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From Plantations to Military: Heritage of Galle Fort in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka's position in the Indian Ocean trade led to the development of port cities. Galle fortress is a paradigm of coloniality, testifying to the interactions of the local and the global. While drawing attention to the Portuguese heritage, overshadowed by the Dutch and the British imprints, this paper also highlights the significance of Galle as an entrêpot for enslaved Africans. An early nineteenth-century manuscript in the British archives lists the names of enslaved Africans running away from the French in Diego Garcia. I argue that the heterogeneous names of the enslaved reveal multiple ethnicities of their owners and the complex world of plantations on which they laboured. Change in status from labourers to soldiers in the Ceylon Regiments typifies a wider demand for African military skills in the Indian subcontinent. The timing of the purchase of enslaved Africans, however, raises questions about the abolition of slavery in the Indian Ocean World.

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> We can change the world and make it a better place.
> It is in your hands to make a difference.
>
> Nelson Mandela

As I climbed up the moon bastion of Galle fort, a statue of a European soldier holding a plaque engraved with Nelson Mandela's words: "We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference" gripped me (Figure 1). The statue of a labourer carrying a large stone beside the European overseer, consolidated the entwining of colonialism and slavery. The diachronic imagery raises issues of inequality and hierarchies of power, relevant to contemporary societies. These statues, erected by the Galle Heritage Foundation, are a memorial to enslavement and indenture which fed the labour demands of Early Modern empires. Moreover, statues of the first British Governor of Ceylon, Sir Frederick North, and also that of an African soldier in the art gallery on the moon bastion brings back the Island's colonial past and the African presence on the Island.

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

Figure 1. European and labourer in Galle fort. Photograph by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya.

In 1988, the Old Town of Galle and its fortifications were accorded the status of a UNESCO World Heritage site in recognition of its intercultural architectural styles and traditions.

> Founded in the 16th century by the Portuguese, Galle reached the height of its development in the 18th century, before the arrival of the British. It is the best example of a fortified city built by Europeans in South and South-East Asia, showing the interaction between European architectural styles and South Asian traditions. (https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/451/)

ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) acknowledge such sites as representing the shared heritage of humankind which need to be preserved for current and future generations. They bear witness of shared history and represent the dialogue between cultures (https://www.icomos.org/en/icomos-and-world-heritage). Whilst bringing forth histories of Europeans and Sri Lankans, untold histories of Africans are also brought to the fore in this article.

Layered histories

Galle fort on Sri Lanka's southern coast memorialises a new phase in the Island's history and heritage, and is of interest to historians, archaeologists, architects, sociologists, ethnographers and heritage professionals. The heritage of Galle reinforces Sri Lanka's significance as a node in Indian Ocean trade, attracting numerous traders including European trade expansionists and colonists in the Early Modern Era. Naval charts and maps marked Galle variously adapted to European tongues – Point de Galle, Puncto Galle, Puncto de Galle, Pinto Gale and Pontugal (Paranavitana 2005, 5). In *Galle Fort: The Heritage City*, K.D. Paranavitana asserts that the original name of this reservoir of cultural and economic history has its etyma in the Sinhala word for stone/s (*gala* – singular and *gal* – plural) thereby naming the town *Gālla* (rocky place) (Paranavitana 2005, 6).

From the seventh century, Africans had a reputation as soldiers (Wink 2002, 31) in Asia. Their military and administrative capabilities paved the way to establish two kingdoms ruled by Africans in western India (Robbins and McLeod 2006; Jasdanwallah 2011). In this paper, I build a history of Galle fort from the advent of the Portuguese in the Early Modern Era concentrating on the military capabilities of Africans, a major driver for African mobilities to Sri Lanka. In the early sixteenth century, a Portuguese ship commanded by Captain Dom Lourenço da Almeida sailing to the Maldives was windswept to Sri Lanka. The date of the encounter although taken as 1505, had been disputed by Donald Ferguson (1907) over a century ago and more recently historian Chandra de Silva (2007) discursively established the date as 1506. Whether the point of arrival was Galle or Colombo is yet an unresolved issue. Although the Portuguese era is taken to be from 1506 to 1658, Portuguese domination does not begin until 1597. The initial phase of 1506 to 1551, was an alliance between the Portuguese and the kings of Kōtte. In the 46 years that followed, Kōtte became a protectorate of the Portuguese following the conversion of Dharmapala, king of Kōtte, to Roman Catholicism. The final phase and the period of domination was only 61 years when the Portuguese ruled Kōtte and also extended their rule to the neighbouring kingdom of Sitawaka and parts of the kingdom of Kandy (Batticaloa and Trincomalee in the east coast) (de Silva Jayasuriya 2017).

In 1587, the Viceroy had been instructed to report on the desirability of erecting a suitable fort at Galle for the protection of ships sailing southwards (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 56). "A 'fortalice' of palm trees and mud" was constructed in 1588[1] by the Portuguese, spurred by an attack by the king of Sitāwaka, Rājasingha I (1581–1593) (de Silva & Beumer 1988, 151). "Three bastions to the north of the town with interconnecting walls and other defences to guard the harbour" (de Silva and Beumer 1988, 151) were built later. Historian and Archivist K.D. Paranavitana (2005, 25) remarks that the most striking feature of the fort is the majestic scale construction of the bastions. The nomenclature of

Figure 2. View of the Indian Ocean from the moon bastion, Galle Fortress. Photograph by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya.

the bastions as moon bastion, sun bastion and star bastion – ring out a cosmic connection befitting an idyllic location merging the sea with the sky in the horizon (Figure 2).

Portuguese policy turned fortresses into fortified towns with Sinhalese military families moved to the fort, in order to build up a force of loyal personnel in the town. "The fortified town was to be the key to the whole conquest and the central institution for the achievement" (Abeyasinghe 1966, 60) and Galle was one of ten towns chosen to be fortified (Abeyasinghe 1966, 60). By 1630, the Portuguese completed three bastions which served as gun towers with battlements (Paranavitana 2005, 29). The central bastion has changed its name with the changing colonisers and the Portuguese imprint is little visible today. For example, what the Portuguese called *Conceyção* (Immaculate Conception) was re-named by the Dutch as *Middlepunt* (Middle Bastion) and in 1667 officially called *Maan* (Moon) (Paranavitana 2005, 29). The other two bastions also bear English names today – Sun bastion on the harbour side and the Star bastion on the north. Linguistically, the Portuguese stamp has been erased although Paranavitana (2005, 31) reminds us of the layered histories: "the most ancient and the best fortified part of the fort constructed by the Portuguese and later improved by the Dutch, now occupied by the DIG Police, Galle."

The summit of the moon bastion (Figure 2) from where the entire fort and stunningly beautiful surroundings are visible, brought back vivid descriptions:

> an exceptional gift from nature unmatched elsewhere in Ceylon. On the western side of the bay a level rock-ringed peninsula provided the roadstead not only with extra protection from the winds and currents but also with an inner harbour in turn was protected by a small projecting arm of land. It was upon that small projecting arm that the Sinhalese settlement was placed and it was there that the Portuguese built their first fortification. (Nelson 1984, 48)

The Early Modern Era marks the competition between European powers to gain control of Indian Ocean trade. The Indian Ocean became a Portuguese lake during the sixteenth century and Sri Lanka was a node connected through a network of *fortalezas* (fortresses) and *feitorias* (factories). Loss of Galle to the Dutch in 1640 marks the beginning of the dynamics of power. Anonymous African soldiers, together with local and regional soldiers of diverse ethnicities defended the Portuguese. During the siege of Galle by the Dutch in 1640, Ferreira e Britto who commanded the fort and the defence force gathered by Captain Major Francisco de Mendonça Manuel included 100 *Caffirs*[2] [*sic*] (Africans) with bows and arrows, 323 Portuguese, 1600 *Lascarins* ("native" [*sic*] soldiers)[3] under four *Dissawas*[4] (provincial governors), 200 Canarese (Indian) – firelock men with the *Rana*[5] (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 269). The Dutch force was numerically smaller with 700 Hollanders and 400 Javanese. An army from Matara, 48 Kilometres south, consisting of *Casados*[6] (married Portuguese settlers), 80 Caffirs and 300 Lascarins was mobilised to Galle (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 272). The siege of Galle lasted 18 days and the Caffirs [*sic*] taken over by the Dutch were engaged in burying the dead (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 280). Whilst 1,500 Sinhalese were delivered to the king, Caffirs [*sic*] and Canarese were taken over by the Dutch (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 280); 700 Portuguese prisoners and enslaved persons (ethnicities unspecified) were shipped to Batavia (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 279). Known as Jakarta today, Batavia was headquarters of the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) – Dutch United East India Company.

In 1640, a Frenchman, Captain St Armand left in charge of Galle by the Dutch, deserted to the Portuguese in Colombo, taking with him "two or three from the garrison and a few Tupasses and Kaffirs" (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 286), an example of Africans moving from the Dutch to the Portuguese before the official takeover. After prolonged battles of losing fortresses to the Portuguese and regaining them from the Portuguese, the Dutch finally routed the Portuguese in 1658. The capture of Colombo fort marks the start of the Dutch era (1658 to 1796). By 1665, a large portion of the present ninety-acre fort of Galle which extends to 700 m north–south was constructed (de Silva and Beumer 1988, 11). Galle assumed importance in the VOC empire ranking amongst the top flight of fortresses in the East. "Until the late 1800s, the advantage of Galle as a wide, mainly sheltered roadstead made it of comparable importance to Colombo" (Nelson 1984, 48). For the Dutch, whilst Batavia was the most important port in the East, the ports of Colombo and Galle were the next in importance (Nelson 1984, 47; Carter and Wickramasinghe 2018, 195). Situated mid-way between Cape Town and Batavia, Ceylan as the Dutch called Sri Lanka was a useful stopover point for ships sailing within the bounds of the western and eastern parts of the Indian Ocean (Mbeki and van Rossum 2016, 99). Sri Lanka was an important node in the intra-Indian Ocean and intra-Asiatic shipping networks.

Persons searching for the "Portuguese fort" are directed to the Black fort. Ethnic or racial connotations are not implied in the appellation black; black fort should not be interpreted as African fort. Anyhow, in the East, blackness is not exclusively associated with Africans; Africans were associated with the place of origin, for example, as originating from *al Habash* (Arabic for today's Ethiopia and Erithrea) or *al Zanj* (Zanzibar). Africans were thus known as *Habshi* and *Zanjibari*, and many other ethnonyms and exonyms which vary across time and space (de Silva Jayasuriya 2006). Signage to the "Black Fort, Noir Fort and Schwarz Fort," calques (loan translations) of the English in French and German is appropriate for a site that attracts tourists but sadly loses the history of the fort (Figure 3). The word order in French, nevertheless, is noun–adjective and should be *Fort Noir*; German *Schwarzes Festung* is more appropriate as *fortes* (not *fort)* implies a wooden structure. Including translations in the official languages, Sinhala and Tamil, would have been appropriate. The Sinhalese recognise the black fort as *Kalu Kotuwa*, its Tamil equivalent being *Karuppu Kōttai*. Given the history of the fort, the signage could have also included the Portuguese and Dutch equivalents. The blackness caused by smoke inspired the Dutch to give the appellation *Zwart Fort* meaning "black fort."

Narratives on the slab in Sinhala and Tamil followed by a translation in English, the link language, refers to African labour in the fort (Figure 4):

> It is believed that this row of rooms was constructed by the Dutch when they developed the fortress named Santa Cruz built in the 16th century by the Portuguese, as a bastion. During the Dutch occupation, this building was used as the workshop (*Wijnkel*)[7] of the blacksmiths who were engaged in the manufacture of armaments. The workers were mainly *labour* [my emphasis] brought from overseas, such as *Africans* [my emphasis]. Recent archaeological investigations[8] under the present floor level of the building have revealed layers of coal used in the workshops. After the Police Station was established in this bastion by the British, the row of rooms was used as prison cells. The vaulted roofs of four of the six rooms of this building are still in a good state of preservation. In each of the rooms, there is an opening in the vaulted roof for ventilation. (Galle Heritage Foundation)

Figure 3. Directions to the Black Fort. Photograph by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya.

Given the significant role played by Galle in the Island's economic history, its rich legacy is inevitably cosmopolitan. Pedlar Street (Figure 5) or Moorse Kramerstraat (Moorish Pedlar Street) speaks to the significant role of the Moors[9] in the commercial activities of Galle. Colonial architecture "with gabled pillars, with large verandahs, constructed on rounded pillars" (de Silva and Beumer 1988, 151) adapted by hoteliers and shop owners to contemporary demands of a modern city frequented by tourists

Figure 4. Blacksmiths' Workshop/Prison Cells in the Black Fort, Galle and Slab with Narratives. Photographs by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya.

Figure 5. Pedlar Street, Galle Fort. Photograph by Tharanga Liyanarachchi, Galle Heritage Foundation.

reflects the dynamism of a space in which the legacies of European nations coalesce and give way to modernity. A walk down this quaint street discloses the tension of coloniality and modernity.

By a historical coincidence, the three successive European waves that washed the shores of Sri Lanka lasted for about 150 years each. The Portuguese (1506–1658) were ousted by the Dutch (1658–1796) only to be taken over by the British (1796–1948). Whilst the Portuguese stamp is enigmatic, the inner archway of the main entrance to the fort bears the

Figure 6. Dutch Coat of Arms with VOC engraved on Inner Archway, Old Gateway to Galle Fort (to the left). Photograph by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya. British Coat of Arms on the Outer Archway, Old Gateway to Galle Fort (to the right). Photograph by Uzman Anver

Figure 7. Number 37 marks a *slaven hospital* (slave hospital) in Galle Fort Netherlands National Archives, archival number 4.VEL and inventory number 1071. Courtesy of Chryshane Mendis.

VOC monogram (Figure 6) dated 1669 in Roman numerals: MDCLXIX. The British inaugurated the fort in 1873 (de Silva and Beumer 1988, 151) and the outer archway bears the British coat of arms above a date carried over from the Dutch days – 1668 – confusingly unchanged and relates to the inauguration of the Dutch coat of arms.

Plan of the Galle fortress (Figure 7) marks the *slaven* (enslaved persons) hospital indicating a significant enslaved population in the Dutch fort.

The VOC records indicate that the enslaved were either from South India or descendants of enslaved brought from other VOC areas. Ethnicities are not specified (Figure 8):

> In Galle waren veel slaven afkomstig van Zuid-India of afstammeling van ingevoerd slaven uit andere VOC-gebieden. Hoeveel slaven er in Galle waren is niet precies bekend, maar het

Figure 8. Colombo Port. Photograph by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya.

> gebruik van slaven was wel wijdverbreid. In 1760 bezat de VOC in Galle 77 slaven. Daarnaast waren er particuliere slaven van Compagniesdienaren en anderen. De Compagnieslaven werkten in pakhuizen, werkplaatsen en op de kantoren. De meeste slaven in 1760 waren in Galle geboren; de anderen kwamen uit Colombo en Zuid-India. (https://www.vocsite.nl/geschiedenis/slavernij/)
>
> In Galle, many of the enslaved originated from the South of India or were the offspring of imported enslaved from other VOC areas. The exact number of enslaved in Galle is unknown, but the use of enslaved was widespread. At Galle in the 1760s the VOC owned 77 enslaved. Besides those there were private enslaved in service of the Company's staff and in the offices. Most of the enslaved in 1760 were born in Galle: others came from Colombo and South India.[10]

That South Asians were in demand as soldiers is not surprising given that armed military peasants were known since early modern times and the Dutch historian Dirk Kolff "captured the imagination of Indianists" (Richards 2004, 390) through his portrayal of armed peasants in north India (Kolff 1989).

Historian, Lodewijk Wagenaar (1994, 51) adds that the enslaved in Galle were South Indian or descendants of the enslaved once brought from the neighbouring Continent which implies that enslaved Africans were among the mixed pool of involuntary migrants. An Englishman, serving in Ceylon as Professor of Modern History and Economics at Ceylon University College who also became a Member of Parliament, Sidney Arnold Pakeman (1891–1975) (1964, 56) confirms:

> The Dutch brought Negro [*sic*] slaves [*sic*] into Ceylon from their other colonies in Asia, some of whom besides emphasising their imprint on certain sections of the inhabitants of the Island

> have also contributed to the Aryan-Negroid element by their female members serving as housewives to civil and military Dutch Officers, and thus producing offspring of mixed blood.

Lack of funds drove the Dutch to rely on costless labour; whenever soldiers performed the same tasks they had to be compensated monetarily. "On 27 March 1643, 16 slaves [*sic*] destined for Batavia were landed at Galle because the fort ditch and ramparts needed urgent repairs, seeing that there were only sixteen couples of chained-slaves able to work" (Roberts 2005, 77).

A former Dutch Military Commander in Galle (1788–1792) Pieter Sluijsken (1740–1813), moved to Colombo and opted to live in Sri Lanka instead of moving to Batavia after British takeover in 1796 perhaps because he could not take 20 enslaved individuals with him (Schrikker 2011, 144). Sluijsken's band of Africans played "sweet music" on the front lawn of his mansion in Colombo when he entertained British Officers, promoting goodwill between the Dutch and the British (Elliott 1924, 12).

Galle: Entrepôt for Africans

Legacies of international trade and empire building have displaced peoples and their silent histories need to be written (de Silva Jayasuriya 2010, 2023b). Forts and ports as entrêpots, are conduits through which Africans, enslaved or free, traversed. In 1802, soon after the British East India Company (EIC) took over from the Dutch in 1796, the coastal areas came under the British Crown. British plans to takeover the independent Kandyan kingdom bore a high military cost. African, Malay and *Sepoy* (Indian) soldiers were included in the Ceylon Regiments. In 1804, the first British Governor, Frederick North (1798–1805) purchased 100 Africans – two women, 79 men and 19 boys from Bombay[11] (called Mumbai today) costing 20,219 rix[12]-dollars and 78 Africans – 8 women and 70 men – from Goa[13] costing 19,954 rix-dollars (de Silva 1953, 274; de Silva Jayasuriya 2023a, 19–20). Moreover, "North contracted with one Monsieur Fortin to receive 500 able-bodied Kaffirs [*sic*] to be brought from Mozambique and delivered at Galle or Colombo at 125 Spanish Dollars each – payable one-third in cinnamon at 3 shillings per pound and the rest in bills on Bengal or Madras" (de Silva 1953, 274). These transactions are contemporaneous with the lead up to Abolition of the transatlantic trade in 1807.

Enslaved Africans commanded a high price due to their reputation as military men. Thomas Maitland, the second British Governor of Ceylon (1805–1811) was anxious to strengthen the Ceylon Regiments. Purchasing enslaved Africans from Mozambique due to the vast distance increased probabilities of losses from shipwreck and death at sea. Searching for cost-effective ways to fulfil his needs, enslaved Africans wanting to run away from nearby Diego Garcia in the Chagos archipelago located in the southwestern Indian Ocean was welcome news. Diego Garcia's geographical proximity to Sri Lanka added value to the operation (Figure 9).

Prize Court proceedings in 1827 housed in the National Archives at Kew concern enslaved Africans transported from Diego Garcia seventeen years earlier, in 1810. Maitland commissioned two ships – Cornelia (commanded by Henry Foulkes), Sir Francis Drake (commanded by George Harris) – and a Brig named Diana (commanded by Lieutenant William Kempthorn) for the mission which sailed from Galle to Diego Garcia to bring back Africans belonging to the French. Agency of the enslaved is striking

Figure 9. Map of Indian Ocean showing Diego Garcia and Sri Lanka. Created by Sampath Chandrasena using https://www.worldometers.info/world-map/

as they chose to run away from the French due to ill treatment. Whether they were aware of the British efforts to curtail the trade is unknown but they were taking a risk in hoping for a better life with the British. As the British ships approached the shore, the enslaved waded in and came towards the ships, some bearing scars of ill treatment. For the historian there is ambiguity in interpreting this kind of agency because on the one hand the Africans are running away from enslavement and on the other hand coming on to British ships on their own will. However, the enslaved continue to be commodified and their cost based on estimated value of productivity is given later on in this paper. The records do not have any information on the monetary gain in transition to soldier, or the conditions of service – wages and retirement benefits.

I now turn to correspondence dated 19th January 1827 stating that Captain Edgell sailed to Ceylon and informed Governor Maitland of "his arrival at Point de Galle with the said slaves [*sic*] on board." On arrival, the males were enlisted into the Third Ceylon Regiment. A letter dated 8th June written by Thomas Maitland from Mount Lavinia to G. Harris Esq in London states that the enslaved were "being delivered over for His Majestys Service" and that "the Negroes [*sic*] must be brought into the Court of Admiralty and regularly condemned to them being delivered over for His Majestys Service, and that the mode of payment being £40 for every serviceable man, £30 for every woman and £10 for every child." Varied demand for men, women and children are reflected in the prices. Maitland continues to add: "I should therefore advise you to have a correct list made out of the number and also of the people you have landed, and that you should leave at Galle any papers that may be necessary for their condemnation in the Court of Admiralty." A document headed "In the High Court of Admiralty" reads "Sundry Slaves [*sic*] taken at the Island of Diego Garcia a Dependency of the Isle of France and conveyed from thence on board His Majestys ship Sir Frances Drake to the Island of Ceylon in the year 1810."[14] Transportation of 134 enslaved Africans was endorsed by Thomas Maitland.

Table 1. "A List of Negros [*sic*] received on board His Majestys ship Sir Francis Drake from the Island of Diego Garcia the 14th of May 1810" (National Archives, Kew, HCA 32/1814/2739).

No	Names	No	Names	No	Names	No	Names Women
1	Copilevyn	36	Aandere	71	Molimant	1	Mezia
2	Prospar	37	La rame	72	Job	2	Julia
3	Arsillar	38	Savarang	73	Sas Mong	3	Rosette
4	Lubyn	39	Compinis	74	Terim	4	Rosellae
5	Charles	40	Masonga	75	Catandy	5	Maria Anne
6	Elarvi	41	Surmant	76	Jeis	6	Catharine
7	Dincar	42	Foomar	77	Zappur	7	Rosine
8	Labram	43	Julian	78	Marca	8	Parcelle
9	Andrew	44	Tegaro	79	Mackaroni	9	Maria Anne
10	Julicaire	45	Zemahale	80	Kesoheda	10	Clarisa
11	Artis	46	Francois	81	Nan Singolo	11	Mary
12	Epongeoa	47	Isantu	82	Seong Seongo	12	Nina
13	Emanuel	48	Lassleur	83	Caster	13	Catharine
14	Jando	49	Nomparpara	84	Narson	14	Harriott
15	Bienvenu	50	Alexander	85	Finges	15	Marina
16	Over	51	Casper	86	Matomby	16	Sophia
17	Francois	52	Macadame	87	Mare Mema	17	Louisa
18	Polit	53	Voltaire	88	Marne	18	Roselle
19	Sanson	54	Emanuelle	89	Tanquil	19	Mamise
20	Preable	55	Estable	90	Surpyn	20	Lacalla
21	Routina	56	Francois	91	Pistola	21	Felicity
22	Sanson	57	Adonis	92	Serompa	22	Gyart
23	Mahor	58	Bourbon	93	Bennois Petel	23	Le Fukiva
24	Zenabo	59	Cezar	94	Tom		*Eight Children*
25	Blanfort	60	Armeda	95	Metame		
26	Armandos	61	Armodeianda	96	Narcissa		
27	Musamana	62	Balmire	97	Blanche		
28	La Vantur	63	Capitos	98	Selapair		
29	St Maria	64	Marker	99	Jante		
30	Mistick	65	Jarnoss	100	Sampier		
31	Marsele	66	Bassar	101	Louis		
32	Acasea	67	Massois	102	Maturyan		
33	Bennois	68	La naces	103	Polison		
34	Sidne	69	Zarevar				
35	Carrias	70	Sepeong				

Spellings of the names and numberings in the original manuscript are maintained in Table 1.

Names of the adults (103 men and 23 women) are listed in the Records of the High Court of Admiralty and Colonial Vice-Admiralty Courts. One enslaved African appears to have died at sea. Notably, the enslaved have one name with a few exceptions and the children are unnamed, perhaps as they were not productive in the plantation world in which they lived in Diego Garcia. No other personal information is given. Strikingly, the names in the register are heterogeneous, ranging from African to European and Asian.

Table 2 illustrates that the majority (73%) had European names,[15] 25% had African names and only 2% had Asian names. Gender breakdown of the distribution of ethnic origin of names of the enslaved Africans is represented in the pie chart (Figure 10).

What do the heterogeneous names of the enslaved tell us about the Indian Ocean trade and the plantation world in Diego Garcia? Erasure of African names by re-naming with European and Asian names has led to the loss of heritage and rupture of kinship ties. I argue that the diversity of names reflects the ethnicity of the owners and multiethnic personnel in the plantation world. Perhaps the English scribe compiling the inventory in

Table 2. Gender breakdown of Enslaved Adult Africans with Ethnic Origins of Names (not ethnicity) as identified by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya.

	Number of Enslaved African Men	Number of Enslaved African Women	Total Number of Enslaved Africans
Ethnic origins of names			
African names	28	4	32
European names	73	19	92
Asian names	2	0	2
Total number of enslaved Africans	103	23	126

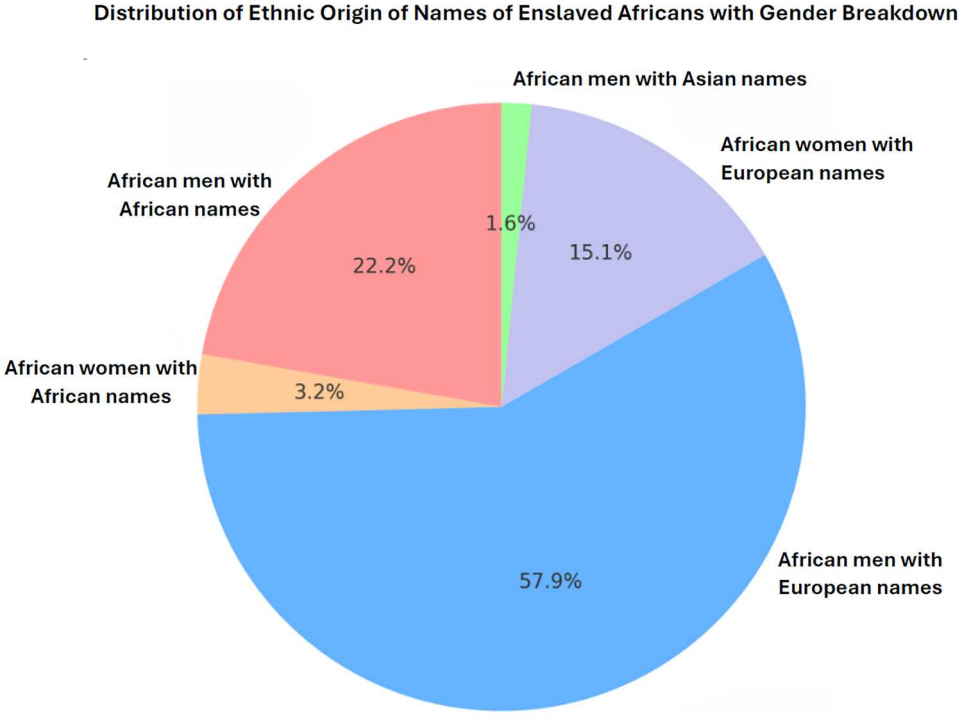

Figure 10. Distribution of Ethnic Origin of Names of Enslaved Africans with Gender Breakdown. Pie Chart prepared by Sampath Chandrasena.

Galle obtained the names and their spellings from the maroon leader of the runaways which accounts for the variation in orthographies. In contrast to the diversity of names of the men, the majority of women had western names; perhaps they carrried out domestic work and were given European names due to the unfamiliarity of the Franco-Mauritians with African names. Of the 23 women, four bear African names[16] (Mezia, Mamise, Lacalla, Le Fukiva), six bear English names ((two) Catherine, Mary, Harriott, Felicity, Louisa), eight carry French names (Rosette, Rosellae, (two) Maria Anne, Rosine, Parcelle, Roselle, Gyart), four bear Portuguese names (Julia, Clarisa, Nina, Marina) and one bears a Dutch name (Sophia). Amongst the men, on the other hand, 28 African names (Elarvi, Dincar, Epongeoa, Jando, Routina, Mahor, Zenabo, Musamana, Masonga, Tegaro, Isantu, Nomparpara, Sas Mong, Catandy, Zappur, Marca, Kesoheda, Nan Singolo, Seong Seongo, Matomby, Mare Mema, Serompa,

Metame, Bassar, Sepeong, Maturyan, Zemahale, Jeis), 19 English names (Charles, Andrew, Emanuel, (two) Sanson, Blanfort, Mistick, Sidne, Julian, Alexander, Casper, Macadame, Marker, Caster, Narson, Tom, Copilevyn, Finges, Surmant), 35 French names (Aandere, Labram, Lubyn, Julicaire, Bienvenu, (three) Francois, Polit, Preable, Prospar, La Vantur, Marsele, Bennois, Molimant, Bennois Petel, Blanche, Sampier, Surpyn, Louis, Polison, La rame, Compinis, Lassleur, Voltaire, Emanuelle, Estable, Bourbon, Jarnoss, Massois, La naces, Marne, Artis, Job, Selapair), 11 Portuguese/ Spanish names (Armandos, St Maria, Carrias, Cezar, Armeda, Balmire, Capitos, Pistola, Narcissa, Zarevar, Arsillar), four Dutch (Foomar, Armodeianda, Adonis, Over), two Italian (Mackaroni, Tanquil), two Greek (Acasea, Jante) and two Asian names (Savarang, Terim). Writing on subaltern individuals moved between Dutch and British territories in Ceylon, Mauritius and Cape during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Marina Carter and Nira Wickremasinghe (2018, 200) remark that "many slave [*sic*] owners are not white Europeans but free Asians or Africans." Historian Richard Allen (1999, 16) conjectures that "Perhaps 20,000 of the slaves imported into the Mascarenes prior to 1810 were of Indian origin, and the Ile de France had also become the home of a sizeable population of free Indian craftsmen and artisans during the late eighteenth century." The ethnicity of enslaved persons may not have been clear to owners of enslaved persons.

Chagos, similar to Mauritius, Réunion, Seychelles and Rodrigues, is a settler colony. A combination of voluntary and involuntary migrants peopled Chagos, the majority being African or Asian with a minority of European entrepreneurs. Diego Garcia, a coral atoll, is the largest island in the Chagos Archipelago. British ships visited Diego Garcia in 1745 and 1755 (Stoddart 1971, 209). Nigel Wenban-Smith and Marina Carter (2016) have recently written a history of the exploration, exploitation and expulsion of the Chagos.

In 1783, the first settler Pierre Marie Le Normand, a sugar and coconut plantation owner and a large slaveowner was accompanied by 22 enslaved people who helped him to set up his privately owned coconut plantations on Diego Garcia (Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee 1986, 91). Le Normand was to supply coconuts to Mauritius (Stoddart 1971, 210). "By the 1780s, arrangements were in place to maintain a French presence on Diego Garcia and to supply the Mascarene islands with the produce obtained there" (Carter 2017, 216). The first attempt to settle on Diego Garcia, however, was by the English, in 1786, who planned to use the atoll as a victualling station (Stoddart 1971, 210). In 1793, "M. Lapotaire was given permission to establish a factory at Diego Garcia to export copra and oil rather than whole nuts to the Ile de France" (Stoddart 1971, 210). M. Lapotaire took enslaved people to the atoll and a few years later more enslaved persons followed with the Brothers Cayeux who carried out the same business as Lapotaire. As David Vine states

> Chagosians lived in Diego Garcia and the rest of the previously uninhabited archipelago since the time of the American Revolution when Franco-Mauritians created coconut plantations on the islands and began importing enslaved and, later, indentured laborers from Africa and India. (Vine 2009, 3)

The tried and tested plantation model in the sugar fields of Mauritius, similar to that in the Americas from southern Brazil to the Caribbean and north to the Mason-Dixon line (Vine 2009, 25) was replicated in the Chagos. Enslaved people from the African

Continent and Madagascar toiled in the private coconut plantations of Diego Garcia (Evers and Kooy 2011, 2). Post-Abolition of Slavery by the British Parliament in 1833, indentured labour was substituted for enslaved labour.

According to the 1826 colonial statistics, a small number of Franco-Mauritians and free people of African or mixed ancestry ruled much larger populations of enslaved Africans (Vine 2009, 24). Absentee plantation owners delegated management of the coconut estates to relatives and *mulattos* (a person whose parents are African and European). Given the close association of Mauritius with Diego Garcia, it is worthwhile pausing to understand its colonisation which pulled in the enslaved labour. In 1598, the Dutch reached Mauritius but attempted to settle only in 1638, abandoning in 1658 and re-settling six years later in 1664 for less than 50 years. In 1710, when the Dutch left Mauritius, some 300 enslaved persons from Madagascar and Java were left behind (Seetah et al. 2022, 5). The French claimed Mauritius in 1710 and the British captured the Island in December 1810. From the 1770s, the majority of enslaved arriving in Mauritius were purchased in Zanzibar; the East African coast and Mauritius were crucial in the transshipment of the enslaved to other parts of the Mascarenes and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean (Sheriff et al. 2016, 4). Slave markets in Zanzibar fed the demand from Mauritius which, in turn, has consequences on the pool of enslaved in Diego Garcia. The pool of enslaved included persons from beyond the Indian Ocean also and amongst the "manumitted between 1768 and 1789 were Guineans, Lascars, Malabars, Malagasies, Malays, Mozambicans, and even a Canary Islander" (Allen 1999, 83).

Historian Satyendra Peerthum (2016) emphasises the legitimate ownership of Mauritius over Diego Garcia. The "startup human capital" included "79 Mozambican and Malagasy slaves as well as a few free coloured who were skilled workers" (Peerthum 2016). A large coconut plantation was established, setting in train the emergence of "an important industry in Diego Garcia which was based exclusively on slave labour" (Peerthum 2016). By "the 1800s, three new coconut plantations and a fishing settlement, relying on unfree labour" emerged under Mauritian entrepreneurs – Lapotaire, Didiet, Danquet, and the Cayeux brothers (Peerthum 2016). By 1808, a 100 enslaved Mozambicans and Malagasies worked for Laportaire alone (Peerthum 2016) indicating the demand for enslaved labour under a single Mauritian entrepreneur in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Richard Allen highlights that marronage in Mauritius started as early as in 1642 during Dutch occupation which commenced in 1638 and "became a fact of life for the settlers who occupied Mauritius following its colonization in 1721 by the Compagnie des Indies" (Allen 2004, 1). Not surprisingly, the agency of the enslaved is illustrated through marronage in Diego Garcia. Le Morne mountain stands as a reminder of maroon activity. Although "the mountain's topography precluded the establishment of a permanent maroon settlement on its summit … .important new insights into the lives of the island's early nineteenth-century inhabitants of African and/or Malagasy origin" (Seetah et al. 2011, 279) were revealed through research in Archaeology.

Probability of revolts was not simply imagined due to the large ratio of enslaved Africans to free persons in Diego Garcia. The sociology of the plantations is significant in understanding the range of names in Table 1. Patriarchal private estates were owned by the ruling class of *grand blanc* (big white) who delegated running the plantations to managers, a member of their family or someone from the *petit blanc* (little white)

class (Vine 2009, 26). Daily work orders were delivered by the petit blanc or *mulatto* sub-managers in turn, to the enslaved labourers through *commandeurs* (overseers) mainly of African descent (Vine 2009, 26). African overseers interphased between French creole speaking petit blanc and enslaved Africans. A study conducted by Robert Antoine Papen (1978) opened the way for comparing the French-based Indian Ocean creoles but Chagossian French Creole remains to be researched further. Linguist Mikael Parkvall (2013) has worked on simulating Mauritian French Creole. Parkvall (2025: personal communication) points out that Chagossian French Creole is basically a dialect of Mauritian French creole also known as Mauritian/Mauricien/Morisyen often preceded by créole/kreol. Based on his yet unpublished data analysis from 1735 to 1765, a part which he had discussed with the late Philip Baker who worked on the genesis of Mauritian from 1721 to 1735, Mikael Parkvall asserts that Mauritian had creolised by 1750. Philip Baker's discussions on the topic are in *Isle France Creoles: affinities and origins* (Baker and Corne 1982). In 1763 therefore the initial settlers from Mauritius in Diego Garcia would have spoken Mauritian, and the dynamics of its demography would have contributed to the evolution of Chagossian French Creole. Enslaved Africans brought to Diego Garcia would have had varied competencies in Mauritian. Later tranches of enslaved people brought to Diego Garcia could have been brought direct from East Africa, Madagascar and even India further enriching the creolisation process.

Re-naming was an unconscious or conscious effort in erasing ethnic identity and emotional ties to roots. As Laura Kostanski and Guy Puzey (2016, xiii) state "names can act as objects of attachment and dependence … while functioning as powerful determinants of inclusion and exclusion." I assert that re-naming an enslaved African with a non-African – English, French, Portuguese, Dutch or Asian – name uproots her/him from African culture and society tearing her/him away from kinship ties. Names are "manifestations of cultural, linguistic and social heritage" (Kostanski and Puzey 2016, xiii) and re-naming, therefore, is an act of erasing the cultural, linguistic and social heritage of the enslaved. Despite commodification and being at the bottom of the power structure, the enslaved's agency was not destroyed. Whilst being in captivity, according to the records, the enslaved planned to leave French territory. Toponyms such as Jarnoss (number 65 in Table 1) which is spelt Jarnosse in French and Bourbon are used as anthroponyms indicating a loss of recognition of their humanity. Inventory features common names: two Sanson (numbers 19 and 22 in Table 1), two Catherine (numbers 6 and 13 in Table 1), two Maria Anne (numbers 5 and 9 in Table 1) and three Francois (numbers 17, 46 and 56 in Table 1) presumably owned by different individuals. Enslaved might bear the name of her/his master or members of the families of their masters, or characters in plays as discussed by Linda Collins Reilly (1978, ix) in *Slaves in Ancient Greece: Slaves from Greek Manumission Inscriptions.* Names of historical personages such as Charles, Andrew, Catherine, Mary (numbers 5, 9, 11 and 13 in Table 1) are prevalent. As the National Archives registers start from 1812, the 1810 data recorded in 1827 is invaluable. Some names given to the enslaved are nouns such as Bienvenu (number 15 in Table 1) meaning "welcome" and blanche (number 97 in Table 1) meaning "white" which can also be an adjective. Naming an enslaved as Mistick (number 30 in Table 1) for "mystic" entails the use of an adjective. Emanuel (number 13 in Table 1) and Emanuelle (number 54 in Table 1) could reflect diverse

owners – British and French – given the varied spelling. Bennois (number 33 in Table 1) and Bennois Petel (number 93 in Table 1) could reflect a single owner, as the enslaved were generally given only one name and Petel could be the differentiator. Varied spellings could reflect the scribes' knowledge of the languages and also the literacy level of the enslaved themselves and deviations from standard European languages. Occasionally names can overlap, for example, Julia (number 2 in Table 1) and Over (number 16 in Table 1), the former being either English or Portuguese, for example and Over, being Dutch or English. As many European names take root from Greek and Latin, such names may not necessarily indicate that a slaveowner would be Greek or Italian. The linguistic profile of the enslaved is not given and their proficiency of the creolised French of the Chagos would have varied.

I have attempted to identify the rationale for the heterogeneity in the names. However, judging by the varied spellings and effort to maintain a semblance of authenticity, the scribe has been sensitive to the orthography of a variety of languages and may have been guided by a maroon leader. The scribe as intermediary is an enabler to the task of the linguist-historian. From the normative cultural point of view, a name includes or excludes a person from her/his own culture and society. Whatever the rationale for re-naming the enslaved, albeit the unfamiliarity of their owners with African linguistic and phonetic systems, conversion to Christianity, enforcing a bond between the enslaved and slaver, integrating the enslaved into a new cultural system, or to erase their African identity, I argue that the diverse names of the enslaved also reveals the diversity of languages in the plantation society of Diego Garcia. The records maintain that the enslaved transported from Diego Garcia were exclusively African [Negros]. Slavery remained the defining feature of Chagos from Le Normand's settlement in 1783 until Abolition of Slavery in Mauritius and its dependencies 52 years later in 1835 (Vine 2009, 24). Although Mauritius was controlled by the British from 1810, Chagos was not ceded to the British until 1814 through the Treaty of Paris (Vine 2009, 23).

A few names in the 1810 register – Alexander and Sophia – overlap with names in the Baptism Register (1677-1807, period 1741-1761), which Lodewijk Wagenaar (1994, 51) lists in his book on *Galle: VOC-vestiging in Ceylon*. Names are grouped into categories – classical mythology and classical antiquity, biblical, temporal elements (days and months) and other names. Furthermore, Wagenaar (1994, 55) lists enslaved children owned by Steven Baade from the Sri Lanka National Archives 1/5674, secretarial *certificaat* (certificate) 26 *maart* (March) 1761. Interestingly, the record also lists the mothers' names. Of the children's names, only Castor in 1761 resonates with the 1810 document – Caster (English spelling) adopted from Greek mythology and Acasea (from Greek Acacia, usually a girl's name). Gender neutral names – such as Maria and Anne (Vine 2009) – common in mediaeval times, were carried through to the nineteenth century. Common naming practices included using names of historic figures in Rome such as Julius Caesar (spelt Cezar) (number 59), Biblical names such as Sanson (for Samson) (number 19) and names from antiquity such as Narcissa (number 96) – despite its feminine spelling of the Greek male name Narcissus – and Prospar (number 2) – a Latin name spelt Prosper. Whilst Latin names tend to be gender specific, a male has been named St Maria (number 29) and Narcissa (number 96). Greek names may have been used by other Europeans who delved into the Classical languages such as Latin and

Greek and may not reflect slaveowners, ethnicities, however. Portuguese, French, English and Dutch slaveowners were exact actors in the Indian Ocean slave trade.

Returning to the early days of settlement, in 1784, a Malagasy overseer François, nicknamed Julicoeurla, led a team of enslaved persons of various ethnic origins: Mozambicans named Hyacinthe, Jaso, Thomas, Domingue, Luni, Susanna, Rose, Creoles born in Mauritius named Casimir, Etienne, Henri and a Malagasy named Sephir (Carter 2017, 16). Such narratives are useful indicators to fill in gaps in the historical archives on the ethnic origins of enslaved Africans who arrived in Galle.

Conclusion

The brutal uprooting from the homelands has eclipsed the historiography of African migrants. Assimilating within independent nation states has contributed to this process. Difficult histories need to be confronted in order to assuage cruelties of the past and bring economic and social justice to the diasporas. National consciousness of an African presence in Sri Lanka is raised through broadening our episteme on the historical facts about their arrival, the places from which they embarked and the tasks that they performed. Textual records enable the linguist-historian to elucidate the actors and drivers of involuntary African movements to Sri Lanka from an unexpected location in the Indian Ocean – Diego Garcia. Erasure of their identity as exemplified in the nineteenth-century manuscript through re-naming the majority of enslaved persons is paramount in understanding the inhumanity of forced migrations. Recovering personalised data contributes to rebuilding the lost past of people of African descent.

Notes

1. Samarakoon, who had been left in charge of Galle and Matara, began the construction of a fort at Galle in 1595, "a work which the King of Spain had been urging for the last eight years" (Pieris [1913–1914] 1983, 287).
2. From the Portuguese word *cafre* adopted from the Arabic *qafr* meaning 'non-believer,' a word that the Arabs used for East Africans as non-Muslims, spelt variously due to orthographic variations in Portuguese, Dutch and English: *caffir, kaffer, kaffir* and adopted by the Sinhalese and Tamil as *kāpiri* and *kāpili*.
3. Tikiri Abeyasinghe (1966, 228).
4. Tikiri Abeyasinghe (1966, 227).
5. A Hindu Prince (https://www.oed.com/dictionary/rana_n?tab=meaning_and_use).
6. Tikiri Abeyasinghe (1966, 227).
7. Spelt *Winkel* (Dutch) is a shop, a place where goods are sold.
8. Published works are not available yet.
9. Includes Muslims of Sri Lanka excepting their co-religionists, the Malays.
10. I am grateful to Jennifer van der Greft for translating from Dutch.
11. C.O. 54, 14, North to Hobart, 25 September 1804.
12. A silver coinage issued in Europe; its earliest usage is in 1589 by the Dutch (https://www.oed.com/dictionary/rix-dollar_n) rijksdaalder (Dutch) meaning 'imperial dollar.'
13. C.O. 54, 11, North to Hobart, 17 June 1804.
14. National Archives, Kew, HCA 32/1814/2739.
15. I am obliged to Margarida Oldland for assistance with identifying the diverse European names.
16. I am grateful to my colleague Chapane Mutirua for helping with the identification of African names.

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