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Slaving Vessel *Soleil* (*Tigre*): 1825 Voyage from Port of Mahe, Seychelles Islands to St. Augustin's Bay, Madagascar

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The Voyage and Capture of the *Soleil* (*Tigre*)

This paper addresses the French slave ship *Soleil* (also known as *Tigre*) which was condemned by the British government at the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century as part of the United Kingdom's enforcement of, and authority under, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, 1807. Information regarding the *Soleil's* departure and capture locations is obtained from documentation and correspondence of the Instance Court of Vice Admiralty contained in the Report Book HCA 35/8 of the *Slave Trade Advisor to the Treasury* (Report Book) held in the National Archives of the United Kingdom.¹ While the information in the Report Book does not reveal details regarding the origins and livelihoods of the slaves aboard the

1 The National Archives of the UK (TNA), HCA 35/8, pp 144-155.

Soleil before they were captured and their freedoms ended, nor their dispositions after the ship was seized and condemned by the British crown, I argue that the upheaval and detriment forced on their lives can be fairly envisioned based on available supporting information. Specifically, oral and written narratives from former slaves and other witnesses as well as statistical data regarding slave voyages during those centuries can provide a clarifying lens into a group of individuals that had native kinship and fictive networks and livelihoods torn apart and never to be rebuilt, and who were subjected to abhorrent truths about inhumanity as their individual freedoms were stolen.

The Brig *Soleil* (*Tigre*) was outfitted for slaves and departed from the Port of Mahe (sometimes spelled Mahi in the Report Book correspondence), a British port in the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean, east/southeast of the coast of Africa. The ship was seized by the British Royal Navy in May 1825 at St. Augustin's Bay on the southwest coast of the island of Madagascar, an estimated trip distance of 1,500 to 1,800 statutory miles. The Royal Navy ship that arrested and seized the *Soleil* at St. Augustin's Bay was the *Leven*, captained by William Fitzwilliam Owen, Esquire.² The record documents did not specify where the slaves were procured, if other than the Seychelles, nor does the documentation identify the slave ship's destination. The Record Book entries for *Soleil/Tigre* made no indication regarding any problems or other details of the capture, nor any physical information about the ship itself. According to the HCA entry book correspondence, the brig was "carried" to Port Louis on the Island of Mauritius, where proceedings were initiated in

2 The National Archives of the UK (TNA), HCA 35/8, pp 154-155.

the Vice Admiralty Court. This description may have meant that the ship was towed by the *Leven* around the south end of Madagascar Island and up the east coast of the island and then to Mauritius, however, further details to clarify the exact method of what was meant by carrying the slave ship were not disclosed.

Condemnation of the ship and its cargo was confirmed by the Instance Court of Vice Admiralty on July 28, 1825 under a declared lawful seizure process by the *Leven*. The Vice Admiralty court directed the *Soleil* and its cargo, i.e., furnishings, goods, wares, guns and tackle, to be sold and the proceeds divided into two equal portions: one to go to the British king, his heirs and successors, and the other portion to go to the officers and crew of the Royal Navy ship *Leven* as the bounty for capturing and bringing in the slave ship.³ The Record Book includes correspondence from *Leven*'s Captain Owen dated August 4, 1825, on behalf of Navy agent W. Joseph Woodhead for the officers, crew and captain, in which he confirms the lawful seizure and detainment of the *Soleil (Tigre)* at St. Augustin's Bay, Madagascar, with a cargo of 152 slaves on board, six of whom were deceased, and that the *Soleil* had been fitted out and equipped and dispatched from the Port of Mahi (Mahe) for the purpose of being in the slave trade, contrary to the legal statute (i.e., the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, 1807). A certificate from W. Archibald LeBlanc, Acting Collector of Customs at the Mauritius Vice Admiralty, confirms that as provided in Section 5.G.4.C.14 Captain Owen is entitled to the bounties of ten pounds per slave, or a total of 1,460 pounds for the 146 slaves that survived the journey, and that it may

3 Ibid., 150, 155.

be legal to compensate Owen for the deceased slaves as well. However, per William Rothery's report in March 1826, he posits that the application for the bounty payment is premature and advises the Lords Commissioners of the court to hold off on the bounty payment until the appeal period of ten months has elapsed and until an accounting of the vessel's proceeds is made.⁴ No correspondence regarding the completion of the final bounty payment was found in the HCA 35/8 book.

Record Book HCA 35/8 does not specify the names of the *Soleil's* captain or crew members. However, according to the court documents of the case proceedings the ship was navigating under the flag of Portugal when it was seized, causing some confusion. A letter of protest/declaration had been submitted to the judge by the French consular agent on behalf of parties interested in the ship and its cargo; it seems logical that the interested parties would have been the *Soleil's* captain and crew, although the HCA report book does not specify that information. Nonetheless, the correspondence and other evidence furnished by the parties through their Consul was reviewed by the judge who determined that although the ship had been flying the Portuguese flag, it was in fact property of French subjects and that the flag had been improperly used to "cover the transaction... and that no part of the vessel was Portuguese." The remaining evidence was examined by the judge and determined to be a vessel "fitted out, equipped and dispatched in and from the Port of Mahe ... for the purpose of being employed in the slave trade," and actually did engage in the slave trade, and "had at the time of its

4 TNA, HCA 35/8, pp 154-155.

seizure by the Leven a cargo of 152 (one hundred fifty two) persons kept as slaves, and as such was subject to confiscation and condemnation.”⁵

A “Schedule of Slaves” is contained in Record Book HCA 35/8 which states that a total of 152 slaves were on board when Soleil was captured at Madagascar. The slaves are assigned an individual identification number in the Schedule. There were 92 men (approximately 60% of the total group), 15 women (10%) and 45 children (30%); slavers considered anyone less than 10 years to be a child.⁶ The six slaves who had perished included: Martindie, a 15-year old man (No. 77), Pellallaye, a 9-year old boy (No. 120), Nancambie, a 21-year old woman (No. 145), Marroselah, a 37-year old man (No. 147), Teckerecoupia, a 20-year old man (No. 148), and Moussaloumah, a 14-year old man (No. 152).⁷ The 152 captives ranged in age from 6 to 37 years old, with the majority in their teenage years. Each slave had either a letter tattoo or a sear or scar on various locations on their bodies; the letters included S, SS, O, Z, FO, B, U, as well as several unique images as drawn in the Schedule. Since there were multiple slaves with the same letter tattoos, they may likely have been the brand made during the processing by the slavers to designate the receiving plantation or other slave ownership or destination. The 146 enslaved who survived, once emancipated as part of the condemnation proceedings, were delivered to the authorities in Port Louis on Mauritius as part of the British monarch’s half of the distributed proceeds according to the Record Book correspondence.⁸

5 TNA, HCA 35/8, pp 152-153.

6 Robert Harms, *The Diligent*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 247.

7 TNA, HCA 35/8, pp 145-150.

8 *Ibid.*,p 155.

The Voyage in the Context of the Euro-African Slave Trade

The voyage of the *Soleil* was not unusual having been initiated in the Indian Ocean islands before its seizure by the British Navy, however, that region was not one of the most common areas of departure for slaving vessels, as discussed subsequently. As related to the background of the overall slave trade, this voyage was one of about thirty-five thousand slave voyages during the period of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries in which approximately twelve million captives were taken from the continent of Africa to slaving plantations and other destinations in the Americas. A small number in the sixteenth century were taken to ports along the West African coast for domestic slave use there, however, the overwhelming majority of captives were transported west across the Atlantic Ocean to European colonies during these centuries.⁹

Historian Robert Harms provides a detailed look into one particular voyage in 1731-1732 of a French grain ship-turned slaving vessel from the journal of the crew's first lieutenant, Robert Durand in *The Diligent*. According to Harms, the slave trade was constantly in flux, changing continuously due to diverse national and local objectives.¹⁰ In the mid-fifteenth century, Portuguese explorer Joao Hernandes became familiar with the peoples along the West Coast of Africa and learned that there were existing markets there from which Europeans could obtain slaves and gold in exchange for European goods.

9 "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," Emory University, accessed December 5, 2017, http://www.slavevoyages.org/summarystatistics_

10 Harms, *The Diligent*, xiv.

The first slaves obtained by Portuguese traders were used in Portugal and Spain as servants to nobles.

The Portuguese then developed sugar plantations on two uninhabited islands off the coast of West Africa, Sao Tome and Principe, and slaves from Africa were used there as those plantations became the prototype for plantation economies in the Americas.¹¹ Christopher Columbus brought sugar cane to the Americas on his second voyage in 1493 where demand for African labor was high after the indigenous peoples suffered catastrophic death rates due to lack of immunity to European germs.¹²

European dominance in the slave trade changed over time, with shifting legal treaties and contracts that specified the country that would ship slaves to other European colonies. Initially, Portugal held sway in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and then in the seventeenth century the Dutch challenged the Portuguese, with the Dutch West India Company gaining the *assiento* treaty that gave them exclusive rights to transport slaves to Spanish and Dutch plantations.¹³ Britain and France got involved in the trade later in the seventeenth century to supply labor for their Caribbean colonies including Jamaica, Barbados, North America, and Saint-Domingue, Martinique, Guadalupe and French Guiana, respectively. The French did not import slaves to work in France because of a common law held over from the Roman era in which any slave that arrived in France was automatically free.¹⁴

11 Harms, *The Diligent*, xv.

12 Ibid., xiv-xv.

13 Ibid., xv.

14 Ibid., xv-xvi.

The source locations in Africa where people were captured varied over time, particularly in the inland areas. In the sixteenth century they were mostly taken from the Congo and Angola region. Captives were also taken from West Africa, particularly the Gold Coast, Senegambia, Bight of Benin and the Bight of Biafra, and the latter produced the majority of West African slaves in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁵ The eighteenth century was the peak of the transatlantic slave trade activity, with over 85% of the slaves transported to the New World during that period to serve what Harms describes as an enormous expansion in the trade. That century also saw a change in the type of commercial organization of the trade, from mostly government-sponsored monopoly companies, such as the Senegal Company, the Royal African Company and the Dutch West India Company, to allowance of privately-underwritten slavers. This shift was due largely to the major increase in demand for quantities of slaves in the New World plantations which the monopoly companies could not satisfy alone.¹⁶ According to Harms, there was no overarching global entity that drove the Atlantic slave trade because different local interests were at work, e.g., events and rivalries, on three continents that participated in slavery.¹⁷

Harms explains that for local governments investing in slaving it was seen as an economic venture, not a moral one. For example, for the City of Nantes, France, the home port of the subject ship, the *Diligent*, the mayor saw slave trading as an opportunity to ex-

15 Ibid., xvi.

16 Harms, *The Diligent*, xvii- xviii.

17 Ibid., xix.

pand international commerce for the city.¹⁸ Other reasons were used as justification for putting humans in bondage for sale. For example, the mayor of Nantes' view was that slavery was doing a service to rescue Africans from "error and idolatry," procuring them a path to salvation. In addition, being ignorant of African geography, the mayor determined that a fictional place he understood to be "Nigritie" was overpopulated such that relieving the area of some of the population through captivity would prevent others there from starvation.¹⁹ The economic driver behind the slave trade was reflected in years of debate between mercantilists and capitalists in the early eighteenth century. Competition between slaving nations increased as they were motivated to find more and more slaves to work the plantations and produce sugar, cotton, indigo and other goods, as the products the slaves created were the source of profits, not the slave trade itself.²⁰ The mercantilist view is exemplified by De Gaullitzer in the late seventeenth century who argued that, for the French, a "multitude of slaves is necessary to compete successfully with the English, Dutch and Portuguese in the production of plantation staples and in navigation."²¹ In the story of the *Diligent*, Harms describes the cargo and supplies that were loaded onto the ship in Vannes,

France which would have been typical for a slaving voyage such as the *Soleil* took. Cargo included materials to trade for African captives: several different types of cotton cloth textiles, cowry shells for currency (along the coast of West Africa), and crew supplies in-

18 Ibid., 13.

19 Ibid., 19-20.

20 Harms, *The Diligent*, 37.

21 Ibid., 37.

cluding guns, ammunition, brandy, smoking pipes, as well as Swedish iron, food stuffs, drinking water (rule of thumb would be three quarts of water per person/per day), wines, and firewood.²² Items specific for the slaves included a special stove and oven for cooking for the slaves' food during the Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean, ankle irons that locked two slaves together, muskets, pistols, swords, cannon balls and fuses for the cannons, and other weaponry in case of slave revolts and/or attacks by pirates. Food stuffs included hard biscuits, flour, fava beans, and minor amounts of ham and cheese. The beans were used to make a daily gruel for both the slaves and crew.²³

Whereas in the early era of the trade in the late fifteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries about twelve thousand slaves were imported by the Portuguese into the Gold Coast area of West Africa for domestic work there, by the eighteenth century, slaves were being exported to the Americas for foreign plantation work, a dramatic shift in slave trading operations.²⁴ Also in the eighteenth century, forts which were initially built in the prior century to store gold for cargo ships by the Dutch, British, and other European slaving countries became holding cells for slaves awaiting deportation.²⁵ Rival African empires vying among themselves for control and expansion in the interior regions behind the forts, e.g., the Asante, Whydah, and Dahomey kingdoms, traded captives for guns and ammunition from

22 No indication of the destination of the Soleil's slave voyage was noted in the Report Book, TNA, HCA 35/8, pp 142-161. However, if it had been destined to West Africa cowry shells may have been included in the cargo.

23 Harms, *The Diligent*, 82-83.

24 Ibid., 135.

25 Harms, *The Diligent*, 125,135.

Europeans. For example, around 1730 CE, the Dutch sold as many as 180,000 weapons and ammunition to African states in the Gold and Slave Coast areas.²⁶ As an example of local African participation in the transatlantic trade, the small kingdom of Whydah (not more than 100,000 people) played a significant part in exportation of captives from the West African coast in the early eighteenth century; Whydah reportedly exported between sixteen and twenty thousand captives, more than the other West African ports combined. Further, during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Whydah supplied over forty percent of all exported slaves during the transatlantic slave trade. The slaves that were acquired were often captives from local wars, or people selling relatives if they were poor and hungry, or those owing a debt.²⁷

Life for new slaves was shocking and disorienting as they were suddenly alienated from their familiar kinship groups and communities, becoming commodities for sale rather than unique human beings. Harms posits that the collection of slaves on any given day were likely to be from various ethnic groups, further infusing their sense of separation from familiar kin and kith.

During the initial process of being rounded up for holding prior to departure was the first time that most native Africans saw white people, e.g., the European slavers, which was additionally fear-inducing since local rumor said that whites were cannibalistic.²⁸ In addition, some slaves from the interior regions had never seen the ocean before being brought to the coastal slaving departure points, and,

26 Ibid.,135.

27 Ibid.,159, 246.

28 Ibid., 246-248.

therefore, were likely to also not know how to swim. Slavers preferred young captives for slave work, ten to fifteen years old, and some merchants would shave and polish with pumice stone captive adult males to make them appear as young as possible for the buyers. Regarding gender ratios, Harms describes a Portuguese slaver's opinion in the early eighteenth century of three males to one female as being preferred, not understanding the value of females for field work.²⁹

Captives underwent humiliating physical examinations prior to departure, being stripped naked and poked and prodded all around; they were then branded like livestock. They were imprisoned in warehouse-like structures at the forts, closely packed together as more and more slaves were processed and the holding rooms filled without sufficient ventilation. They were given two starch-laden meals per day without protein or fruit, contrary to their much more nutritious diets when they were free, which included generous amounts of meats and citrus. Aboard ship, a similar feeding routine was implemented, with a tasteless gruel-soup mixture of fava beans, millet, peas or flour served in buckets to the slaves twice a day, with very little variation or seasonings.

Therefore, the slaves on the *Diligent* found the gruel unpalatable to the degree that some refused to eat, for which they were physically punished. Scurvy invariably disabled or killed slaves aboard ship due to the limited diets which reserved any smaller amounts of provisioned proteins and fruits for the officers and crew, particularly when food stuff supplies dwindled due to extended trip lengths or bad weather.³⁰

29 Harms, *The Diligent*, 247, 252.

30 *Ibid.*, 250, 308, 317.

Slave ships were modified especially for transporting captives in order to give the crew the ability to implement as much control and subjugation as possible and to minimize rebellions. Using the changes made to the *Diligent* as an example, the following design modifications were likely to be the case for ships such as the *Soleil*, to create a type of prison ship, per Harms. Front and rear decks were partitioned off from each other to separate the women and men, passageways were narrowed, vertical barriers were installed both on the exterior and interior to separate the quarter deck from the main deck to provide a safe place for crew in case of a slave rebellion.³¹ Below the main deck a special slave deck was built where the slaves would sleep during the night; this deck was tantamount to a sardine can with slaves literally packed cheek-to-jowl, with individual spaces measuring about one foot wide and five feet long. Slaves either had to lie on their sides or sit folded with knees up depending on their space location on the deck. Smaller ships also aggravated the conditions on the slave deck by packing more slaves in a smaller lower deck space than on other ships.³²

No information regarding the size of the *Soleil (Tigre)* was indicated in the Record Book so even though other slaving vessels were known to have carried over 200 or 300 slaves, nonetheless, the tight quarters on the slave deck would have been torturous and difficult to endure for *Soleil's* 152 captives in transport.

31 Harms, *The Diligent*, 250-251.

32 *Ibid.*, 262-263, 305.

The discomfort of lying on rough boards in tight spaces on a crowded deck was aggravated by the stifling stench from hundreds of bodies in a compact space with little ventilation further exacerbated by a tropically warm climate. As one example of the abominable conditions they suffered with, the men were shackled in pairs so that when one moved the other had to as well, tripping over other captives and causing anger and frustration when they needed to get up to relieve themselves.³³

The multiple elements of poor diet, extreme discomfort below decks, illness, and inhumane conditions involved with transporting captive Africans, made worse by a lengthy journey across the Atlantic Ocean with no land in sight for two to three months, justifiably led to feelings of severe anger and acts of rebellion, extreme sadness and depression, mental instability, and thoughts of suicide among the slaves. As Harms notes, the mortality rate overall for the entire Atlantic slave trade during the first quarter of the eighteenth century was sixteen percent (16%) of the captives.³⁴ The *Soleil's* voyage lost 3.9% of the slave cargo by comparison, however, it was a shorter trip (at least to St. Augustine wherein it was seized by the British) than those that made complete journeys to their slaving destinations.

The most difficult portion of the slave voyages was the Middle Passage, the crossing of the Atlantic from African shores and offshore islands to plantation destinations in the Americas. According to data from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Database, the average trip through the

33 Ibid., 305-306.

34 Harms, *The Diligent*, 307, 317.

Middle Passage took sixty and one-half (60.5) days using a sample size of 7,069 voyages.³⁵

Slave Voyage Data Comparison

The data in Emory University's Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database accounts for voyages that reached American (South, North and Caribbean) and/or African slave destinations, and as such the data includes both embarkations from African regions of collection and disembarkations at slaving destinations. Therefore, the data pertaining to the number of slaves on each recorded ship among the approximately 35,000 voyages in the database represent full trips, unlike the ones such as the voyage of the *Soleil* which were interrupted and confiscated by the British prior to reaching the intended slave reception port in the Americas. However, this seminal database provides extremely valuable statistical information with which comparative analysis can be made for arrested voyages in terms of departure locations and routes, quantities of embarkations and timeframes by region and relative route levels, among other information.

The embarkation location of the *Soleil* out of the Seychelles Islands was one of the less frequent ports of departure for slave voyages during the first quarter of the nineteenth century; the majority of slave ships departed from West Central Africa and the Bight of Biafra. According to Emory University's slave voyage data, during the decade of 1821-1830 approximately 121,200 slaves embarked (were carried off) from the Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean Islands region out of an estimated total of 855,800 from all departure regions

35 "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," Emory University, accessed December 5, 2017, http://www.slavevoyages.org/summarystatistics_

that decade, or 14.2%

of the slave embarkations recorded for that ten year period.³⁶

Although the amount of slave embarkations from the South-east Africa and Indian Ocean Islands region (which includes the southeastern states of mainland Africa, Madagascar, the Seychelles and other small islands in the archipelago) shows as the third largest for that particular decade, many more embarkations came from West Central Africa with 442,000 slaves and the Bight of Biafra with 164,000 slaves. For comparison, the total number of slaves that were carried off during the entire slave trade (1501-1870 CE) is about 12,521,500 according to the database, thus, the embarkations from the region that included the *Soleil's* voyage between the Seychelles and Madagascar during that decade represented less than one percent (00.97%) of all of the slaving voyage embarkations documented to date. For another comparison, during the quarter-century period of 1800-1825, 182,338 slaves were carried off from the Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean Islands region, or 1.46% of all slave trade embarkations.³⁷ For the entire slave trade period of the beginning of the sixteenth to end of nineteenth centuries, roughly 543,000 slaves were carried off from the Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean Islands region, compared with the major embarkation regions of West Central Africa and St. Helena (5.7 million slaves),

Bight of Benin, Bight of Biafra and the Gold Coast (4.8 million) and Senegambia, Sierra Leone and the Windward Coast (1.5

36 "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," Emory University, accessed November 11 and December 5, 2017, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>.

37 Ibid.

million).³⁸

The *Soleil's* voyage was interrupted by the Royal Navy's seizure of the vessel and cargo off Madagascar and its ultimate destination was not specified in the report books, however, given the time period of its journey, it is most likely that its destination would have been one of the more frequent slave-landing locations per the database, which included southeast Brazil, the Americas, including Cuba and the Caribbean islands, and Sierra Leone. The highest number of slaves purchased in the Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean Islands (if *Soleil's* slaves were purchased in the area they embarked from) were delivered to southeast Brazil.³⁹ The ratio of men, women, and children on the *Soleil* was roughly consistent with the overall percentages for the entire slave trade, which was 64.6% male (*Soleil* 60% men), 14% women (*Soleil* 10% women) and 21% children (*Soleil* 30% children); the *Soleil's* slave population had more children and less women than the average.⁴⁰

Slave Experiences

The experiences of the slaves on board the *Soleil* would likely have been similar to those of other slaves during the era of the transatlantic slave trade, particularly while at sea and at work on plantations and other sites for slave owners. The following example is provided from a narrative by former slave Olaudah Equiano as documented in "Documenting the American South: the North American

38 "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," Emory University, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates/maps>.

39 "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," Emory University, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/search>.

40 Ibid.

Slave Narratives Database.”⁴¹ While the specifics of each slave’s experience are unique, the overarching oppression of the conditions of enslavement during this transatlantic era contains common elements that all those that found themselves enslaved would have likely experienced.

Olaudah Equiano was born in 1745 in Essaka, an interior region of sufficient distance from the capital of Benin such that he and his people were unfamiliar with white Europeans, the ocean, and ship-going. He was kidnapped from his home territory with his sister when he was eleven years old, and they were taken on a six to seven month-long arduous journey through various interior African states before arriving at an unnamed coastal embarkation point, possibly the Bight of Benin. He describes his horror when being brought aboard ship of seeing white Europeans for the first time and their treatment of his fellow slaves who were chained together while still in port. For example, those slaves that dared refuse to eat were punished by whipping, as were those who tried to jump overboard. Olaudah was also flogged for refusing to eat unfamiliar food stuffs from fearsome white men with red faces who he was certain would eat him. He describes the demeanor of the chained captives as sad and dejected.

Olaudah provides a thorough and detailed description of the extreme stench on the lower slave deck; he became sick from the

41 “Documenting the American South, the North American Slave Narratives Database,” University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, last modified December 4, 2017, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/chronautobio.html>, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/equiano1/equiano1.html>, 1-215.

smell and depressed from the crying of the other slaves forced to confinement there, sometimes for days at a time with no fresh air.

He says he had never seen or experienced such a manner of cruelty as those of the white crewmembers; for example, one slave was mercilessly flogged to the point that he died of the injuries and was tossed overboard. Olaudah's fear of the whites therefore increased and was constant, not only because of their inhuman treatment of the captives but also because of all of the unfamiliar things he was being exposed to that he could only think were caused by magic, such as seeing another ship sailing into the port with full sails up and stopping, seemingly unexplainably. Although he was spared being forced to stay below decks as often as most of the other slaves, apparently because he was perpetually sick from the stench and near suffocation compounded by the tropical heat, he nonetheless came to contemplate death as potentially preferable to end the misery of the conditions. Providing numerous examples of cruel and incomprehensible treatment of the slaves by the crew in his detailed life story, Olaudah told of an instance when the crew had caught a plentiful amount of fish for themselves and when there was some left over, they threw it overboard rather than give it to any of the captives; driven by hunger, some slaves tried to get a small piece or two for themselves for which they were flogged.

Olaudah describes the bewildering scene when they arrived at Barbados and were divided into groups or "parcels" in the slave yard for the buyers to choose from, and the rush and clamor of the buyers. Often, sibling slaves were divided up into separate groups for sale, never to be reconnected again, which caused much despair for

those family members who were separated. Olaudah was not sold in Barbados but taken on to Virginia to work at a plantation where there were no other Africans that he could communicate with, which left him grieving and miserable as he describes it. It was there that he saw for the first time a punishment tool on the slave cook, an iron muzzle, which held her jaw shut so that she could not eat or drink.

Olaudah spent five or six years working on merchant ships and military man-of-war vessels traveling to numerous countries under several different slave masters, during which time he was generally treated somewhat better than most slaves. One owner, Mr. King from Philadelphia, was a merchant and had Olaudah working on several different vessels wherein he added to his set of useful skills. This master treated him with kindness, which was one of a few such moments in his life when things were not as dire. But during his slave tenure he witnessed many horrendous treatments of other Black (referenced in Olaudah's narrative as Negro) slaves. He notes, for example, that it was common for slaves on Caribbean islands to be branded with their master's initials and weighed down with heavy iron hooks and chains around their necks. Instruments of torture such as the iron muzzle and thumb screws were applied for seemingly minor actions. An almost routine practice was to violate female slaves and rob them of their chastity, even children less than ten years old. In Monserrat he saw a Negro staked to the ground, cut multiple times and portions of his ears removed because he had purportedly connected with a common white prostitute, the irony of that instance heavy given that white men frequently took liberties with indentured Negro women. Many of these atrocities, he says,

drove slaves to seek death as a refuge from these intolerable acts.

The *Soleil's* Journey

The slaves on the *Soleil's* voyage did not experience the Middle Passage, but it was nonetheless a long journey from Port Mahe in the Seychelles to the southwest coast of Madagascar, roughly between 1,500 and 1,800 miles. After the Royal Navy arrested the ship, crew, and cargo of slaves, they were subsequently carried, or presumably towed, around the south point and up the east side of Madagascar, then northeast to the island of Mauritius, approximately another 1,500 miles, to reach the Vice Admiralty court of adjudication. Thus, the slaves endured at least 3,000 miles of ocean travel in cramped and despicable conditions, which would be essentially equivalent to experiencing the Middle Passage across the Atlantic, save for their stop-off at Madagascar. Although there are no details in the HCA 35/8 Record Book regarding the travel conditions, precise trip length, specifics of the *Soleil's* dimensions, nor during which portion(s) of the journey the six slaves perished, it can be postulated based on experiences described by former slaves who were aboard transatlantic slaving vessels such as *Olaudah Equiano* that the slaves on board the *Soleil* assuredly suffered similar extreme challenges of painful discomfort, illness, humiliation, perhaps retribution or even near-death punishments, depression, malfeasance, and other horrors of ship-board incarceration.

Had the *Soleil* not been captured by the British and condemned before completing the planned voyage, and had the slaves not been turned over to the authorities in Port Louis, the 146 souls

who survived the journey to Mauritius would likely have been subjected to the non-stop Atlantic crossing, and those that survive would have disembarked at the planned slaving port destination such as Bahia, Brazil, or even further north to the West Indies or beyond. They would have then begun lives of servitude under treatment as less than human chattel, under varying degrees of oppression, most land-bound on plantations producing sugar, cotton and other staples, while others such as Olaudah may have been sold to maritime masters. The slaves would not have been reunited with any kin or kith from their home states in Africa while they remained unfree slaves and thus would have had to create new networks in their new settings. Further, once the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act became law in 1807, the enforcement of the law through slave ship seizures by the British government did not mean that emancipated slaves were then returned to their homelands; rather, they were set to work as “free” workers on plantations or other work sites where slaves were used usually in the immediate area or region near the British court where the condemnation proceedings occurred. The government did not want to return the slaves to the closest home ports or ports of embarkation for concern that they would be recaptured and enslaved. The slaves on board the *Soleil* most certainly would never again know the lives they had before their kidnappings nor the lives they would have had in their homelands; they learned the unimaginable degrees to which inhumanity existed.

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