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CHAPTER

14 Migration, Slavery, and Commodification

Michael Zeuske

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Abstract

This chapter analyses migrations in global history using examples of slave trade/slavery as ‘forced’ or ‘coerced’ migration and their connections to commodification. Taking a *longue-durée* plateau approach to global history, from 10000 BNC to around 1960, Atlantic slavery (1400–1900), as well as the slaveries and colonial expansions of Europe (1800–1960), are given special consideration. In addition to referencing the commodities produced by and for enslaved people, here enslaved people in particular are treated as ‘talking commodities’, a relatively unaddressed topic. In summary, it is established that without slavery, diverse slavery regimes, slave trade, but above all without enslaved people, many commodities would not have existed. How this applies to commodification in ‘Western’ capitalism as a whole needs to be further researched and debated.

Keywords: [migrations](#), [global history](#), [slaves](#), [slavery regimes](#), [slave trade](#), [talking commodities](#)

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MIGRATION has played an integral part in global history.¹ Geographical mobility, whether freely entered into or the result of coercion, has always been an important element of human society and the global spread of commodity frontiers. Indeed, it would probably be impossible to study the history of any commodity without some consideration of the human movements that this involved. Migrations of workers, merchants, or technical specialists enabled the development of plantation economies and extractive regimes, as well as exchanges and trade in general, but there is another sense in which migration and commodities are interlinked: the process by which human bodies themselves became a form of capital—commodified as slaves; traded; and in the process enabling the exploitation of plant, animal, metallic, mineral, and medical commodities that as a captive workforce they were employed in producing.

The concept of migration was initially primarily used by state authorities in their counting of emigrants and immigrants, as they attempted to maintain control over their populations. From this, social science demographers and historical sociologists made use of the term. Although with some earlier precedents, historians—in particular those applying a more global perspective—have since the 1990s been paying close attention to this. Particularly important was Dirk Hoerder's study of world migrations over the last millennium,² but the range of historical migration studies is now quite impressive.³ Bridging the gap between social sciences and historical research, this growing literature covers a wide range of migrations: slavery and the slave trade, as well as other 'unfree' forms of labour and forced migration, such as indentureship and convicts; concepts such as the 'African diaspora' and the 'African Atlantic' that arose from the slave trade, along with the human commodification in the production of tropical commodities; and the voluntary migrations related to economic, structural, political, and religious differences and the global division of labour.

p. 312 Until at least the sixteenth century, most migration consisted of nomadism—the historical movement of large groups. This saw the migrations in the early history of mankind, the migration of peoples with their livestock from Central Asia to Eastern Europe and India, the migrations to and across the Americas, and that of the Polynesians and the migrations in Africa and other large territories. Militarized expansions also played a part: the Hun expansion of the fourth to sixth centuries AD, leading to the accelerated migration of peoples, in many cases through displacement; the Mongol expansion of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; and later European expansions. From this perspective, all human history, since its early beginnings until the present day, is the history of migrations—taking place for reasons of subsistence, inequality, land occupation, or climatic changes and events or as a result of political causes such as escape from violence, oppression, or armed conflicts.

Many migrations have not been voluntary. From the earliest times, alongside 'free' movement there has been a trade in those who were compelled against their will. Christian Langer, for example, has shown the relationship between forced labour and deportations as far back as Ancient Egypt.⁴ Since at least the Neolithic period, animal husbandry (in particular of horses) facilitated military migrations and massive raids on other settlements, resulting in enslavement.⁵ Not only were those captured forced into domestic or military service, but they quickly came to demonstrate an early form of commodification, as 'gifts' exchanged between rulers and elites.⁶

Probably the most important of forced commodified migrations that played a significant part in defining the modern world, integrally connected to a number of commodities, was the 'African diaspora', involving the coerced movement of large numbers of enslaved Africans to other parts of the world and the most significant movement of people into the Americas. Up to 1820, while some two to three million migrants arrived from Europe, between six and eight million came from Africa. It was not until 1840 that this became supplanted by other migrations in scale—Europeans into the Americas and Asians to both the Americas and Australia.

While the African slave trade was integrally connected with commodity production in the tropics (sugar, tobacco, cocoa, coffee, cotton) and slave-food commodity production (jerked meat, dried salt cod, cassava, maize, beans, rice, eddo), this forced migration itself saw human bodies becoming commodified. Enslaved men and women, as well as children, were 'talking commodities', and their human capital was arguably the fundamental capital of Atlantic history from 1450 to 1900,⁷ and an early driver of globalization. Commodified humans provided a gigantic capital stock and were the basis of formal financial and commercial institutions (including state credit), as well as colonial territorialization by European powers.⁸ However, although much of the literature has focused on transatlantic slavery, this was but the more visible aspect of a phenomenon that was in fact much more widespread. Andrés Reséndez, for example, has shown how the Spanish built an 'empire of slavery' in the Americas, partially founded on the enslavement of

indigenous peoples, particularly in frontier zones,⁹ while Mattias van Rossum et al. have recently highlighted the importance of many slavery regimes in the Indian Ocean World.¹⁰

p. 313 The focus here is on the enslaved forms of migration in which humans themselves were commodified. Slavery can be defined as the exploitation and control by other people (individuals, institutions, or corporations) of human bodies, their productivity (work, energy, services), time, and mobility. Slaves have been used as body capital for power, labour, value, wealth, and productivity, as well as for status, health (including as objects for medicinal knowledge), and currency or value—sometimes linked quite specifically to either parts of the enslaved body, or its whole. They have also been used for their reproductive value, as, among others, Jennifer Morgan has explored.¹¹ That the procurement of those to be enslaved was carried out mostly by marginal elites, or as mutual ‘gifts’ between elites, resulted in slavery becoming an institution, as Joseph Miller traces for slavery throughout global history.¹² However, despite its historical ubiquity—or perhaps because of this—slavery should not be seen as a ‘mode of production’ in itself. Rather, there have been slaveries in multiple epochs and situations—including houses, estates, mines, ships, harbours, and military fortresses. Slavery has occurred in many different regions, under quite distinct slavery regimes, while slave trading and slave production in slaving zones have been part of various political systems—imperial, monarchical, and republican—and also ‘without state’, practised by small-scale societies, or religions such as Catholicism, Protestantism, or Islam.¹³

Damian Pargas has argued that slavery was a globalizing phenomenon, along with the slave traders and their personnel, in a way similar to the role played by sailors.¹⁴ The connection to developing global communications and mobilities stems from the sixteenth century, with the expanding circumnavigation of the earth through Iberian ships (Magellan/El Cano 1519–1522) and the founding of Manila in 1571 leading to a truly global connection of slaveries and slave trades. Prior to this, the most globalized slaveries and slave-trade systems were those of the *islamicate*—territories under Muslim control, or strongly influenced by them, from Spain to Sumatra and the Southern Philippines. Sylviane Diouf has shown how enslaved Muslims since around 1400 influenced the developing European globalization—not only in Europe but also in the Americas.¹⁵ However, ‘global’ biographies of enslaved people were unknown until the eighteenth century, despite literature that has established the notion of a global life history from around 1570.¹⁶ Possibly the most globalized biography of a slave—at least covering the whole Atlantic hemisphere of Africa, Europe, and the Americas—is that of Nicholas Said.¹⁷

p. 314 Ehud Toledano has shown how all slaveries were also ‘systems of belonging’ and formed the basis for new hierarchies, as well as asymmetric dependencies.¹⁸ In this sense, they were very important for the preservation of stability, on the one hand, and, on the other, new forced migrations and expansions: slave soldiers, states with enslaved soldiers, crews of slave ships, captains, and slave traders as entrepreneurs and cosmopolites ‘from below’. Not to forget slave women as mothers of enslaved people but also of mighty elites. This suggests that all slaveries were also systems of dependencies—albeit following very violent acts, actions, forced mobility, and processes against individuals and groups. All such systems were in the first instance local but also ultimately regional, continental, imperial, hemispheric, and transhemispheric, as in the case of the Mongols, extending from East and South-East Asia to Eastern Europe, or the fifteenth-century Islamic commercial networks—from Spain to Aceh and the Southern Philippines, passing through Central Asia and Northern India, with connections to the Malay Peninsula, Northern and Eastern Africa, and Europe.

Nevertheless, none of these was fully ‘global’, in the spatial sense of spanning the whole globe, prior to the nineteenth century. It was not until the establishment of a world economy between 1800 and 1960 that there would be a global work system, with colonies involving many local slaveries (house slaveries, women and child slaveries, and collective slaveries, often under the control of local elites) and slave trading systems (sometimes using other names and traditions), regional slavery between elites, and global migrations into forced labour systems and ‘second slaveries’. Until then, they were at most national-imperial work systems.

Chronological-Spatial Plateaus of Slavery

Slavery can perhaps best be understood as having gone through a number of ‘chronological- spatial plateaus’ in relation to migration and commodities. There were in fact multiple slaveries, and together these provide an alternative way at looking at world history through a commodities lens.

Hypothetically, these plateaus began between 20000 and 10000–8000 BCE. Although extending over larger spaces, they always grow from local roots in some form, and with quite specific cultural definitions or legal forms (e.g. forms of bondage and serfdom in Europe). They were, however, even from their very local beginnings, ‘global’ in the sense that slaves existed, even if without a worldwide institution of slavery per se or as stateless prisoners in groups. They may not have been a part of a global system as such, but with their mobility, or the interruption of their mobility in being fixed as enslaved, they were part of the broader perspective of migration. Prehistoric slavery can be seen, for example, in the work of Catherine Cameron,¹⁹ and since then six ‘plateaus’ of slavery can be identified. It is important to understand that these are not stages or formations but rather manifestations of slavery that started successively, none of which has ever stopped, with the partial exception of the Third Plateau of Atlantic slavery, which was formally abolished in the West by the late nineteenth century.²⁰

p. 315 The First Plateau consists chiefly of enslaved women and children—or rather, victims of slaving activities within or between communities. This includes self-enslavement of women and children, as well as poor people, in return for food, sustenance, and security. This is slavery without formal institution, dating from at least 20000 BCE, and extending to the present day. Often this has been a part of nomadism or slow migrations. In this case, commodification is on a very individual level, and barely formalized—at most as an exchange or release, for example, of conflict prisoners/captives, women, girls, and children in general. This might be to leaders of other communities, playing an important function in demographic community, domination, and stabilization. ↪ Men—especially young captive men—were often herders for livestock, and as such were treated as warriors. Even if there was some form of contract (as happened from very early in China), after the signing of such a contract these people totally disappear as legal persons. They would have their own forms of mobility and commodification, often involving other asymmetric social dependencies, like adoption, forced marriage or female house servitude, children’s bondage, buying and lending of girls, boys, and women. Possibly the oldest form was that of sacrificial slavery, with the enslaved people forming a part of rituals involving the use of living human bodies.

The Second Plateau is that of ‘house’ or kin slaveries, existing on a small scale within personal networks of kinship, affinity, guilds of skilled people (such as hunters, warriors, ritual specialists, or healers), and clientage.²¹ Here ‘slaving’ (even when there may have been little conceptualization of it as such) is a dimension of mobility between groups. In the majority of cases, this would have been involuntary. However, at times it may have been voluntary—for example, self-enslavement as part of a feast culture, clientage, or enslaved members of raid groups. As Alfredo González-Ruibal shows, the enslaved came into a house group, which, in the broadest sense of the word, would comprise huts, houseboats, tents, temples, and palaces.²² This plateau forms something of a Pandora’s box, containing all slaveries and slave trades as forced migrations up to the present day. It also includes slaveries without big migrations—as forms of ‘close slaveries’ or small-scale slave regimes, such as debt slavery, collective slavery, raid slaveries, child slaveries, slavery of certain castes, and sex slavery. It seems to date from at least the Bronze Age,²³ and combines probably the most widespread and quantitatively overwhelming forms of slavery, including some of the biggest slavery regimes in world history: Roman; Arab-Islamic Caliphates and their successor empires, including the Ottoman and Persian, and their zones of influence in India, North and East Africa, and the Malayan World; the Byzantine Empire; the Frankish-Carolingian Empire and its successors; the barbaric and Slavic monarchies, which often emerged as militaristic slave-hunting societies, including the Huns, Avars, Bulgars, Saxons, Cumans, Khazars, Vikings/Normans, and Hungarians; the empires in China and its

area of influence; the Mongolian empire and its successors. Often these formed a part of migrations and expansions.²⁴ In this plateau, commodification played a very important role, alongside ‘gifts’ between elites as well as for generals and soldiers, possibly as war booty. Slaves were exchanged for silver, alcohol, metals, weapons, fabrics, furs, horses, cattle, technologies, knowledge (such as books and maps), art, currencies, and even food such as fish, meat, salt, or oil.

p. 316 The Third Plateau is primarily constituted by the so-called Atlantic slavery, running from around 1400 until 1900 in the expanding ‘West’—spanning the Americas and West Africa, as well as parts of East Africa and (at least until the eighteenth century) the islands of the Indian Ocean. Moses Finley defined five ‘hegemonic’ slaveries,²⁵ and of these three are contained within this plateau: southern US slavery and those of Brazil and the Caribbean (the other two were the slave societies of Greek and Roman antiquity). The most important of Atlantic slaveries was that of the Iberian Atlantic, followed by the North-West European Atlantic. However, all these ‘Atlantics’ were, at the same time, an ‘African Atlantic’, as Paul Lovejoy and others have argued.²⁶ Within this plateau, different types of other slaveries (belonging to the First and Second Plateaus) continued to exist: various types of local slavery regimes under their own elites, slaveholders and traders (without the African local slavery regimes, the Atlantic slavery would have been impossible), slaving zones, and local slavery regimes in growing contact with the globalizing commercial networks associated with European colonialism. One of the best examples of research into slavery and its interdependencies with colonial expansion is that of the diverse slaveries in North America, including northern Mexico and the Caribbean, explored in *Linking the Histories of Slavery*, edited by James Brooks and Bonnie Martin.²⁷

The Atlantic slaveries of the Third Plateau can be summarized into three distinct periods, in terms of the interrelation between migration, slaveries, and commodities. The first, or African-Iberian Atlantic, runs from around 1400 to 1640—with connections to the Indian Ocean from 1488, and from around 1570 to the Pacific Ocean, with emporia established around the globe (including, for example, Luanda and Manila). This saw the foundation of Atlantic forced migration for the production of tropical commodities throughout the colonial territories of the Americas (although centred upon the Caribbean), the prerequisite for which was the violent conversion of African captives into ‘talking commodities’ as enslaved people.

The ‘Second Atlantic’ ran from around 1640 to 1820. This had two main dimensions: a Protestant African-Northwest European Atlantic and a Catholic African-Iberian Southern Atlantic. There were many connections between the two, especially in the Caribbean and West Africa—although in some cases also in East Africa and the western Indian Ocean, as well as between East Asia and Mexico/Spanish America. Approximately eight million enslaved people were taken from Africa to the Americas during this period, in conjunction with production complexes that were increasingly global in their orientation. These included the extraction of minerals, especially American silver (although also gold, which was important in Africa, platinum, and precious stones),²⁸ iron, and copper; and European and American industrial goods, including those related to shipping (sails, metal parts, instruments, barrels, masts) as well as tools, weapons, and earthenware. These were dwarfed, however, by the commodity trade that was directly related to slavery. This included the value of the slaves as commodities in themselves, which (drawing on the research into the slave trade by David Eltis, Frank Lewis, David Richardson, Nicholas Draper, Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and others)²⁹ can be estimated as being in the region of two billion silver pesos over this period. But it also includes the extensive range of commodities produced by them: not least the plant products cultivated and processed using slave labour, and then commodified by colonial and ex-colonial elites—sugar, cacao, tobacco, indigo, coffee, cotton. There were also those commodities produced for and by the enslaved: food crops, drink, working and guard animals (cattle, horses, mules, dogs), food animals (chickens, goats, cattle, sheep), clothing, tools, ships, and the various infrastructural needs—such as harbours, barracks, and the transport and communication infrastructures between them. There was the

p. 317 leather and timber for boxes and barrels ↵ needed for transportation of the commodities, as well as textiles and fabrics—wool, linen, cotton, and the cloths produced from these.

The ‘Third African-Iberian hidden Atlantic’ of the nineteenth century was formed from some very large, almost global, ‘second slaveries’ and ‘slavery modernities’,³⁰ involving slave-based capitalisms.³¹ These were part of European expansion, colonialism, creolization, new types of mass migrations, and Western ‘war capitalism’,³² alongside the capital-multiplying space of the ‘hidden Atlantic’ (as in Cuba/Spain and Brazil/Portugal).³³ This period saw more than two million displaced people thrown into the illegal contraband trade, with forced migration from West and East Africa.

As a whole, these ‘Atlantics’ formed the Third Plateau of slave history—a history of intense forced migration over long distances. It is the only one of the plateaus of slavery that was built upon an entire commercial transport system (not only maritime, but also land-based).³⁴ The enslaved migrants (if they survived the journey, which of course many did not) often subsequently engaged in active resistance, flight, settling, transculturation, and the formation of new diasporic migrations (often themselves in connection with the slave trade).³⁵ The historiographical problem this presents is that there are hardly any self-representations by slaves while in slavery.³⁶ Yet this is also the only plateau that found a formal end in state-proclaimed abolitions and emancipations, as a result of which to this day there is no country where ownership of human bodies is legal—however much informal slaveries may persist.³⁷

The Fourth Plateau began around 1800, and thus overlaps with the Third—mainly through the ‘second slaveries’, ‘hidden Atlantic’, and the beginnings of world economy with connections to East Africa—and is the most complicated of the Plateaus.³⁸ It began in the period of Western abolitionism—first from England, the United States, and France (1808 to 1840), in tandem with developing racist discourses, and then the ‘new’ slaveries from 1840 to 1960.³⁹ It saw the ‘West’ become genuinely global in scope (with the expansion into India, the Indian Ocean and Africa). In the process, abolitionist rhetoric and policies to openly countenance slaveries turned to other forms through which slavery could persist albeit disguised. Slave emancipation did not end forced labour, which continued in some parts under the pretext of preserving local customs and traditions, as in China, South-East Asia, India, Persia, and other Islamic countries.⁴⁰

This was paralleled first by large-scale forced worker migrations within and from the Indian Ocean, China, and other Eastern hemisphere territories, such as the Dutch Indies, to the Western hemisphere and Australia.⁴¹ It included mixed forms of indentureship, free labour, and bond-slaveries, based on national-imperial ‘war capitalism’,⁴² as well as the formal or informal ‘second slaveries’. In effect, this plateau is akin to a ‘global second slavery’, in effect ‘no end after the end’.⁴³ It involved informalization following the abolition of former ‘big’ legal slaveries into smaller complexes of slaveries by another name—yet involving the same extremely hard work under the same production structures (plantations and others, in colonies or on colonial frontiers), often with even stronger asymmetric dependencies and the same low status for the nominally ex-slaves. This began with the practices under Toussaint Louverture in Saint-Domingue/Haiti around 1800 and colonial policies under British anti-slave trade pressure from around ↵ 1815, with the so-called emancipated slaves.⁴⁴ These officially ‘liberated’ but in reality informal state slaves had to work following their emancipation from slave vessels for seven more years under conditions that were often indistinguishable from slavery.⁴⁵

Akin to colonial slavery and involving the same hard labour (generally unskilled and physical, involving the hardest of routine jobs, and work on large projects like canals or railways), this was indirect commodification. Individuals could not be bought and sold in the marketplace, as were enslaved people before formal abolition, but, with the help of the state, they were sold by contract, or exchanged between elites, or colonial projects and armies. Something similar also happened with the so-called contract or indentured workers (‘coolies’),⁴⁶ whose contracts were also sold, sometimes with an advance payment being made by the buyer to the families of those so employed.⁴⁷

The Fifth and Sixth Plateaus comprise slaveries of women and children, collective colonial and state slaveries, and slaveries in prisons and camps (German concentration camps, Japanese prisoner camps, the Russian gulags, US jails, Chinese and North Korean camps), and the so-called modern slaveries from around 1970 on.⁴⁸ These are not discussed here, but, particularly since the 2003 Iraq war and the refugee crisis of the twenty-first century, it has been shown that slaveries continue to form part of migrations as human trafficking linked to informal commodification. Today's slaveries exist though without formal legal ownership in the sense of civil codes, as in 'Roman' law, customary law, or traditional Anglo-American case law.

Two examples illustrate how these different plateaus worked in historical reality, one from the sixteenth century and the other from around 1800. Atlantic slavery emerged in the sixteenth century, first in Africa, the Caribbean, and on some points of the South American coast. The Iberians and Genoese encountered First and Second Plateau slavery, mostly through capture, raids, killing, and enslavement of prisoners, or house slavery of the *caciques* and elites, on the islands and coasts around the Caribbean, and themselves carried out massive raids and transported slaves. They brought the first Black enslaved people and began smuggling enslaved *cativos* from the West African islands. From 1520 onwards, they also engaged in direct trade between Africa and the Caribbean,⁴⁹ when the Spanish crown forbade the enslavement of *indios* from the New World across the Atlantic to Europe—something that Columbus had already started—and introduced collective forms of strong asymmetrical dependency on site (*repartimiento* and *encomienda*). Despite the ban on this Atlantic dimension of Indian slavery, massive slave raids continued in the Caribbean. Although the *conquistadores* and first settlers were generally acting within the First and Second Plateaus, they tried to turn the enslaved into Atlantic commodities, just as the Portuguese turned *cativos* from Africa into Atlantic capital of human bodies, quasi-settlers, and talking commodities. However, this succeeded only partially and regionally in the Caribbean, as well as on frontiers and war zones in the expanding American colonies,⁵⁰ and was not yet permanent within the Third Plateau of Atlantic slavery.

p. 319 A striking example of such slavery, together with forced migration, is that of an indigenous woman from the Tocobaga people in today's Florida (near Tampa). The woman, whom the Spaniards named Madalena, was captured in 1539 during a raid by the Hernando de Soto expedition to Florida in 1539–1542. This was clearly captivity and raid slavery of the Second Plateau. De Soto sent Madalena to the household of his wife Inés de Bobadilla in Havana—another dimension of the Second plateau (informal domestic slavery). De Soto was killed on the Mississippi around 1542, and his widow took Madalena to Seville, where she continued to be an informal house slave within the emerging Third Plateau of Atlantic slavery.⁵¹ Inés de Bobadilla died in Seville in 1546, and Madalena returned to Havana, and as a translator she helped the Dominican monk Luis Cáncer (a close confidant of Bartolomé de las Casas) in the preparation of an expedition to today's Tampa Bay, where the Dominicans were trying to establish a mission. After serious conflicts with Tocobaga warriors, who killed Cáncer, Madalena disappeared from written sources in 1549. As Scott Cave has commented on her life history: 'Madalena is never formally called a slave, but her kidnapping, transshipment, and labour constituted slavery, in fact if not in name'.⁵² The same applies throughout global history to the connection between raid/war captivity and slavery, which has so far mostly been debated in connection with expanding empires and frontiers, as well as militaristic frontier societies against expanding empires.⁵³

The second example concerns the close observer and analyst Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), who visited Venezuela between 1799 and 1800, and Cuba in 1800/1801 and 1804.⁵⁴ Before travelling to the tropics from Europe, Humboldt had experienced Prussian serfdom and was familiar with the debates around the Third Plateau of Atlantic slavery—in the first instance with the British arguments about the slave trade. In Venezuela, he described the dynamic beginnings of 'second slavery' on the north coast of South America—an important dimension of the Third and Fourth Plateaus, which, as mentioned above, is based on capital accumulation in plantation areas from human bodies out of the slave trade as well as mass production and

trade/smuggling of commodified human bodies and products/commodities for and by the enslaved. In Cumaná, Humboldt observed the smuggling of slaves in the Caribbean periphery between the islands of different colonial powers,⁵⁵ and the establishment of new cocoa plantations as part of the Third Plateau. In Caracas and in the adjacent large plantation zones of the Aragua and Tuy valleys (sugar, coffee, cocoa, indigo, cotton, tobacco; also, cattle, horses, donkeys, and mules on cattle ranches, or *hatos*), he analyzed what was then the most modern ‘second slavery’ in the Spanish Empire.⁵⁶ On his travels south through the Orinoco plains (*llanos*), he took note of the slavery of *llaneros* (mostly people of colour with Indian mothers) and Black enslaved foremen in the *hatos*.⁵⁷ This can be considered a very old form of slavery as part of the Second Plateau (captured warriors in livestock farming), existing within the Third Plateau. On his boat trip down the Orinoco south to the Río Casiquiare, Humboldt saw the most varied forms of slavery among the indigenous peoples (First and Second Plateaus, most of them raid slaveries, especially of Caribs, who also supplied the Dutch and French in Suriname and Cayenne). And finally, Humboldt repeatedly refers to a kind of religious slavery in the Christian missions, which used slavery and the slave trade, as well as those enslaved ‘without slavery’—in other words, forms of the First and Second Plateaus on the frontiers of the Third Plateau. Similar to the *bandeirantes* and *entradas* in Brazil, the monks had developed raid tactics with larger groups of men from colonial societies (often also indigenous people of the mission, *mulatos*, *zambos*, and free blacks as well as special enslaved people) with which they raided areas of not yet subjugated peoples and tribes (*entradas*). There, women and children in particular were enslaved in order to add them to the indigenous peoples of the mission stations and territories, with the excuse of bringing them to Christianity.

Cases Studies from Cuba

The Spanish colony of Cuba had by the nineteenth century developed the most dynamic of second slaveries in its central western part. This undoubtedly formed part of the Third Plateau of Atlantic slavery and also of the global Fourth Plateau, and through forced migrations, also contained elements of the First and Second Plateaus within this. Mayas, Apaches, and Chichimecs from the northern regions of New Spain were abducted as raid slaves to Cuba.⁵⁸ From many other areas of the Caribbean (Saint-Domingue after 1791, Santo Domingo, Florida, and Louisiana, as well as South American *tierra firme*), slave owners fled to Cuba with enslaved people or tried to force their former enslaved in Cuba back into the Third Plateau.⁵⁹ Between 1840 and 1874, around 150,000 Chinese and 2,000 Yucatecan Mayas, Indians from Honduras and Costa Rica, and Black workers from Liberia were transported to Cuba.⁶⁰ As war and raid captives between slaves and indentured people (or bond-slaves), they effectively came from other plateaus into the Third and later Fourth Plateaus.

Slaves were frequently treated not just as commodities for sale but as a form of currency that furthered transactions between the three continents. This can be seen in the example of Jacob Faber, an American slave trader from Baltimore who was taking up residence in Cuba having worked as a *factor*, or trade agent, for the *factoría* (commercial centre for the Atlantic slave trade) on the Pongo River in today’s Guinea, north of Conacry. In 1815, Faber embarked on the slave ship *Junta de Sevilla* with six *muleques* (adolescent slaves) and a *negrita* (probably a young woman), to travel from Africa to Havana. To cover the cost of transportation, he paid 100 pesos per enslaved child to the consigner of the ship—another North American, Dr Samuel Galé, from Charleston. The trick with these semi-legal transports was that men like Faber did not run the risk of buying and losing ships, organizing the expedition, or buying food and other necessary supplies. Faber himself wrote about his human ‘currency’: ‘Serah to prime girl/Fárra to prime boy/Sabu to prime boy/Yattá to prime boy/Yorrá to prime boy/Sabudie to prime boy/Culipa to prime boy... in all seven’. He had chosen especially sought after and valuable child slaves and did not see fit to baptize them or give them ‘Christian’ names. He had taken the children as highly wanted commodities and capital to finance the cost of hotel and subsistence expenses in Havana, and to exchange some of the children for other

commodities or silver pesos. At the same time, travelling with slaves served as status capital, demonstrating his power, connections, and wealth.⁶¹ Faber's story is one example of how enslaved people were treated as a currency for commercial operations in both West Africa and the Atlantic World. The term '*pieza de Indias*' (or *peça* in Portuguese) was used as an accounting unit throughout the Iberian empires until around 1820. As Fernando Ortiz describes, a full *pieza* referred to a healthy man between 15 and 30 years old of at least a certain height, or a healthy, tall young woman. Older women (aged over 25 years old), along with adolescents and children, were valued as half or two-thirds of a *pieza*.⁶²

The particular challenge for historians is that there are very few historical sources in which the enslaved themselves 'talk', and even fewer examples of their self-representation. As Guno Jones has written, in looking at Dutch Transatlantic and Indian Ocean slavery: 'Impactful, horrific stories of many millions have disappeared into black holes of epistemological nothingness, and there is no way to retrieve them'.⁶³ Nevertheless, there are some examples of the 'talking' of the enslaved, which can be found in studies that have sought to uncover such hidden voices, as in the collection edited by Kathryn McKnight and Leo Garofalo, which seeks to make audible black narratives from the early modern Ibero-Atlantic world.⁶⁴ Even then, since a voice has to be written down in order to be usable as an identifiable source, and as few slaves would have had such an opportunity, mostly what can be found are what Paul Lovejoy has labelled 'freedom narratives'⁶⁵, written either after the manumission of the respective individual or following formal abolition of slavery.

Important to historians in this respect are legal sources: police and prosecutor archives, court cases, and the records of the *síndicos* and fiscals, who were state-appointed and funded lawyers responsible for negotiating on behalf of the enslaved, slave owners, and overseers.⁶⁶ Slaves and former slaves (or those facing the danger of re-enslavement of themselves or their children) looked for sympathetic people in the system to whom they spoke and who wrote down their words. Although the problem remains that such voices have been mediated, nevertheless the impression is given of such enslaved people talking through the writer. This can be seen in recent studies, such as that of Víctor Goldgel-Carballo drawing on the consular testimony of a man kidnapped into slavery in Cuba.⁶⁷

Two specific sources from Cuba provide examples in which the enslaved 'talk' to us by writing themselves. Although neither of these two sources had been subject to forced migration or the Atlantic slave trade, since both were born in Cuba as Creole house slaves, nevertheless they were 'talking commodities', facing the risk of being sold on by their respective owners. One of these, Juan Francisco Manzano, is very well known. Manzano, while still a slave in Cuba, wrote and recited poetry that the slave owners (and possibly his co-enslaved) liked to hear. His freedom was eventually purchased by a group of slave owners and writers, and he wrote his autobiography.⁶⁸ The other, by contrast, is much less known—a young slave in Havana, Margarito Blanco, who, with the written permission of his master, looked for work on the streets or in the harbour. What we know of him comes from his recorded testimony before the Military Commission in 1839: that he was twenty-five years old, a Creole slave, married, living in the Jesús María neighbourhood (near to the walls and harbour of Havana), and held two jobs, as a cook and a harbour worker. He had asked the authorities for permission to hold a nightly dance event with drums by the city walls.⁶⁹ Not only did Margarito speak as a 'talking commodity', he also left some texts written in his own hand on pieces of paper.⁷⁰ From other sources it seems that Margarito was a senior member of a mutualistic society (*asociación clandestina*)⁷¹, a religious group known in Cuba as *abakuá* or *ñáñigos*,⁷² in which he held the rank of *ocongo* or *mocongo*—considered to be the highest leader and warrior, responsible for making the sacred drum sound (which is considered the voice of the leopard). As well as functioning as 'labor contractors who used their position to provide favors and jobs to society members, but also to exploit them', the heads of the secret society were often required to sign contracts for their members in the ports.⁷³

Partly for this reason, such slaves and former slaves learned to read and write. But there were those who arrived as slaves from Africa, already proficient in Latin alphabetical script. This was the case with the Efik

people from the Cross River region between today's Nigeria and Cameroon, as well as the *ambakistas* or *ambacas* from the Kongo and Angola regions.⁷⁴ As very active slavers and merchants, in Africa they interacted with the mainly English-speaking slave traders and captains of European, Cuban, and North American slave ships.⁷⁵ As in all enslavement societies and slavery regimes, slave traders also lived dangerously—some of them were themselves enslaved and forced across the Atlantic as 'talking commodities'.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Each of the slavery plateaus described and the case studies provided demonstrate distinctive forms of commodification, related to a wide range of commodities—including the slaves themselves as 'talking commodities'.⁷⁷ This became clearly evidenced in Atlantic slavery from 1700 onwards in the Third Plateau, and more clearly still from the Fourth Plateau onwards, with the development of the capitalist '*Weltwirtschaft*' (global economy) and corresponding local slavery regimes of resources, production, and commerce.

Once the formal slave trade and slavery for Westerners were no longer allowed, there was a turn to the so-called coolie migration of contract or indentured labour. This has its own historiography, which is not dealt with here but, in the context of those such as Hugh Tinker who refer to this as the 'new system of slavery', calls for more comparative global research.⁷⁸ Contract labour was encouraged by the destruction of rural livelihoods in their places of origin, whether through local slavery regimes or the already existing colonialism, indirect or direct (such as in India), through wars or revolutions (as in China), active military colonial expansion (for example, on the western frontier of the United States, Australia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific islands).⁷⁹

Indentureship saw aggressive use of contracts in the legal expansion of abolition discourse (and the already old tradition of written contracts in China); human shipments bound for the Americas over longer distances than at the time of the transatlantic slave trade and often on the same ships used in the former slave trade;⁸⁰ and work on plantations and major infrastructure projects in the country of arrival for a specified time—in the case of Cuba for eight years, similar to the so-called *emancipados* or liberated slaves. Contracts could be sold and extended for the slightest offense, and penal sanctions could be imposed for breach of contract.⁸¹

After the abolition of slavery and with the US incursion into former Spanish colonies, there were also marked patterns of mass 'free' (recruited) labour migration across the Caribbean to work on post-slavery plantation areas and build roads, railways, and the Panama Canal.⁸² Globally, whether Chinese sent to Cuba, Angolans to Sao Tomé, or South Asians to Sri Lanka, this was a very constricting form of 'free' labour if not slavery in disguise.

Migration, slavery and slaving, and other forms of 'unfree' or 'semi-free' labour have, thus, been major issues in global history linked to commodification, creating the basis for asymmetrical dependencies, in communities, societies, and empire formation, and for the enrichment of persons, groups, and institutions, or getting central political positions for former marginalized elites. In the case of slavery, as this chapter has shown, different historical plateaus, which began with temporal and spatial specificity, have overlapped, and interacted, and—with the exception of the formal abolitions of the Third Plateau—have not ended to this day. The best-known and best-studied plateau is arguably that of Atlantic slavery, which resulted in empire building and colonial settlement, on the basis of commodity production by and in some instances for the enslaved, in the process turning slaves themselves into 'talking commodities'.⁸³

Deepening and broadening the plateau approach to encompass all forms of coerced labour may well contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the different ways in which commodified humans have been so fundamental globally, especially if avenues are explored to give them more of a voice. Without slavery, diverse slavery regimes, slave trade, and above all without enslaved people, many commodities would not have existed, and as people they deserve further research and debate. At the present stage of the debate around slavery, commodification, and development of the global economic system, it is probably best to solve it by understanding enslaved people as commodified ‘capital of human bodies’ and examining their role in the history of different capitalisms. Since around 1800, these capitalisms and their respective state forms have been networked with each other but also hierarchized through wars and politics.

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