy black and curling -- a lovely Goddess who had chosen a human form. . . . And over the full-hipped maiden as soon as she was born the disembodied voice spoke: “Superb among women, the Dark Woman shall lead the baronage to its doom. The fair-waisted maiden shall in time accomplish the purpose of the Gods” Hearing this, all the Pancalas roared like a pride of lions, and the earth was unable to hold them so full of joy (*Mahabharata* 1(11)155: 42-47).



This paper will look at issues fundamental to research on the African Diaspora in Asia. African-American scholars have been interested in the presence of Africans in Asia since the eighteenth century, primarily in defense of the Black psyche in the face of the Hamitic myth and Darwinist justification of a white supremacist racial hierarchy. Research in the early twentieth century began with informal reports from soldiers who had fought in the Philippines, and essays by journalists such as the globetrotting J. A. Rogers and race-proud educators such as Drusilla Dunjee Houston. It was not until 1971 that a formal study appeared in the form of Joseph E. Harris’ *The African Presence in Asia*. A decade later, William Leo Hansberry produced a study of Ethiopian societies. In 1985, an anthology of writings on Asia was published by historiographer Runoko Rashidi. In 1993, Martin Klein edited a volume on emancipation in Asia and Africa. Since 2004 a host of books on slavery, resistance and emancipation in Africa and Asia have been published. Gwynn Campbell, Edward Alpers, Richard Pankhurst and Shihan de Jayasuriya have all released texts in English. Research on Afro-Asians began with deconstructing Ham, and evolved into breaking the hold of Western supremacy in the minds of Africans and their scattered descendants. This paper will look at the psychosocial issues in the

still-shallow waters of Afro-Asian research, the sources of funding, and efforts to de-romanticize the Arab and Indian slave trades.

Tracing African migrations to Asia requires consideration of four points. First, how do we define Asia? Barnes and Nobles *Geographica* atlas sets the boundaries of westernmost Asia as the Ural River and the Black Sea; this places a large part of the former Soviet Union within the Asiatic sphere. Second, studies in anthropology tell us that all human beings migrated from East Africa at least 50,000 years ago; this means that “indigenous” black-complexioned peoples can be found across the world. Those Africans whose migrations were documented in writing or oral epic may have moved into areas populated by groups retaining earlier ‘negroid’ phenotypes. Third, cultural values were transported with, and transmitted by, African migrants. Fourth, South Asian and Arab expansion brought African, Afro-Asian and Asian populations into close and continual contact under the cultural umbrellas of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, respectively.

Deconstructing Ham: Earliest Studies of the African Presence in Asia

The Bible informs us that the Patriarch Noah cursed his grandson Canaan because of scorn from Ham, Canaan’s father and Noah’s second son. The Biblical incident is a fairly moderate curse, considering that the God of Israel threatened to strike its women bald:

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed *be* the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.¹

Folklore conveyed through the Babylonian Rabbinic additions made it clear that Black people were Noah’s targets for perpetual servitude: “Canaan’s children shall be born ugly and black! . . . [Ham’s] grandchildren’s hair shall be twisted into kinks, and their eyes red.”

Close readings of the Bible by those fortunate enough to be fully literate made it apparent that the curse was invalid. Further it was apparent that even if ‘Ethiopia’ had been cursed to be enslaved, the ‘Lord’ had every intention of judging and redeeming its future inhabitants.² Happily, even the great prophet Moses married an Ethiopian. In their defenses of Black intellect, Reverend Blyden, Dr. Delany and David Walker all recalled Ethiopians who ventured into southwest Asia. Delany romanticized Afro-Asian relations so much that he proposed an Afro-American colony in East Africa on the basis of projected trade possibilities.

The Eastern Coast of Africa has long been neglected, and never but little known, even to the ancients; but has ever been our choice part of the Continent. Bounded by the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean, it presents the greatest facilities for an immense trade, with China, Japan, Siam, Hindoostan, in short, all of the East Indies -- of any other country in the world.³

Today, Africans can be found throughout the Arab Gulf States, Iraq, India, Sri Lanka, the Malay peninsula and China. Populations migrate daily in search of work, and the majority travel to make the Muslim pilgrimage (hajj). Such migrations are not new. They have resulted in the Zanj of Iraq, the Siddis and Habshis of India, the Dasyus of ancient India, and the “Kaffirs” of the Indian Ocean. Africans were reported to have migrated into Iraq and southern Iran as early as 4,500 BCE (before common era).

Africans were also reported to have left colonies in the region of the Black Sea during the reign of Sesostrius I. The kingdom of Meroe in modern Sudan featured queens of such fame that they were immortalized in the *Bible*, as were the Pharaohs of the twenty-fifth dynasty. The Aksumites imported spices and textiles from Western India, as early as the first century CE. Various texts discuss the presence of African ethnicities and “blacks” east of the Red Sea. *Manu’s Laws*, the *Vedas* and *Mahabharata* discuss interrelations in the Persian-speaking world, while Kebr Negast discusses relations in Arabia, Jerusalem and the Horn of Africa proper.

The Laws of Manu are sacred precepts that regulated the affairs of the Indian castes. Buhler offers no definite date for which they may have been composed, stating that part of the problem is that the author, Manu, is sometimes referred to as the first man, the ‘supreme soul’, or even God.⁴ It is possible that the Laws were written between 600 and 200 BCE.⁵ The Laws of Manu identify the country of the Meluccha (spelled in various ways), whom Rashidi, Brunson, Winters and Chandler posit were Africoid peoples originally from the area of Sumer and Elam as barbarians. The term Meluccha is synonymous with savage in the Laws of Manu, as in the *Mahabharata*.

The Aryan represented a person from a particular place and of a particular state. In the first place, the country was “between the Himavat and Vindhya mountains.” Spiritually speaking the Aryan was born three times: “from (his natural) mother . . . on the tying of the girdle of Munga grass, and . . . on the initiation to (the performance of) a Srauta sacrifice.”⁶ The Sudra, on the other hand, was a servant by nature and thus could never be released from servitude. The Dasyus, famed as the flat-nosed dark-skinned enemies of Indra in the Rig Veda, are first mentioned in book Seven of the Laws of Manu, and it is initially not clear whether they are to be regarded as the same as Mlekkha. In the case of Manu’s laws, no difference of feature or color is mentioned. Instead, the Dasyus are referred to as synonymous with robbers. Dasyus could not be witnesses before the law, nor could a Sudra, though the Sudra can give evidence for a Sudra.⁷ Interestingly, Manu’s laws indicate castes lower than that of Sudra, referred to as the lowest castes; Buhler comments that these people should be properly referred to as the “aboriginal robber-tribes, and probably includes all those resembling them.”⁸ Manu later explained in the tenth book that Dasyus might speak a Mlekkha or Aryan language and were “excluded” from those born from Brahman.⁹

The *Mahabharata* is believed by van Buitenen to have had multiple authors and to have been composed over multiple dates. It is traditionally said to have been written by Krsna Dvaipayana, also author of the Puranas and the authority who divided the veda into four. The *Mahabharata* discusses a succession war in the Kurukstera region of northern India. It has been translated into languages spoken by the ancient Hindu Diaspora in India and Indonesia. Since

1785, the *Mahabharata* has been translated into English. The epic is important to the Africanist precisely because it covers an area that had an ancient black population and was read in a region with an ancient ‘negroid,’ Malay population. Finally, according to van Buitenen’s notes, the description Krsna of its author indicates, as we shall see, that the author was a dark-skinned or Black Indian. It should be noted, that the Ganguli and Van Buitenen translations do not always describe characters in the same way. For example, in the section entitled *The Slaying of Hidimba* (Hidimva-vadha Parva), where Van Buitenen describes Bhima as ‘swarthy’ and Draupadi as ‘tall, dark, [and] delicate’ Ganguli describes them as ‘of hue like heated gold,’ and ‘of transcendent beauty,’ respectively. Ganguli is also likely to use the term Krsna for a character and continue without further explanation.

The Dasyus are not described in terms of complexion, but as hordes, thieves, or robbers. They are rarely described as moving singularly, but great prowess is attributed to the heroes who slay groups of Dasyus. Considering the dark complexion of many of the gods and heroes of the *Mahabharata*, “Dasyus” might be properly considered the Indian equivalent of the N- word, as used by African Americans. On the other hand, they are associated with the North, and thus may have been, as Buehler translates in the *Laws of Manu*, a robber-tribe, or a much maligned ethnic group.¹⁰ Likewise there are a variety of lesser characters, whose blackness is attributed in translation to filth, or cannibalism, rather than nature.¹¹ These too are conquered by Arjuna, along with various ‘ocean’ peoples, which may represent expansion into the Pacific and contact with short-statured ‘negroid,’ or ‘negrito’ peoples:

The kings who dwelt on ocean islands, born from barbarian wombs, the man-eating Nisadas . . . and those who are called the Black-faced Men, who spring from Raksasas. . . . the Pandyas and Tamils along with the Codras and Keralas.¹²

The *Shahnameh* was written by Ferdowsi in the 10th century CE as a glorification of Iranian civilization and a justification for Iranian rule of the Turanians (sometimes identified as Turks), Arabs and Caucasians.¹³ The *Shahnameh* in English translation does not engage in the Black/White antagonism that one would expect of an Iranian work. It begins with references to an unfortunate king of Arabia, whose death at the hands of his son destabilizes the region for many years.

Zohak’s distant successor, Feridoun, would instruct his sons to marry Yemeni women. These marriages presumably symbolize real or imagined political ties between Iran and Yemen at the time of the monarch whom the *Shahnameh* identifies as ‘Serv.’ The daughters are no longer mentioned in the narrative, but their children by Silim, Tur and Irij became, according to the narrative, rulers over ‘Roum and Khaver,’ ‘the Turks and China,’ and ‘Iran,’ respectively.

In the seventh chapter of the *Shahnameh*, revolt against Iranian rule by Africans is mentioned, and the Kemites and Berberistanis (possibly the Libyans) are said to have unsuccessfully allied with the King of Hamaveran. Because independent Egyptian rule ended with the Persia conquest in 525 BCE this battle would seem to predate the late sixth century.

So the King of Hamaveran sent messengers of entreaty unto the Kings of Egypt and Berberistan and they listened to his prayers, and sent out a great army unto his aid. And they drew them up against [Persia], and the armies stretched for two leagues in length. . . . And ere the evening was come, the Kings of Egypt and Berberistan were [Persia's] captives; and when the sun was set, the King of Hamaveran knew that a day of ill fortune was ended.

The *Kebrā Negast* provides a history of the rulers of Ethiopia from the time of Sheba and her son Menelik. The Ethiopian commentator or commentators of the *Kebrā Negast* state that the text was found by Patriarch Timotheus in Rome between 511 and 517 CE. Copying is attributed by later commentators to 'Abal'ez and Abalfarog. E. A. Wallis Budge translated the *Kebrā Negast* with commentary as part of his study of the Bible. The text was written to support the claim that "the King of Ethiopia is more exalted and more honourable than any other king upon the earth, because of the glory and greatness of the heavenly Zion."

For Africanists, the value of the *Kebrā Negast* is in its description of cultural transformation. After marrying and becoming pregnant the Queen of Sheba reputedly changed the tradition of female rulership to male beginning with her son Menelik, also called David, Walda Tabbib, and ibn al-Hakim (son of the wise man).¹⁴ Within the narrative, both Makeda and Menelik turn down Solomon's requests to stay in Jerusalem in favor of Ethiopia, and Menelik goes so far as to steal the Ark of the Covenant (Zion). The transfer of the God of Israel's dwelling to Ethiopia figures prominently in the *Kebrā Negast*, which also discusses the ascension of Ethiopia over Israel and promises the destruction of the Judeans at Ethiopia's hands.

Breaking the Hold of the Western Intellectual Tradition

From the 1960s forwards, African-American intellectuals who had benefitted from segregated schools and who saw desegregation as a dilution of Black values and an attack on Black teachers, began to argue forcefully against the legitimacy of so-called Western Civilization. They had plenty of ammunition, including the astonishing words of Hegel, a foundational figure in the philosophy of history:

What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the world's history.¹⁵

Most turned to the Old Christian and Muslim states for new ideas. All held up the African presence in Asia, whether pro-Islamic or not, as an example of successful African philosophical conquest. Once Diop had proved that at least some Pharaohs were unmixed Africans, and Carruthers applied his knowledge of the language of Kemet to reanalyze Budge's translations and Massey's exegesis, African-American scholars began to discuss the Afro-Asian Diaspora as one less tainted by 'Miseducation.' Working from the premise that the Bible and Qur'an were fundamentally East African texts, and the Semitic peoples were practicing

degenerated East African religions, Black scholars began to define the African Diaspora in areas as far as Cambodia and pre-Aryan India.

Under the influence of the John Henrik Clarke-Cheikh Anta Diop school of scholarship, focus on the African presence in Asia has shifted from the Bible to Central Africa. Once it was firm in the minds of his students that Christ and the Pharaohs were Black, the focus turned to establishing the centrality of 'Black' African cultures. It was essential that Afro-American, post-colonial African, and Black Australian disdain for the "Mother continent" be replaced. In this, the Clarke school brings to fruition the vision of Henry Highland Garnett.

By an almost common consent, the modern world seems determined to pilfer Africa of her glory. It was not enough that her children have been scattered over the globe, clothed in the garments of shame -- humiliated and oppressed -- but her merciless foes weary themselves in plundering time tombs of our renowned sites, and in obliterating their worthy deeds, which were inscribed by fame upon the pages of ancient history.¹⁶

According to this school of thought, peoples who left the Central regions of Africa could be expected to bring traditions that had not been influenced by southwest Asians or people from the Mediterranean. These traditions, which will be discussed in detail below, include spirit worship, ancestor veneration, reverence for mothers, and fundamental female economic influence. Combined with Cheikh Anta Diop's comparisons of Egyptian to several West African languages, scholars have pointed to African descended communities in Haiti and Spanish-speaking America as the best examples of relatively unfiltered African culture. Therefore, Central Africans and South Africans from the Bantu language groups who were enslaved in Asia could be expected to have brought similar ideas and to have been successful in maintaining them in polytheistic (Hindu) or saint-venerating (rural Islam and Catholic) cultures.¹⁷

Another school of thought has been more willing to embrace the southwest Asian cultures and treats the African presence as foundational at one time and integrated at another. That school of thought is American Islamic. It has produced scholars who have learned the classical Arabic (al-fusHa) and immersed themselves in the regulations set out by four schools of law. They have also accessed archives in south Asia, southwest Asia, Malaysia, and North Africa. As a result, much of the scholarship on Afro-Asian literary efforts has come from Muslims. Mansur Vincent Cornell published a much cited translation of Al-Jahiz through the Prescott collection. Imam Saleem Abdel-Majeed published a study of one of the founding Arab tribes in 1998. This thesis is entitled "Does Empirical Evidence Support the Quranic Assertion of the Existence of an Ancient Adite Civilization?" Better known as the 'Ad Thesis,' it posits that one of the two earliest tribes, called the Ad, was of African descent.

Funding the Research

The earliest scholars of the African experience in Asia had to finance themselves. Drusilla Dunjee Houston's efforts were essentially a family affair, since she was able to take advantage of her younger brother Roscoe's printing plant and her fellow underpaid staff

members. The Prescott family funded the translation and publication of Al-Jahiz's *Book of the Glory of the Blacks Over the Whites* as part of the continuing battle against the Euro-Christian philosophy that John Hope Franklin lambasted as African "nothingness." The same motivation is behind the Islamic History Project, which comes from the community of Imam W. D. Mohammed, and published Abdel-Majeed's work.

The Islamic History Project (IHP) was established in August 1999 . . . [with the] initial objective [of bringing] to light important information on the African connections on the Arabian peninsula before the advent of Al-Islam.¹⁸

The African Diaspora in Asia (TADIA) society project is affiliated with UNESCO as part of the expansion of slavery and abolition studies. A major goal is to spark economic independence among Afro-Asian communities.

The TADIA Society also promotes economic development through its promotion of contemporary artistic and spiritual forms of expression by the diaspora and, in particular, its support for national and international music, song and dance festivals, and cultural tours.¹⁹

Breaking the Chains was the result of the 1986 International Economic History Congress held in Berne. The Social Sciences Research Council of Canada and the Woodrow Wilson International Centre funded much of the research, which includes work by Ottoman Empire scholar Ehud Toledano.

The Initial First-Hand Reports

There were a small number of individuals of African descent who journalled their travels in Asia at the end of the nineteenth century. Because of technological advances many of these adventurers were African Americans. Richard T. Greener, a graduate of Harvard College was the U.S. agent in Siberia. He raised funds for war victims in China's Shansi province and received a service decoration for his efforts. Salim Bin Akbari noted his travels in "Safari Yangu-yu Bara na y Siberia." He was Zanzibari by birth and traveled to Siberia and Central Asia with his German employer. Allison Blakely writes about these individuals, as well as ten thousand Africans to the former Soviet Union. Some of these military trainees must have encountered Asians in the former Soviet Union.

The twentieth century brought two world wars and U.S. intervention in Asia. The presence of African-American soldiers brought a temporary and permanent African presence to colonial Asia and then modern states. At the turn of the twentieth century, African-American soldiers found themselves in the Philippines. Black soldiers reported that Filipino guerillas encouraged them to desert with posters calling for the support of "The Colored American soldier." Black soldiers in Vietnam left numerous reports, of which Wallace Terry's *Bloods* (1984) presented twenty detailed oral histories.

There are also outstanding twentieth century individual journals of people of African descent in Asia. Poet and world traveller Langston Hughes left a long recount of his time in Shanghai, and Soviet Asia in *I Wonder As I Wander*. An outstanding example of an early twentieth century Afro-Asian was Trinidadian-born Eugene Chen. Chen was of Afro-Caribbean and Chinese ancestry. He became an architect of Chiang Kai-Chek's government and the Foreign Minister. His granddaughter has written a biography of his life. One of the most important narrations of African-Asian interactions is Richard Wright's *The Color Curtain*. His observation brought the perspective of the Atlantic Diaspora to the Indian Ocean.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw a number of photo essayists, linguists and historians travel to Asia. Dr. Harris worked in the archives of Goa, India. He also traveled to Iran. Art historian James E. Brunson traveled the east and collected a series of photos and lithographs. Lawyer Khalid Al-Mansur has documented the African presence that he found in numerous Asian countries. The author of this paper has documented the small number of Central Asians with obvious, phenotypic, 'negroid' features of kinky hair, broad nose, dark skin, or some combination that she saw among the majority mongoloid populace.

Psychosocial Analyses of the African Diaspora

Scholars now approach Diaspora studies in ways that emphasize philosophical migration and psychological trauma. In one case, this perspective is based upon the accepted Judaic model stemming from at least two thousand years of "exile." It is applicable to comparison between populations forced into relocation in Asia -- namely the Zanzabaris, peoples of the Swahili Coast, Sudanese, Chadians, South Africans, Turks, Caucasians, Chinese and Slavs. Cohen's 'Typology of Diasporas' is used by Edward Alpers, Richard Pankhurst, and Shihan De Jayasuriya, all scholars of the African Diaspora to Asia.²⁰

1. Dispersal from an original homeland often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively, the expansions from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory or myth about the homeland, including its location, history, and achievements;
4. an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; the possibility of a distinctive, creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Dr. Elliott P. Skinner contended that emigrants experience three relationships. There is bitterness towards the homeland; among themselves as they debate the desirability and feasibility

of return; and their relationship with those who remain in the homeland. According to his definition, Diaspora implicitly involves suffering, thus communities of African descent in Asia must be regarded in a broader context. Dr. Joseph Harris describes the 'triadic' relationship in the Afro-Asian diaspora: the homeland, the descendants, and the 'adopted' home. He finally outlines a tradition of 'sustained resistance.'²¹

Tony Martin suggests that the terms 'scattered,' 'uprooted,' or 'dispersed' would be more appropriate to describe the peculiar experience of African people. These terms help to center the peculiar experience of African people. The word 'scattered' does not deny that other communities underwent slavery and genocide, but it ignores the voluntary Native American heritage of many Afro-Americans. Perhaps 'daughter communities' would be a more accurate description. I recommend that the African experience in Central Asia and the Caucasus be further explored with the realities of Russian colonial racism in mind. Black and African in Russian is pejoratively called "Negr." Illiterate is "Negramotniy." In former Soviet Uzbekistan, Russian-British English dictionaries define Blacks and Africans as "Nigger." Because colonial Russians referred to many Central Asian people as "niggers" particularly after they imposed cotton production on the Mongol-Turkic and Farsi speaking peoples, even those with the most "negroid" features may be willing to refer to themselves as black, but not African.

Genetic Analyses of the African Diaspora

Studies of human evolution have been dominated by Europeans for the last hundred years. While a few Asian scientists have also weighed in on the debate, much of the focus has been on an African origin for humanity. Archaeologists, physical anthropologists and geneticists have descended upon east Africa, but rarely have Africans presented theories of human evolution to the rest of the world. Thus the human evolutionary narrative, presuming that one exists, has been dominated by European arguments about the possibility and impossibility of 'white' racial uniqueness. It is up to Africans to bring our cultural points of views to the discussion about the human family.

Washington University St. Louis professor Alan Templeton and his team have found that humanity migrated out of the continent of Africa in three phases. The team's conclusions are based on recent analyses of the human genetic history that suggest that groups that left Africa later created families and offspring with groups that left the continent thousands of years earlier. The team analysis can be found in the 2005 Yearbook of Physical Anthropology.²² Some 700,000 year ago, Africans emigrated to Eurasia yet again, bringing improved stone technology and a new round of conjugal relations. Not only does this suggest that 'people' were aesthetically similar over the 1.2 million year period, but it indicates that geological changes on the continent of Africa were inducing mass movements.

The 'Out of Africa' theory postulated that as long as 100,000 years ago homo sapiens left Africa and replaced or displaced earlier populations of human ancestors. They settled in Europe, Asia and the Middle East and evolved through climate change into modern ethnic groups, often referred to as 'races.' Populations again left the continent some 55,000 years ago. A southerly movement has been postulated by Cambridge University researcher Peter Forster in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, for Aboriginal Australia. Black Australians

are believed by European scientists to be examples of preserved and isolated populations. Genetic research suggests that their origins were the last great wave of African pre-colonial emigration, which took place 55,000 years ago. Australian Aborigines and New Guineans are believed to have crossed a post-Ice Age land bridge. Details of this study explain the dangers of applying the term Eurasian in its political form to early populations.

But a study of DNA samples from Aboriginal Australians and Melanesians from New Guinea appears to verify the single migration theory. Both populations were found to share genetic features linking them and other Eurasians to the exodus from Africa. . . . Their ancestors would have travelled to Australia via Arabia, Asia and the Malay peninsula, dispersing at a rate of about one kilometre a year”²³

The debate around this study also shows the difficulties of the fossil record and the current inability of science to provide exact data on presumed human evolution.

Although it has been speculated that the populations of Australia and New Guinea came from the same ancestors, the fossil record differs so significantly it has been difficult to prove.

For the first time, this evidence gives us a genetic link showing that the Australian Aboriginal and New Guinean populations are descended directly from the same specific group of people who emerged from the African migration.²⁴

Genetic work has also been used to trace the migrations of Yemeni and other South Arabian Jews. Polydactyly (multiple toes or fingers) is an uncommon trait that has been commented upon in Biblical literature and may still be found in related populations. A Himyarite king named Luhay’at had multiple fingers, as did the Hyabite tribe. Polydactyly has been considered a sign of the legitimacy of the modern Bal-Harith tribes of descent from Himyarite rulers.²⁵

African American Scholars Runoko Rashidi and James Brunson accept the Out of Africa hypothesis, and move forward, to look at the current populations of Asia. One of the most important populations, because they reflect the smaller-stature people believed to have left Africa first, are those that Rashidi and Brunson refer to as ‘Sinicized Blacks.’ Other scholars have referred to these emigrant Africans and their descendants as “Seed People,” “Little Red Men,” “Pygmies,” or “Negrillos.”²⁶

Economic Analyses of the African Diaspora

I was unable to find any studies of the economic impact of African descended communities on their new Asian homes. The economic evaluations are likely buried in general economic analyses of the relevant countries and one with knowledge of internal demographics could probably develop a thorough analysis. The Christian slave trades to the Indian Ocean were

primarily for plantations. Because the majority of Africans enslaved by Muslims were women, I decided to look at studies of women's contributions to the plantation states. The types of work expected of women in domestic slavery and concubinage, and in a culture that could not carry the same racial expectations as the Euro-Christian one, could be expected to be lighter. Therefore, comparisons are best made between Asian cultures and Atlantic cultures that operated under American concubine system. Filomina Chioma Steady looks at the impact of female labor on women in the islands. She estimates that women of the Atlantic Diaspora contributed \$123 billion to the world economy in 1975. With the rise of South Asia, the contribution of African women to the world economy must have risen exponentially.

The authors of the essays in *Breaking the Chains* address the economic impact of slaves and indentured laborers in Africa and Asia. Anthony Reid estimates that the servant-status of indigenous Indonesians and slaves held by Europeans produced large profits for the Dutch East India Company. For example, until the middle of the nineteenth century, bonded labor produced all of the world's nutmeg to Dutch profit. Dharma Kumar estimates that outcastes, low-castes and enslaved people contributed to the colonial Indian economy through agricultural production. In particular, in the early twentieth century, Indian bonded labor produced raw rubber and the economic returns from the automotive industry alone must have been enormous.

Deromanticizing the Slave Trade: Enslavement of African Women

Because the Arab and Indian trades in Africans operated mostly under Islamic law, they were supposedly limited in the amount of abuse that could be meted out to bondwomen and men. The Prophet Muhammad is believed to have required that slave owners treat their servants as debt-bondspeople and to act with humility.

Let no one of you say, my slave, or my female slave. And, let not a slave say, my lord. The master should say, my son or my daughter and the slave should say, sayyide or sayyidati (respectively for master and lady) because all of you are owned and the Lord of all is Allah.²⁷

Enslaved women and girls were to be married, according to the Qur'an. However, realistically numbers of men must have taken advantage of the women in their households. Filomina Steady reminds us that even where the children were freed, exploitation of female slaves provided new labor. In the Islamic case, exploitation of women also potentially provided more male heirs.

The black woman's exploitation, in terms of both her fertility any sexuality, has been both racial and sexual, and to a large extent she has been the most vulnerable victim of the ideology of racism.²⁸

In the Americas, women resisted the impacts of sexual exploitation through infanticide and abortion. Perhaps the likelihood of the male children being freed would have factored in a woman's decision to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

Doing the Demographics

At the beginning of the twentieth century Willard Price referred to a “Black Girdle” that covered the equator. No one country has been singled out as the recipient of the largest numbers of Africans, and certainly no country in Asia has numbers comparable to Brazil. However, India’s Afro-Asian population was sufficiently prosperous and assertive to be referenced in Medieval South and Central Asian Islamic and Hindu texts. European censuses, planters notes, and journals have provided estimates for the Afro-Indian Ocean communities. According to Harris, some 15,000 African were enslaved in Basra, Iraq at the time of the Zanj rebellion. Harris also provides a limited list of nine Africans ‘recaptured’ by the British. British archives would likely provide many of the records of enslaved Africans who were liberated from ports that fell under colonial rule. He also reports that Richard Burton’s logged seven hundred Africans in nineteenth century Gujarat.²⁹ Richard Pankhurst estimates that over 300 years 9,250 enslaved Africans were annually taken from Ethiopia and the Horn to Arabia and India. That leads to the astonishing figure of 2,275,000 with the areas of Tajura and Zayla losing two-thirds. Eduardo Medeiros has evaluated the numbers of Mozambicans enslaved in Mauritius. Using census figures, he estimates that there was a 21% mortality rate on the ships and that the population doubled between 1787 and 1827. According to Medeiros, citing another scholar, perhaps 1,000,000 Africans died in Mauritius. Malyn Newitt estimates that Madagascar lost 70,000 people from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Hintjens estimates that over a 13 year period Mozambique lost 38,500 people to the Reunion was carried out illegally. Working with British anti-slavery estimates, Jean Houbert estimates that all of the islands of Mauritius received 160,000 captured Africans.³⁰

Genetics is being used to trace the migration to Asia and the returns. Much of the work is on the migration from 50,000 to 1.5 million years ago. However, work by researchers such as Karafet, et al. on the Khoisan and Cameroonians might help determine the numbers of people of African descent in former Dutch and Portuguese colonies.³¹

Conclusion

The African Diaspora in Asia has been studied by scholars for at least the last two hundred years. Literate African Americans quickly realized that they were discussed throughout the Bible. Ethiopia stretching forth her hand became a central theme that inspired research from every aspect of the African American community. Christian scholars and “John G. Jackson-type atheists” studied East and Northeast Africa in terms of the colonization of Palestine. Muslim scholars took the figure of the castrated Ethiopian muezzin Bilal ibn Rabah and the Ethiopian colonization of southern Arabia and crafted theses about the African origin of the Arabs. Strict historians looked at the Horn of Africa and the Swahili coast for the origins of the ‘Ethiopian’ dynasties of Muslim India. Non-black scholars have also looked at the Swahili Coast and the Indian Ocean merchants as sources of labor and cultural transmission to the Indonesian islands and Mauritius.

Unfortunately, a preoccupation with emphasizing the dignity of the Afro-Asia experience has led to neglect of the day-to-day reality for the millions of Africans whose toils were undocumented. The foot soldier, the craftsperson, and the artist have been overshadowed by the

lord, the general, and the statesman. Women's lives have been neglected almost completely, except for a few late twentieth century works on spirit-possessed Afro-Arabian and Afro-Iranian healers. The African continent has seen many of her children scatter throughout Asia for millennia. The documentation of their religious beliefs, cultural accretions, and assimilation is only beginning.

Notes

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1. Gen 9:24-27 (KJV)
2. Daniel, Isaiah; psalms
3. Martin R.R. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. (Philadelphia: M.R. Delany, 1852. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1993), 212-213
4. Buhler, Georg. *The Laws of Manu*: translated with extracts from seven commentaries. Dover Publications, Inc. New York first published in 1969, lvii
5. Buhler, Georg. *The Laws of Manu*, xxii
6. Buhler, Georg. *The Law of Manu*, (book 2:169)
7. *ibid*, (book 7:143); (8:66); (7:66)
8. *ibid*, *The Laws of Manu*, (p. 266)
9. *ibid*, (book 10:45)
10. *Mahabharata*, van Buitenen translation, "Thus the tigerlike hero conquered the North, fighting a great many battles with barons as well as Dasyus"; and Jejuna 2(23)25-27
11. When the dog smelled that black Nisada in the woods, wrapped in black deerskin, his body caked with dirt, it kept about him, barking away. 1(7)123:18 (van Buitenen), and 'Meanwhile, the dog also, in wandering alone in the woods, came upon the Nishada prince (Ekalavya). And beholding the Nishada of dark hue, of body besmeared with filth, dressed in black and bearing matted locks on head, the dog began to bark aloud.' (Sambha Parva, 134, Ganguli)
12. *Mahabharata*, van Buitenen trans., [2(23)28:45-49]; Ganguli refers to these tribes simply as Mlechchhas. 'that bull among the Bharatas then conquered all *Mlechchha* tribes. The mighty son of the wind-god having thus conquered various countries, and exacting tributes from them all

advanced towards Lohity. And the son of Pandu then made all the *Mlechchha* kings dwelling in the marshy regions on the sea-coast, pay tributes and various kinds of wealth, and sandal wood and aloes, and clothes and gems, and pearls and blankets and gold and silver and valuable corals. The *Mlechchha* kings showered upon the illustrious' (Book 2, Jarasandhta-badha Parva, section 30)

13. *The Role of Farr in Firdowsi's Shahname*, by Ira. Bashiri copyright, Bashiri 1993;
<http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/Farr/farr.html>

14. Budge, E.A. Wallis, trans. *Kebrā Negast*, section 87. *How the nobles (or governors) of ETHIOPIA took the oath*

15. George W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 99, quoted in Jacob H. Carruthers, *Intellectual Warfare*, (Chicago: Third World Press, 1999), 66

16. "The Dialectic: Diasporas and Homelands," in Joseph Harris, ed. *Global Dimensions Of the African Diaspora*, (Howard University Press), 23

17. Yaw Abobo. La spiritualité et l'unité culturelle nègres à travers le temps et l'espace.
http://www.africamaat.com/article.php3?id_article=95

18. *A History of Muslim African Americans*. (The Islamic History Project Group, 2006), i.

19. http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31684&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

20. Shihan de Jayasuriya and Richard Pankhurst. *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*. (Africa World Press, Inc., 2003), pp. 20-21

21. Joseph E. Harris, *Radical History Review*, 158.

22. *New analysis shows three human migrations out of Africa; Replacement theory 'demolished'*; by Tony Fitzpatrick; Feb. 2, 2006; see also Templeton, Alan R. "Review: Advocacy for the Multiregional Hypothesis," review of *Race and Human Evolution*" in *Current Anthropology*, vol. 38, no. 5, Dec. 1997, pp. 921-922.

23. Rose, David. Aborigines out of Africa. *The Australian News*. May 8, 2007,
<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21692339-601,00.html>

24. Rose, David. Aborigines out of Africa.

25. Honeyman, A.M. *Some South Arabian Instances of Polydactyly*. University of St. Andrews.

26. Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan; Alfred M. Ligon; Richard D. King, M.D. and Dadisi Sanyika refer to them as "Seed People"; Albert Churchward referred to them as "Little Red Men"; and Oxford University's Jim Wainscoat believed them to be the key to the "Out of Africa theory."

Runoko Rashidi and James E. Brunson. People of the First World: Small Blacks in Africa and Asia. In *African Presence in Early Asia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 158-9.

27. Maulana Saeed Ahmad. *Slavery in Islam*. (Karachi Pakistan: Darul Ishaat), 98

28. Filomina Steady, "Women of Africa and the Diaspora," in Joseph Harris, ed. *Global Dimensions Of the African Diaspora*, (Howard University Press), 176

29. Joseph E. Harris, "Africans in Asian History," in Joseph Harris, ed. *Global Dimensions Of the African Diaspora*, (Howard University Press), 334

30. Shihan de Jayasuriya and Richard Pankhurst. *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*. (Africa World Press, Inc., 2003); see Eduardo Medeiros, "Contribution of the Mozambican Diaspora," p. 71; Malyn Newitt, "Madagascar and the African Diaspora," p. 86; Helen Hintjens, "From French Slaves to citizens: The African Diaspora in Reunion Island," p. 99; Jean Houbert, "Creolisation and Decolonisation in the Changing geopolitics of the Indian Ocean," p. 123

31. Karafet, T.M.; Zegura, S.L.; Posukh, O.; Osipova, L.; Long, J.; Goldman, D.; Klitz, W.; Harihara, S.; de Knijff, P.; Wiebe, V.; Griffiths, R.C.; Templeton, A.R.; Hammer, M.F.. *American Journal of Human Genetics*, Mar1999, Vol. 64 Issue 3.

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