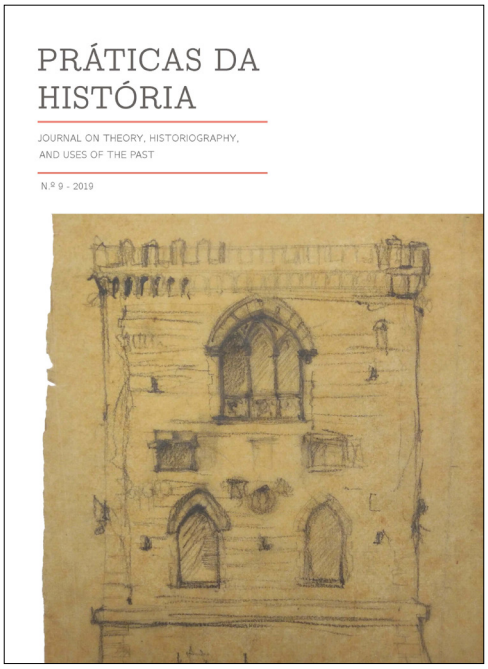


# Africanist Historiography from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean

## An interview with Edward Alpers

por Filipe Barradas Correia Castro Bastos

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# Africanist Historiography from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean: An Interview with Edward Alpers

Felipe Barradas Correia Castro Bastos*

## Foreword

Edward Alpers is an American historian who has dedicated himself to topics in African History since the 1960s. After graduating from Harvard University and pursuing his Ph.D. at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, he then moved onto studying a broader range of phenomena related to the connections – whether cultural, commercial or political – established between societies located along the Indian Ocean's shores. His scholarly diligence, however, never strayed far from political activism. For instance, over the course of his affiliation to the University College in Dar es Salaam as a lecturer from 1966 to 1968, he witnessed the momentous consequences of President Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* policies while fruitfully engaging with FRELIMO, one of the southern African liberation movements then exiled in Tanzania. Back in the United States, Professor Alpers combined his professorial duties at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) with participation in committees and boards interested in supporting and safeguarding the rights of underrepresented students while advocating for African liberation movements. Currently an emeritus Research Professor at UCLA, Professor Alpers has an extensive list of

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publications which firmly place him as an internationally-renowned reference for those interested in African and Indian Ocean studies.

On the occasion of his attendance as a keynoter at an international seminar held at University of Campinas (Unicamp) in Brazil,[1] Professor Alpers agreed to be interviewed in the University's *Casa do Professor Visitante* on March 15 2019. Our conversation flowed freely out of a series of questions aimed at exploring the implications of his research to contemporary historiography into richly documenting his academic trajectory, which makes a compelling – and indeed inspiring – case for the importance of combining historical scholarship with political awareness and activism. Thus, in an era increasingly marked by burgeoning political extremism, we believe that the interview timely draws attention to the importance of historical research in dispelling bigotry and uplifting the unrelenting force of human agency in fighting against oppressive circumstances.

The interview has been divided into five sections. In the first section, we talk about his early academic career and the development of his interests in African History, exploring along the way the main outlines of Africanist historiography during the 1960s. The second section is composed by his experiences in the agitated political life of late 1960s East Africa, narrating his relationships with scholars like Walter Rodney and liberation movements such as FRELIMO. The third section delves into his researches on the Indian Ocean World (IOW) and his activism in the United States, followed in the fourth section by a brief description of his current research interests and developments. The final section turns to thoughts on comparative perspectives regarding African societies and its relations to the Americas and the Indian Ocean World. This concluding section probes deeper into a number of topics brought up along the interview, namely the multiple historical meanings of freedom, enslavement and race, as well as

1 The Seminar was titled "Seminário Internacional África, Margens e Oceanos: Perspectivas de História Social", promoted by the University of Campinas and the University of Pennsylvania, and hosted by the Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences (IFCH-Unicamp) from March 13th to 15th, 2019.

the challenges of unraveling such meanings from a global perspective through historical research.

## 1. Academic beginnings: doing Africanist historiography in the 1960s

**Felipe Bastos**: *First of all, thank you for coming and accepting this interview proposal. I think we could start pretty straightforwardly by asking about your academic formation and career. So, why have you decided to pursue your college education in History?*

**Edward Alpers**: Well, a lot of History majors became so by default. I come from an academic family, both my parents were doctors; they both were academic doctors as well as practicing physicians. I had two older brothers, one of whom was in English literature, now deceased; the other is in academic medicine. They were six and ten years ahead of me in school. I was the family rebel; they were pre-rock-and-roll, while I am definitely rock-and-roll era, and so I basically just messed around in high school and really only got into Harvard, which is where I did my undergraduate degree, by the skin of my teeth and the fact that my father and both my brothers excelled at Harvard. So they accepted me as a... it wasn't really a legacy, but somebody who had potential, and I had good SAT scores. I started out pre-med because I had worked in my father's lab, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I did badly; I partied as much in my first year as I did in high school. And then, I sort of thought "maybe Anthropology, maybe History...", I think History always seemed to be, you know, the path of least resistance for Liberal Arts majors.

My junior year, so this is the Fall of 1961, I come back to Harvard, I'm looking at classes, and I see that there is a class in African history being given for the first time. At Harvard in those days, maybe still, you had to do a junior tutorial and then a senior tutorial which was your undergraduate thesis, and I never thought not to. So I went into the Department Office and I said "Do you think I could do my seminar with this guy who is teaching African History?" They said: "Well, go

ask him". So I went and it was Robert I. Rotberg, and Bob said to me "Sure!" And that is how I ended up concentrating in African History, and that changed me. From that point on, I took every class that Harvard offered on Africa. Rotberg gave a year-long lecture class, I did my junior tutorial all year with him, so that's two out of four classes; I also did a class in African politics, another in African economics, and one class of African Anthropology with Elizabeth Colson, who was visiting from Brandeis – the best class I ever had, and something else, probably U.S. History or Europe, something required for the major. And I went from being... I think, my first year I was bottom-corner of my class, as I had gotten a D in Biology, to getting all "As". And then I did my senior thesis the next year and I graduated with high honors, high honors in the major, high honors in my degree, and I published my first article out of my undergraduate thesis. [...]

Anyway, I always say that three things saved me: one was the woman that I am still married to after 55 years; we met the first day in class, so when I was being a very bad boy in the first year in college she basically kept me from, you know, doing what I shouldn't do. The second thing was rock-and-roll, which really is what got me interested in African American and African music. And the third thing was African History. I sort found out what you always tell children to do: "find something you are passionate about". I was passionate about it. And the other thing that made sense to me was that both my wife and I remember hearing a specific R&B song in the summer of 1954, which was also the year of "Brown vs. Board of Education". So we were very much part of this, you know, find, discovering black American culture and the Civil Rights movement. So in my freshman year, the only good thing I think I did other than meet my future wife, was to join a civil rights picket of Woolworth's in Boston, because although Woolworth's lunch counters were integrated in the North, in the South they were still segregated.

**F.B.**: *Yes, I was about to ask you not only about how your interests came to focus on African History, but also about the political circumstances of the sixties in the United States.*

**E.A.**: For me, it was a combination of culture, politics and being an activist. I mean, it's interesting how you put these things together. I actually shared a room with two classmates from high school in my first year, and then we went our separate ways; two of the guys in the next room were African American, one of them was actually a great quarter-miler at Boston Latin and he and I became friends. He was really into the jazz and black music... So, he would take me down into Roxbury, which was then a black neighborhood of Boston – Boston was a very racist city, still is – but that was a very different cultural experience for me. One of his roommates was Frank Bardacke, who was from an old communist family that had moved to San Diego. He only lasted one year at Harvard, where he made a great impression on those of us who knew him, and went on to UC Berkeley, where he became an important figure in radical student politics. He became a labor activist and community educator in Watsonville, in the Salinas Valley, California. Meeting these people had an impact on me, because I was basically from a liberal Jewish family, but I hadn't done anything in high school except mess around, so that was a really transforming experience.

**F.B.**: *It was a sort of a finding of purpose?*

**E.A.**: Right. And so, although I did not then understand why I got interested in African History, I knew that it was what I wanted to do. In fact, as I used to advise my undergraduates regularly, when they came to talk about their interests and, often, their confusion about what their families expected of them and what interested them, "You have to do what you love. If it feels good, even if you don't understand it" – because I didn't – "if it feels right, do it". So that was what I was doing basically. I took African History because I just loved studying it, and did really well in it. And the other thing is that I discovered that I loved doing research. [...] My senior thesis was about a weird American named Charles Chaillé Long from Prince George's County in Maryland, which was a border state, and although he was a Southern sympathizer and his brother had joined the Southern army, his family, I think, made him join the Union Army. Anyway, when he was demobilized after the Civil War was over, he ended up in the Ottoman Empire as one of these foreign soldiers

and ended up going into southern Sudan. He was with General Charles "Chinese" Gordon, and wrote about it. According to what Chaillé-Long wrote, Gordon was a secret drinker and that allegation was featured in Lytton Strachey's notorious book, *Eminent Victorians.*[2] Chaillé-Long traveled from Gondokoro, in South Sudan, to Buganda. He was the second European after Grant & Speke to enter that kingdom. So, he wrote a report about that trip to the Ottoman government in Egypt in French – I had taken French college, that is actually where I met my wife – and then he wrote a very peculiar book, which I have a first edition of, called *Central Africa: naked truths of naked people.* This was Dinka and Nuer country, among people who didn't wear any clothing. His last book was called *My life on Four Continents.* He ended up being the US postal representative to the Kingdom of Korea, you know, this is very strange stuff, but what was most fascinating to me was that he kept on re-telling his Central African adventures in each version. What he writes in 1912 is quite different from what he wrote in the 1870s – and of course he keeps on inflating his own role. So Chaillé-Long was the subject of my Harvard thesis and Robert Rotberg was my advisor. One of the two outside readers was William Langer, who was one of the founders of what became the Central Intelligence Agency during the Second World War. He was also one of the founders of Psychological History and so it was funny, my advisor kept on saying: "Don't do too much armchair psychoanalysis", which I knew nothing about, and then Langer said "You should say more about this guy!" So anyway, I took two central chapters out of that and wrote it up the summer that we moved to London, where I had been accepted at SOAS [...]. I also applied to both UCLA and Wisconsin, but Rotberg said: "Apply to SOAS". He actually did his DPhil in Imperial History at Oxford, and he pushed me to go to SOAS. That summer I wrote up the revised version, and before I knew it, in 1965, it was published in *The Uganda Journal.*

In London I thought that I was going to work with Roland Oliver because I had used his *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* in

2 Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918).

my thesis.[3] I had even started a summer course in German – that's all I've ever done with German. But Roland had me go around and talk to each of the African History faculty, no matter what their field, so I talked to Richard Gray and I really liked him. Richard had been Roland's student at Cambridge, I mean, we are very proximal generations, and I said "I think I would like to work with Richard Gray". Richard Gray had written about Southern Sudan, so I knew his work. He did a wonderful first book on the slave trade in southern Sudan in the nineteenth century and then he wrote a book that was part of a trilogy on race relations in the Central African (Rhodesian) Federation. Anyway, I went back to see Richard and he said: "how do you fell about learning Portuguese?", and I said "Why not?" I had French, I knew I didn't want to work on Uganda, or I thought I didn't. And so this shows how the historiography has changed: he said "Well, have a look at this", and he gave me his copy of the *International African Institute Ethnographic Survey of East-Central Africa* that Mary Tew did. Mary Tew, after she married, became Mary Douglas, the very great anthropologist and author of books like *Purity and Danger*.[4] And that is what I used to make my way into northern Mozambican commercial history. I read that, and then I started reading the major Portuguese historians of Mozambique. I studied Portuguese for one term at the Luso-Brazilian Council in London, then started reading Alexandre Lobato's many works; Teixeira Botelho, *História Militar e Política de Moçambique*, Banha de Andrade, *Relações do Moçambique Setecentista*, Carvalho Dias, these last two are primary documents! And they were just starting to publish the multi-volume *Documentação sobre os Portugueses na África Central*.

So the next thing I know, I'm giving a seminar at the end of my first year to the weekly African History seminar at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies on African trade in northern Mozambique. And in the process of preparing that paper, Richard Gray, who gave me many pieces of advice, but this was the very best he ever gave me:

3 Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952).

4 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*: *An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

[...] I went to him to ask him about something to do with what I was writing about and he said: "Well Ned, you know more about this than I do, and this is how I would approach it". And I walked out thinking: "he is right! I do", because [back then] no one writing about the history of Mozambique was really interested in African history. That first paper was the beginning of my Ph.D. thesis on the role of the Yao in African trade in northern Mozambique.[5] And it was a typical London topic. At London in the sixties there were basically two broad categories of thesis: "the role of trade in" and "the missionary factor in", with a few notable exceptions. Because that, of course, is what the Europeans in Africa wrote about. So if you could use the European archives, that is what determined your topic. I never set foot in Africa before I finished my dissertation.

**F.B.**: *The first time was in Dar es Salaam?*

**E.A.**: Yes, it was in Dar es Salaam! Anyway, in the summer of 1964 Annie and I went off to Lisbon, where I did some original work; it was a very interesting working in the archive. The Portuguese really weren't too concerned about your academic bona fides, but I had to go to the American Embassy before I could work in any archive and get a letter to show that I was not a communist or an agitator, because Portugal still allowed the United States to have an airbase in the Azores which the United States believed was strategically important. I worked the summer in Lisbon and we returned to London for my second year and continued to work in the Public Record Office which was then just a fifteen-minute-walk away in Chancery Lane, off High Holborn. The SOAS library had a lot of books, but didn't have any archival material – but I did a lot of work in the Public Record Office.

**F.B.**: *Now it's at Kew...*

**E.A.**: Now it's at Kew, and unless you stay in Kew, it's an hour on the District Line from central London. I also worked at the British Library (BL), which was then part of the British Museum, so that was

5 Edward Alpers, "The Role of the Yao in the Development of Trade in East-Central Africa 1698-c.1850" (PhD diss., University of London, 1966).

just a block away from SOAS – so I would go, and, you know, could pretend I was like Karl Marx sitting around in the reading room. The BL has a wonderful collection of Portuguese materials and additional manuscripts, lots of earlier stuff, but as I was doing background, so I was reading a lot of seventeenth and early eighteenth century material, although the focus of what became *Ivory and Slaves* was on the second half of the 18th.[6] So I finished whatever I was doing that year, and I had been passed on to Ph.D.; they just sort of tell you "you are no longer in the master's program", and then we went back to Portugal at the end of the term, in 1965, and spent the rest of the time through January 1966. And really that was when I amassed all this material, mostly in the *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*, but also the *Biblioteca do Palácio da Ajuda*, some in the *Torre do Tombo*. I also got to see the original manuscript of Frei Bartolomeu dos Mártires 1822 report on Mozambique, which Richard Gray arranged because he was an Anglo-Catholic, so he got me into the monastery where it was housed. [...] I also worked at the *Sociedade de Geografia*. In February we went to Paris and I spent a month, maybe six weeks, working in the *Archive National* – that's where I found a lot of the stuff that people now use for East Africa, the originals of Guillain's *Documents sur l'histoire de l'Afrique Orientale*... there are also a number of commercial reports by Loarer and a number of other people [these documents are now located in the ANOM in Aix-en-Provence], so then we went back to London. I had already written up one chapter and had one chapter that Richard said "this is not really a chapter", out of which I subsequently published an article about textiles.[7] Anyway, I am sitting down to write and Roland says, "we are having this conference on chronology"... It was a big thing event, [with] all the French scholars... "we'd like you to do a paper on the Monomotapa. You read Portuguese, you must, you know...", so I had to stop, and from zero, I wrote a paper which was subsequently published in *The Journal of African History*, and subsequently did a

6 Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*: *Changing Pattern of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Later Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

7 Edward Alpers, "Indian Textiles at Mozambique Island in the Mid-Eighteenth Century", *Textile History* 48, no. 1 (2017): 31–48.

separate chapter in *Aspects of Central African History*, but, you know, that was right when I was struggling with my thesis. I went to that conference, the first conference that I ever went to, and then I sat down to write my thesis every day. My wife would say, you know, "stop to eat!" And this was all writing by hand, so scissors and paste was a reality in editing, and then we had to take it to a typist; finally I said: "Richard, I've got so much material, I have done five chapters up to 1810". There was a chapter on the period to 1698 and the first half of the eighteenth century; and then three chapters that cover the rest of the century, because that is where all the documentation is, from 1752 on, fifty *caixas* or more. And Richard, another great piece of advice: he said "Well, Ned, you've got a perfectly good thesis. Just make the last chapter an epilogue". So this chapter, that is the longest chapter in *Ivory and Slaves*, the long nineteenth-century chapter, that was an epilogue. And in the Epilogue, the text is... I don't know how many words it is, but if you look at the pages in the thesis there will be, like, five lines of text, and then eleven lines of notes saying how many boxes I had consulted [laughs]. So I showed that I had done the work and then we sent the thesis off. I had a wonderful committee. My outside University of London reviewer was Charles Boxer, and I'd actually worked in Boxer's library, I met him, he had a document from the 1720s from Ibo that I was interested in knowing about – and George Shepherdson, from the University of Edinburgh... he was the co-author of *Independent African*, the first great book about John Chilembwe's rising in colonial Malawi. So it was a really distinguished committee. And then, by that time Walter [Rodney] and I had been nominated as the two London emissaries to the basically Oxbridge Dar es Salaam Department of History, because all of them were either Oxford or Cambridge...

**F.B.**: *Like Terence Ranger...*

**E.A.**: Ranger was from Oxford; archaeologist John Sutton was an undergraduate at Oxford, while he is one of the few PhDs from the former University of East Africa. John McCracken, John Iliffe, and John Lonsdale were all Cambridge products. And then the two Africans were Arnold Temu and Isaria Kimambo. They were still finishing up

their work. Arnold in Canada, Isaria at Northwestern. I think Isaria had already come back. And they were hiring by areas of expertise, so Terry [Ranger] did Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) and Southern Africa; John McCracken, whose last work before he died was his very fine history of Malawi, covered that part of Central Africa; John Lonsdale, of course, was a leader in Kenyan history; John Iliffe not only was the historian of Tanganyika-Tanzania, but knew German, so he'd use German sources. Walter was hired for West Africa, I was hired to do the Coast and Lusophone [Africa]... Mozambique, because I had studied Portuguese, as well as some Swahili, you know. So we all were there for various times, some for longer periods obviously, but some on short term contracts... Walter was just there for a year and a half, and I was there for two years.

## 2. University of Dar es Salaam, FRELIMO and political militancy

**F.B.**: *Yes, exactly. Following up on this thread about how you were affiliated as a lecturer at the University College, which is today the University of Dar es Salaam, for these two years, as you've mentioned, from 1966 to 1968, I would like to ask you, how would you describe the atmosphere at what was known as* The Hill *during and prior to those* Ujamaa[8] *years?*

**E.A.**: As you've probably heard, since you spent some time in Tanzania, it was so exciting! It was exciting because Nyerere was already a known thinker, and this is before *Ujamaa*, so he was just known for having a kind of a socialist vision. But Dar had a great History Department, and then there were other important social scientists. I was good friends with John Saul, who was there; Giovanni Arrighi, who was one

8 *Ujamaa* is a Swahili term translated by President Julius Nyerere as "familyhood", which described relations of fraternal solidarity seen by Nyerere as constitutive of African "traditional" societies. After a meeting of Tanzania National African Union's National Executive Committee in early 1967, in Arusha, a document entitled "Arusha Declaration" [*Azimio la Arusha*] set *Ujamaa* as the organizing principle for the socialist, independent and self-reliant Tanzanian nation. See: Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa*: *Essays on Socialism* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968).

of the great economists... it was an amazing place. And seminars, history seminars, you would just go from one seminar to another and they were fantastic. And everybody was on *The Hill*. *The Hill* was out there, back then in the middle of nowhere, the city has now grown beyond it. And it was just incredibly exciting. So here I was, a very young PhD, [...] I had my PhD at 25 [years old]; I was still very young, I had kind of progressive or liberal politics, but this cement mixer, or washing machine, whatever you want, or cyclone of activity and then *Ujamaa*. The Arusha Declaration happens, and I remember that we were all incredibly excited. There were people who were serious Marxists, like Saul and Arrighi. And in London [at SOAS], theory was not something historians did, you did data, you know? It was primary sources... So I was just like a sponge. That is where I really learned and read my Marx and found how I wanted to use it, and then there were a lot of politics at the university. The whole thing about developing a common course and education for revolution... so there were big pushes. There was a famous group of ten, and then there were two or three of us who stayed outside that group so that we could support them when they put their petitions forward, and the voices that came up, even though everybody knew us as sort of fellow travelers.

I remember also marching in support of the Arusha Declaration, and that there were two marches: one that was for workers and one that was for peasants. Clearly I wasn't a peasant [laughs], but I never thought of myself as a worker, you know? When you are an academic and you trained in a Western university you don't – now you might, but then... So I went down to Dar es Salaam, marched in the parade, and one of the people I marched next to was Ben Turok. Ben Turok was a South African anti-apartheid activist who had been in solitary confinement for three years, I think, in South Africa; he escaped from house arrest in a faked prisoner attendant's uniform, to go Tanzania through the ANC, and that is what he wore to march in support of the Arusha Declaration. Meanwhile, in Dar was the ANC headquarters-in-exile, well, Lusaka was, too, but there were ANC people there, FRELIMO was there, SWAPO was there... You know...

**F.B.**: *The Organization of African Union's Liberation Committee*[9] *was seated there...*

**E.A.**: Yeah, and these were all young guys. I mean, you got to know all of these people. If they knew your politics, you were hanging out with them politically and then socially, it was just, you know, the two most intensive years I had. We had our first child in Dar es Salaam, so that too... it was just an amazing time. And Tanzania was really wonderful. My Swahili then was pretty basic, I didn't need to use it. I learned it better when I went back to do fieldwork [in 1972-1973], but it was just fantastic then. And that is how I met many political friends. Walter [Rodney] I knew already, he was really my best friend. We were Richard Gray's first two students. Walter and I had been in Lisbon together at the same time, so we would see each other; we also knew Pat, who became his wife... [...] So, we knew Walter in Portugal and it was interesting talking to him there, I once asked, "Did you feel it was particularly racist?" He said "No, because I speak Portuguese. I was *civilizado*", but he lived in some kind of hostel that had a lot of Angolan students, so they were consequently being watched by PIDE. I mean, everybody was constantly being watched by PIDE. He defended his thesis about ten days before I did and went out to Dar. And there was a going-away house party that Richard, Annie and I attended. I think we were the only *wazungu*[10] there. [...]

**F.B.**: *And how did you get to FRELIMO and all these African freedom fighters and nationalists who were also engaged at many activities at* The Hill *in that time? Like Yoweri Museveni, Eduardo Mondlane...*

**E.A.**: So, Museveni I taught. I wasn't his tutor, but I lectured him. At Walter's going-away party [in 1967], which was down by the pool, the university pool, I remember he was dancing with my wife... now, Museveni as a student was very skinny, he was not the kind of big African leader he is now – and also he should have step down about twenty

9 Hilmi S. Yousuf, "The OAU and the African Liberation Movement", *Pakistan Horizon* 38, no. 4, (1985): 55–67.

10 *Wazungu* [singular: *mzungu*] is a Swahili noun used to indicate White/European/American people.

years ago, you know? But I remember he danced with Annie and said "You know how to remember my name? It's Mu-Seven-and-I!" [laughs]. So that is our story about Museveni! Walter really loved to dance, he was a great dancer.

But anyway, so one day we were shopping and we'd go to the market. There was an Ismaili green grocery, Alladina Jamal, where the *wazungu* and all the foreigners went, and they had very good fruits and vegetables. So I was standing there in line and there was a woman next to me and a small African man carrying a basket. I was just minding my own business when she turns to him and says, "*Temos cebolas*?", "Do we have onions?", and I looked at her and said in Portuguese, "É *uma Portuguesa*?" And she gave me this frosty look, she said: "No, I am not... who are you?" I said "I'm Ned Alpers, I am an American, I've just arrived...". *Acabamos o diálogo*, and that Sunday –that was probably Friday – we were in our flat at the university [...], there was a knock on the front door. And I open it up and was Eduardo Mondlane! So his network, which of course was vast, had already figured out who I was, that I was OK, that I wasn't CIA, and we became friends, so we would get invited regularly to FRELIMO parties and events and I met, you know, Marcelino dos Santos, Joaquim Chissano, and I was free to go to FRELIMO headquarters on Independence Avenue, which was next to this awful Chinese restaurant, but, you know, John Saul and I would be in there. Chissano... Chissano is a year older than I am. We're all age mates. We were all *jovens*. We were all in our mid-twenties ... the SWAPO had this whole thing of a lot of people who were actually being paid by CIA or somebody, you know, so you got sensitive to this. One of our best friends, closest friends in FRELIMO, Lourenço Mutaca, was a lovely guy who was sent to Sweden to study cooperatives or something like that. Anyway, he is somebody who got in trouble [he resigned after Uria Simango left FRELIMO in 1969]. Eventually, he came back, and after he was sent to reeducation camp, rejoined the party; so you know, you learn to be careful. Orthodoxy was of a certain sort in a group like FRELIMO, which of course was all over the place. It was far from a Marxist-Leninist party, that is, not until the Third Party Congress. In

any event, we got to know Janet. Interestingly, I have a handwritten note from Eduardo that tells me that I should see Lázaro Kavandame!

**F.B.**: *Oh really?*

**E.A.**: It is just a little note which I kept at UCLA in my papers, because I was interested in [...] he [Eduardo] learned about my work, and he said "oh, you should see this guy [Kavandame]". So I am not sure whether this shows that Eduardo was really, you know... they didn't really know what Kavandame was up to either. Not much later we'd go to these parties and you would chant "*Abaixo* to this", and "*Abaixo a Kavandame*" [laughs]. I was probably vetted through Herb [Herbert] Shore, who taught theater at the university, an old leftie who knew Eduardo from the States. Somehow I also got plugged into the local ANC folks, so I got friendly particularly with Jo Nhlanhla, who was one of the top fifty of the ANC; in 1994, in South Africa, the last time I saw him, he was ANC Intelligence Chief.

Subsequently, when I went back to Tanzania, we were back in 1972-73, we ended up being kicked out of our flat [in Morogoro] because of decentralization because they [the Tanzanian government] needed so many flats, so we stayed with a friend of ours John Sender; John is a South African development economist. So John and I used to play tennis in the former King George V tennis club, next to the old King George V Stadium – now the People's Stadium – with Joe Nhlanhla. So I would play tennis with Joe. The ANC had a military training camp outside Morogoro. I knew that, Joe knew that I knew that, we all knew that, but we never talked about it. We just played tennis with these huge ants that would crawl up your leg just as you're playing. So there were all these unwritten rules you learn and you know, for me, I was still young, you'd learn and it just seemed natural. I knew these were people I liked, I supported their politics, and when I came back to the States I got engaged right away with the liberation support movements; Southern African support movements, I was very active in the support of FRELIMO; very actively engaged in the Los Angeles premier of Bob Van Lierop's film "A Luta Continua" [in 1971]. We did tons of stuffs like that. And that was good because in Los Angeles that took me up with

the black community, which I never would have done or had any reason to do particularly, because the history I was doing was not really the history they were interested in [laughs], like here [Brazil], you know? So, that education was both theoretical and practical in terms of my personal growth, and that really made me an activist. So I consider my politics, other than my cynicism of old age, my politics are the same, but I am not as much an activist as I was. But through a long period of time I was. For example, my mother was a doctor, so it was easy for me to become a feminist and it wasn't hard for me to imagine women being in positions of knowledge and power, you know, so you learn these lessons. You learn some things from your academic advisors; you learn some things from your colleagues; but I couldn't have been in a better place for the first two years after my degree than in Dar es Salaam, it was just an amazing experience.

**F.B.**: *Nice, I can only imagine. And following also in this thread of your militancy in these contexts, I see that in your historiographical practice you have written articles on topics directly related to those tense political circumstances of the Mozambican independence in the 1970s, which we can consider to be at the heat of the moment.*[11] *Can they be read as a historian's duty to intervene insofar as manipulative interpretations of history – which do thrive in these polarized moments – are concerned?*

**E.A.**: Well, I don't know if you can do "*a* historian's'", but for *this* historian, it was! [laughs]. You know, so I would do these things. I wrote a chapter in the book on *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa* [1979], where I compared the constitutions of FRELIMO and MANU, well, I was told subsequently by Marcelino [dos Santos] one time when I was in Maputo, I think, with Allen and Bobbi [Barbara] Isaacman, we all went to see Marcelino and he said: "Oh yeah, that's a good piece", but then he said, "You know, but I wrote a lot of that MANU document"! I

11 Edward Alpers, "Ethnicity, Politics, and History in Mozambique", *Africa Today* 21, no. 4, (1974): 39– 52; and Edward Alpers, "The Struggle for Socialism in Mozambique", in *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa*: *A New Assessment*, ed. Carl Rosberg & Thomas Callaghy (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1979), 267–295.

had assumed that there was a kind of a left version or right, that these things were put together, so you learn things after the fact. Of course you can't assume that you've got everything right in anything, and the whole point of scholarship is to keep on poking into new areas. What graduate students do is: "Vansina was really wrong about this", "or Alpers", or whatever. But you know, you take your chances, but I felt very strongly that I would be asked to do these things.

It is interesting how the left is always "concerned". So there is a group called The Association of Concerned African Scholars [ACAS], and during the Vietnam era at UCLA there was a Concerned Faculty Group, which was, you know, a left committee, and then the conservative faculty formed a group called "The Also Concerned Faculty", which I though was actually wonderful [laughs]. I was engaged. Kathie Sheldon and I did a short piece in 1991 on Mozambique for ACAS (she had been my student), so I continued to do these things. I doubt that my colleagues paid much attention to this kind of activity, but some of them were published in, you know, university presses, but these were basically a kind of political activity. The other pieces I've written in the colonial period are about Islam. In fact, what's interesting about the work I am doing now is looking at a couple of decades after the end of slavery, and they are the first things that even take me to very beginning of the real colonial period, and of course in Cabo Delgado, the Portuguese were really not there because they sold the whole thing to the Nyassa Company. But of the stuff I've done on Islam, the one on "Islam in the service of colonialism"[12] was very much an engaged thing. So those are the kind of things which gave me the chance both to talk and to do some work about that. Really most of my forays into the modern period are either about teaching, or, for the most part, political. I did that piece on *Xiconhoca*,[13] – which I just had more fun doing – published in a volume in South Africa; that was for a conference; that

12 Edward Alpers, "Islam in the Service of Colonialism? Portuguese Strategy during the Armed Liberation Struggle in Mozambique", *Lusotopie*, no. 6, (1999): 165–184.

13 Edward Alpers, "'A Family of the State': Bureaucratic Impediments to Democratic Reform in Mozambique", in *African Democracy in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Jonathan Hyslop (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999), 122–138.

was the first time I went to South Africa, to one of the History Workshops at Wits in South Africa. But you know, for the most part, I am a nineteenth- and eighteenth-century guy! [laughs].

**F.B.**: *Nice, really nice. Still, whenever we have the opportunity, we should help these political movements and everything...*

**E.A.**: Oh, absolutely, you get asked to do things. You get asked to do things in different stages in your career depending on what's up and sort of how senior you are, how well-known you are, but at that time I'd have to think really hard, and look at my bibliography to say: "how did that happen?" But clearly anything that was around FRELIMO at that time was because I was really engaged with FRELIMO.

## 3. The "Indian Ocean World" in historiographical practice and academic activities in the United States

**F.B.**: *I see. And now going more into the theoretical, methodological implications of the studies of the Indian Ocean World for historiography, I would like to begin exploring these questions by asking how your investigation on the development of the trade relations in East-Central Africa lead you to consider broader topics in the Indian Ocean... Like those which took you to Goa in the 60s, and so on?*

**E.A.**: Well, that is the right question, clearly. I now know what took me into the Indian Ocean, but like a lot of things I wasn't conscious of it at the time, I mean, I didn't think about it as "I'm in the Indian Ocean". But if you are studying the ivory trade it was all in the hands of *Vaniya* [Gujarati Hindu merchants] based in Diu; it's all going to India in the 18th century, across the Indian Ocean. When I started studying the French slave trade [...] it took me out to the Mascarenes. They are in the middle of the Indian Ocean. So I just did that and then these things went on and on, the next thing I know, I am being asked to do stuff in Mauritius, and then...

One of the things you don't about is that I was always, unfortunately, a good committee person. I worked hard on committees. In 1985, the University of California was being pressured to divest from

South Africa, and I was one of the leaders of a faculty committee – actually a faculty and student committee at UCLA – to do this, and one of my colleagues, an Americanist, she was organizing the big auditorium where we would do this Teach-In. We were bringing Jennifer Davis out from the American Committee on Africa, I knew Jennifer for a long time, she was South African based in New York, and my colleague, Kitty [Kathryn Kish Sklar] a very great feminist historian, says to me, "I am on a search committee for the Dean of Honors program, would you be interested?", so I said I'd go talk to Annie, went home and talked to Annie, and said "what do you think?" She said, "Well, why not see what this is all about?" So, they set up a committee meeting like two days later, it was hot, it was in Spring, and I show up dressed up sort of like I am: sandals, kakis and I had a dashiki on, and in those days I'd also have beads and a lot of silver jewelry. But anyway, I go to this committee meeting and walk in and they ask me, "What do you know?", and I said, "I didn't even know that we had an Honors program". And about three days later they offered me the job. It was at that point a half-time position that had been started two years before. It seems that everybody else whom they'd interview previously had wanted to be the Dean, and here I came and I didn't know anything about it, but they liked my attitude so I became Dean of Honors.

And then two years later the Dean of the College asked me to take responsibility for undergraduate counseling and the orientation program in the summer and athletic counseling (which we did in the College), plus tutoring, and I said "OK". So suddenly my title became Dean of Honors and Undergraduate Programs and my job full-time. A year after that the College Dean asked if I would be willing to take over the Academic Advancement Program (AAP), which had come out of the post-Head Start Program for underrepresented students, which in those days was basically African American and Chicano, this was before there were many low income Central American and Southeast Asian (mostly Vietnamese) students at UCLA. And he said to me, "But I am concerned that you are not part of that group [i.e. underrepresented]", so I said to him, "Thirty years ago you and I would not

be part of the majority [at the university] either because we were both Jewish!" [laughs]. Then I said, "What matters is my politics". They know, the AAP people know my politics because I've been very visible [on campus], and so he told me, "just don't talk about mainstreaming AAP". He was very afraid of this: there was an official, Administration's history of AAP and then there was a "people's history", and he said: "Don't talk about mainstreaming AAP". So the first thing that I do when I am being introduced is this. I said, "I was told specifically..." [laughs], and this is my activism: "I was told specifically not to say that we are mainstreaming AAP, but in fact we are mainstreaming AAP, and I want AAP to change the direction of the mainstream". And it worked, you know? And so now the whole unit is called the Division of Undergraduate Education, but I set out the structure for it.

I did that for eleven years, and so there is a period where my publications – about a two or three-year period – where there is nothing, [...] and then we had all these fantastic graduate students entering our African History program. We had these great students coming in and I accepted that I was ready to come back to History, which I did in 1996, and I ended up working with many of these students, people like Roquinaldo [Ferreira], and José Curto. In fact, one of my former students, Nwando Achebe, Chinua Achebe's daughter, is giving the James S. Coleman Lecture at UCLA next month. So I returned to History. And then, ten years later, I became Chair of the department. And you know, things changed a bit, but this Indian Ocean stuff just grew like Topsy. And it was also because when I came back I had to review my lectures. When I was Dean I only taught seminars, again to show you how this works: I taught an Honors seminar once called Cultural Aspects – or something like that – of Apartheid South Africa, where I would have them read all of this township literature and plays, look at posters, South African-produced anti-apartheid visuals... all this kind of stuff. The whole point was that a situation of political oppression is often the richest period of cultural production. It's not that people are simply oppressed, it is [that] they fight back.

So that was some of the best teaching I ever did, I would have twenty unbelievably smart honor students, including some really inter-

esting South Africans who'd come to Los Angeles. But when I came back to my regular teaching in the department, at that point, I was starting to do stuff on the diaspora. That happened in 1997, there was a conference in Sweden and I did that piece on "the African Diaspora in northwest Indian Ocean". And then I started doing this stuff on *Siddis* and things like that, so one thing led to another and all of my various interests came together. So when I came back to the department I started teaching and we had just approved, after a couple of tries, an examination field at the PhD level in World History, nobody quite knew what to do with it, because none of us were Wallersteinian people, though we had all read the first, you know, after the first volume I was never very interested in reading the other stuff [laughs], whatever five or six volumes, or whatever the hell of it...

**F.B.**: *I think there were four.*

**E.A.**: Four, yeah. And I know Manny [Immanuel Wallerstein] because he was the first president of the Association of Concerned African Scholars, ACAS. Anyway, we established an upper-division lecture course on Topics in World History, so I taught one on the African Diaspora – or maybe I taught it in the African History series. But then I said "you know, I'd like to develop a course on the Indian Ocean". So in 2003 I started teaching this course, I taught probably five or six times before I retired and that was when I began writing *The Indian Ocean in World History.*[14] I had my lecture notes as my rough guide, and I had a paper that I had done for a conference on the Indian Ocean in 2002, that I co-organized with Allen Roberts, but we had never published anything from this huge conference. That version of the paper is up online, it has been for years because I gave it [a revised version is Chapter 1 of the Indian Ocean book] as a seminar someplace, anyway. And I wrote the book differently, so, coming back to teaching and having to... you know, there was no way I was going to teach my East African classes with the same lecture notes I had from before, and there had been ten years of writing; and I also taught our modern African history survey.

14 Edward Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

**F.B.**: *I see... And in this period of coming back to teaching, but also continuing or resuming your research and everything, what would you consider to be the biggest challenges which had to be tackled or surmounted in researching the Indian Ocean World? In a methodological sense, what kind of archives had to be consulted?*

**E.A.**: Well, I mean, as you could hear from all the conversations today [at the Unicamp conference], people have lots of opinions about the Atlantic, the South Atlantic, Brazil and Africa, and things like that. But basically allowing for the fact that if you are going to be an Africanist at least you should do, you know, some Kimbundu, or Kikongo, or something like that, a Ghanaian or a Nigerian language, or whatever. But basically you could do Atlantic history with European languages. It's nice if you know Danish, but... [laughs] you know, a sort of French, Portuguese, English, Spanish, it is not hard. [In the] Indian Ocean you really can't do unless you know at least one language [...] So here was Charles Boxer, you know, the great historian of Portuguese expansion. Boxer had been a military translator in the Second World War, he was an intelligence agent. He had fluent Chinese, fluent Japanese, read about ten European languages, but he didn't know any Indian languages, he didn't know any African languages, he was interested in those places, and so he used the resources he had. So one of the things was to make sure that the people who were interested in doing that were, you know, getting appropriate language training.

The first graduate student I had who'd done any Arabic was [Randall] 'Randy' Pouwels, who wrote that wonderful *Horn and Crescent*,[15] which is one of the key texts for medieval Swahili history, and he only used it a little, although he mainly used Swahili to conduct fieldwork in Lamu [Kenya]. When [Matthew] 'Matt' Hopper and this new generation came along... my graduate teaching was all focused on the Diaspora or on the Indian Ocean. I no longer taught a course on Portuguese Africa, or anything like that, you know, that was historical. But Matt did a first

15 Randall L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*: *Cultural change and traditional Islam on the East African coast*, 800-1900 (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

degree in History and then he went to Temple [Temple University in Philadelphia] – and he did an MA in World History. Then he came to UCLA in African Studies and then he did an MA in African Studies, and then we recruited them into the PhD program. And he did a lot of Swahili, but he also studied a lot of Arabic. In an interesting way, here there is his wonderful book *Slaves of One Master*,[16] which is about slavery in the Arabian Gulf, yet he hardly used Arabic because the sources are not in Arabic. The sources were primarily the British anti-slave trade sources. Someone who does use Arabic sources is Thomas McDow, whose *Buying Time*[17] is about the networks of family affiliation and debt of Omani traders in East Africa, also cross-trained linguistically. He and Matt actually met in Zanzibar earlier in their careers and decided to divide up: one would focus on African mainland and Matt decided he would focus on the Diaspora.

But there are a lot of people like that now. Ned Bertz at the University of Hawaii, who was cross-trained in Hindi and Swahili, and now he's learned Gujarat. There is a lot of training of people in this way, but also, the recognition that you need... [that] it's important to work collaboratively with a lot of people, so there is a lot of that that goes on. Another cross-trained person is Kerry Ward at Rice University; she studied at Michigan with both Southeast Asianists and Africanists, and the only Africanist who's done that is Nigel Worden, at Cape Town, who's learned Malay. So in my case, you know, when you are writing or teaching about the Indian Ocean you just learn a lot of stuff about Southeast Asia, and South China, everywhere else beyond your formal education that nobody trained you to do, but if you are trained as a professional, you will know how to do that. And if you read the languages, you know, a lot of the reading I do is in French, more so than in Portuguese – except for this Portuguese stuff I'm currently doing –, my French and English, occasionally a little Italian, I can fake a little German, but it's mainly French and English.

16 Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

17 Thomas F. McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018).

**F.B.**: *And we can see it is quite a collective enterprise that we are talking about. I would like to talk about this somewhat recent idea that calls for the importance of considering the "island factor" and "insularities" in history, which posits that communities and polities situated in places like the Antilles or early colonial enclaves in the coasts of Africa provided these privileged sites for investigating and understanding the implications of local agency and global phenomena.*[18] *I'd like to ask you how does this study of the IOW [Indian Ocean World], connected as it were through Zanzibar, Mozambique, Reunion, Mauritius and so forth, contributes to these developments in a general way.*

**E.A.**: Well, it's interesting. I mean, the obvious point to make about these islands from a perspective of African History is that islands are not in the mainland, so they were places that, if they had reasonable harbors – or even if they didn't because they'd have lighters go out – outsiders, whether they are Persians or Arabs, or Indians, or Portuguese, could go to them and only had to deal with the people who lived on the island. They didn't actually have to deal with people on the continent. So islands were safe havens in that way – Mombasa... all of these places – and we've known that. That's not new. But several things happened: islands were getting discovered by people other than people like me, Africanists and historians. One of my UCLA colleagues [Teshome Gabriel], an Ethiopian filmmaker and critic, edited a journal called *Emergences-Journal for the Study of Media and Composite Cultures*. He asked me, more than once, would I write something on islands? They were doing a special issue of emergences on islands. And this is often how I, I mean, I suppose I am sort of passive in this way. I hadn't thought of that, and I [said]: "Sure! I'll do something on islands", and then I write the "Island Factor" and it appears in *Emergences*[19] before I reprinted it in... Was it reprinted in *East Africa and the Indian Ocean World*?[20]

18 Edward Alpers & Burkhard Schnepel (eds.), *Connectivity in Motion*: *Island Hubs in the Indian Ocean World* (Palgrave Macmillan: Series in Indian Ocean World Studies, 2018).

19 Edward Alpers, "Indian Ocean Africa: The Island Factor", *Emergences*: *Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures* 10, no. 2 (2000): 373–386.

20 Edward Alpers, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean World* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009).

**F.B.**: *Yes! Chapter 3, I guess.*

**E.A.**: [Laughs] I have to remember my own bibliography! So then, Burkhard Schnepel, whom I did not know from Adam – he's interesting because he trained with a group who was initially working in Sudan, but then as a South Asianist. His first work is on South Sudan, then he did research in Orissa. But more recently he's being doing work on Mauritius on tourism and development so he had read some of my publications. Anyway, I saw a call for papers for a conference he was organizing [in 2015] as part of a big EU research project, and while he didn't know me, if you look at that call it's a one-paragraph statement and includes a reference to "Alpers' Island Factor". And I'm thinking, "hmm... how often am I sort of the centerpiece of a conference?" So I write him and I said "Gee, since you're citing me, I probably should do something!" [laughs]. So I did a paper on the Comoros and gave my paper at the conference in Halle, and at the end of the conference – it was done in part with Gwyn Campbell's "Indian Oceans: Connections" – in fact, at the lunch break, they asked me if I'd be willing to be a co-editor [of the conference papers]. Eventually, Burkhard and I co-edited *Connectivity in Motion: Island Hubs in the Indian Ocean World*. It made us think that islands, as you say, theoretically have come to occupy an interesting position because they're usually colonized, they have specific boundaries, they have different characteristics, you know, so that's really been an interesting experience. And that book is actually going to be translated into Chinese now.

The Gujarat volume came about similarly. It was sponsored by Darshak Itihad Nidhi, a Gujarati NGO that supports historical research; they've published things in Gujarati and in English and at that point they had organized two international conferences, both published in India. Michael Pearson had been the keynoter and co-editor of the second one, so I think they must have asked him, "Who should we get to do the next conference?" and Mike said, "Well, why don't you contact Ned Alpers?" Mike and I are old sort of friends and rivals, but he recommended me so I got contacted by Chhaya Goswami, a Kachchhi historian, and she asked, "Are you willing to do the keynote?", and you know, I replied [all of this by email], "and probably serve as co-editor,

too?" and she said, "Yes", and that's now been published, just coming out from OUP Delhi.[21] [...] Since I am not a South Asianist, I wondered what am I going to do as a keynoter? I decided that my best bet was to undertake an historiographical survey of Gujarat in the Indian Ocean. I first wrote about "Gujarat and East Africa" in 1976 [...] It was an interesting exercise for me, because in 1976, *Ivory and Slaves* was out, but in writing both the book and the Gujarat paper I had used Pearson's thesis, which I still have a copy of, because his first book, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*[22] had not yet come out. And that book is a very important intervention in Gujarat history because he argues at the time – [as] others had argued before – very strongly for the division that Indian states were not interested in the ocean trade. And that's been disputed subsequently, people have gone back and forth [on it], but it was a perfect starting point for me, and then I just read everything I could. It's actually a very long paper and took me a good hour and five minutes to deliver, and we were at the end of the day [laughs]. But the audience response was very positive, full as it was with historians of Gujarat. And now if you ask me [about the historiography of Gujarat and the Indian Ocean], you know, I'd have to go and read my own piece [laughs]. But now things just sort of happened, you know? Like this work with Daniel Domingues... in fact my invitation to here comes through, well, ok, comes from 'Roque', my [former] student Roquinaldo [Ferreira].

**F.B.**: *Ah, sure.*

**E.A.**: But my invitation to São Paulo comes from 'Cris' [Cristina] Wissenbach, whom I met in Maputo in 2017.

**F.B.:** *Oh, right. October, 2017?*

**E.A.**: Right. The *Oficina de História* conference.[23] It was on slavery, the legacy of slavery in Mozambique. And I also met Eugénia Rodrigues

21 Edward Alpers & Chhaya Goswami (eds.), *Transregional Trade and Traders: Situating Gujarat in the Indian Ocean from Early Times to 1900* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

22 Michael Naylor Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (University of California Press, 1976).

23 2nd Annual International Conference of the *Oficina de História* named "Slavery, Slave Trade and the Making of Mozambique", held at Fortaleza de Maputo on October 27-28, 2017.

there, she gave a different paper on her medical stuff, and she has now invited me to keynote at the "Eleventh Biannual Iberian African Studies" meeting in Lisbon in 2020. So, you know, that's how you get to meet people, you meet people and they say "I want you to come and...",

**F.B.**: *Oh yeah* [laughs].

**E.A.**: I mean, in my case I am getting invited to do keynotes and these people pay for me, so... You know, so that happened and then 'Roque' really wanted me, you know, this whole "let's expose Brazil to the Indian Ocean", but that's also what Eugenia wants me to do [in Lisbon]. I think the theme is "African Transits in a Global World" and she said "[Africanists] don't know anything about this in Portugal or Spain, about the eastern side". So I said "I'll do something that looks back at everything that has been written [about the Indian Ocean diaspora] since I started writing about this", and there's been a lot. You know, there are five or six books, seven books on *Siddis* in India, and there is stuff on other places. I just found some interesting articles by Dutch scholars about the *Jangi* [Africans] in Indonesia, so stuff is coming out all the time.

**F.B.**: *Yes, historiography has really kicked off.*

## 4. Current research interests, projects and developments: slaves and freedmen across the Indian Ocean World

**E.A.**: Yes, it really has. So, I now have a career more in that [role], but the project with Daniel is different. I gave a paper called "The Ibo Register" at the Maputo conference [2017]. Basically I was grappling with more than three thousand names [of registered *libertos*], a lot of data, and I'd first seen it when I'd last worked in archives in 2003 while I was looking for shipping stuff, Indian, Arab shipping and other economic stuff on the Comorian connection [with Mozambique]. And I saw this document, I looked at it and made a note of it, and I made a note of the summary and the numbers of *libertos* [written] on the front [of the file]. So I wanted to do some more work for that paper in 2017, so through one of Allen Isaacman's students I contacted Chapane Mu-

tiua, a Mozambican who is now finishing, we hope, his dissertation in Germany. He is a person who has provided more help and worked for other people, but anyway he was able to get approval to photograph the whole register, for which I paid, of course. Anyway, I gave that paper and at the end of it I said, you know, "I see this as a foundational document for the social history of the late nineteenth century in the Querimba Islands and Cape Delgado. I'm not going to do that work. That is a dissertation kind of work, I'm doing other things".

But in 2017 I also spent about a week in the archive, where I saw other registers, so I knew there were registers from Bazaruto, and from Lourenço Marques, and I said, "Somebody needs to go through these", maybe get a team of Mozambicans or something, digitize the stuff or something. And Daniel, who was also giving a paper [at the conference], came up to me and said "I'd be happy to work with you on this, it would be great, I'd like to come back to Maputo and everything", I said, "Great!" So we returned home, he goes back to Rice [University], I go back to Northern California and about, I don't know, seems like less than a month later he says "I've just applied for some grant that supports an initial digital project". "This is why", I said, "you work with young digital historians, they know what the hell they are doing!" [laughs]. And he got the grant, he was going to go to Mozambique, and I said, "OK, I still have research funds, I'll join you. I'd be working primarily on my stuff, but we can work together". And then I found a really nice hotel in Sommerschield with a little restaurant to it, and it's about a mile walk down to Avenida Julius Nyerere to the entrance of the university, and then you walk through the university to get to the AHM [*Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique*]. It was a good, I mean, every day I had a mile walk in each direction, so it was a very good exercise [laughs]. And as we did this, Daniel said "why don't we try doing a book together?" So we haven't finalized that, but that's what we have been doing, collecting all the slave and *liberto* registers [...] he has already put up a website, what's it called? "Oceans and Continents".[24]

24 Available at: https://resilientdh.org/projects/between-oceans-and-continents-the-registers-of-slaves-and-liberated-africans-from-mozambique-1850s-1870s/. Accessed on August 20, 2019.

**F.B.**: *I'll be looking forward to that.*

**E.A.**: So now we have all of the registers digitized, which makes it possible to read the documents in great detail, even the miniscule comments for some registers.

**F.B.**: *And in the digitized version, can you read them?*

**E.A.**: Yes, you can, if it's a high-quality digitized version. What I had originally, [the photographed copy] that Chapane did, was useful, but it turned out when I looked at the original during the week before the 2017 conference, I completely revised some of my paper, because I'd worked with the documents in its original. [Now we have all the registers and associated documents digitized.] Also, the University of Florida has digitized the first twelve official bulletins of Mozambique, 1854 to 1865, I think it is.

**F.B.**: *It's great to hear that.*

**E.A.**: Yes, but it's a pain to print out a photocopy; every time you time you want to do something, you have to put which page to start on, which page to end on – and it might be the same page – and you have to undo the thing that says "I'm going to do the whole document", so it's a slow process. I am looking at stuff for us, the publication of official notices, all the notices of the *libertos* in the [published accounts] of the *Junta Protectora dos Escravos e Libertos*, which has interesting notes. And I am also looking at all the shipping records, because I am doing a paper on the cattle trade from Madagascar and the Comoros to Mozambique for Burkhard [Schnepel]'s last conference in Berlin [on Indian Ocean cargoes][25]. That's one of the things I have in *Ivory and Slaves*, because Mozambique was always dependent on provisions from outside. Madagascar was a big source of hides in the nineteenth century, but also beef and cattle, live cattle.

So, I also have some interesting material from 1885 that involves *libertos* after they've been liberated, and some interesting stuff from

25 The International Conference is titled "Cargoes: The Materiality of Connectivity in Motion Across the Indian Ocean" and will be held by Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Berlin, on October 3-5, 2019. See: http://web.eth.mpg.de/data_export/events/8185/19_Prel_Programme_Cargoes.pdf. Accessed on August 20, 2019.

1894 when the Portuguese required Africans to get work permits, licenses, so there was one month when they'd sign up almost 1400 people. And some of the people, some of the *patrões*, who were at that point just their employers, are also [named] in the *registo de libertos*. Not a big surprise; they were slave-owners. And in one case I found a list of 20 names, three of whom might possibly have been *libertos*. So what I'm interested in, since there is a very strong evidence... there was a team from Italy that worked for about five or six years on the social analysis of Cabo Delgado, focusing on Ibo, and one of my good friends, Francesca Declich, a wonderful anthropologist – her first book[26] was *I bantu della Somalia*, [basically] the Bantu of Juba, in Somalia – was part of that team. So here I am wearing now my "Mogadishu Hat"! [laughs]. She has done a couple of great papers that show the legacy of slavery is very strong in Ibo. People know who were slaves. She has one example – actually, you will appreciate this – there is a line in one paper that mentions that the name of a former female slave was "*Zina-rakonani*", ["What is your name?"]. This is just "jina lake nani", "what's your name" in Swahili. I mean, it's more classic than your usual slave name, you know, Maria, or...

**F.B.**: *All the baptized names, and so...*

**E.A.**: ...or Saguate [Gift], which is obviously a slave name, but also Mubarak, which is a slave name. No good Muslim would be given the name "Blessed". If you look around the Arabic-speaking world there are a lot of these slave names, you didn't give them [to free people]. The real issue is what did it mean to be a *liberto*, and how quickly did that disappear? José [Curto] wrote something that comes out like: "This is an understudied topic, no one really looks at *libertos*". The other thing I learned, which was complete news to me, in revising this paper – that's why we have so much fun – is that there was a category of *libertos do estado* in Mozambique, about which no one has written [and I first encountered in a single source by a Portuguese traveler

26 Francesca Declich, *I Bantu della Somalia. Etnogenesi e rituali mviko* (Franco Angeli Edizioni, 2002).

who stopped at Mozambique]. So I started reading and discovered, as you Brazilian historians would know, that when Jesuits were kicked out of Brazil in 1759 they freed their slaves, and they made them all "*libertos do Estado*", who don't become free in Brazil until 1871, and they still had to work another five years for the State. So then I find in the *Boletim Geral* results of censuses in Inhambane, the first censuses registering slaves records "slaves and 55 *libertos*", five [of which were] *libertos individuais* and fifty "*do Estado*". So here was this category that nobody's ever recognized for Mozambique. I looked in Malyn Newitt's *History* and looked at all the things I could get my hands on and nobody ever writes about this. And in a way, it's really fascinating to find something like that, that just by turning over one stone basically, you find this other phenomenon. But the real issue is, you know, *libertos* rapidly – as James Duffy wrote years ago – became forced labor, or became migrant labor, or whatever.

I've done another piece that appeared in *Ufahamu*[27] on the last period of emigrant labor from Inhambane to Réunion, and that was fun doing because I first had [only] the French documentation, and then, with the help of Chapane, found the Portuguese documentation in the AHM. And that's great because there were like three shiploads that were sent, and one of the French [documents] is the naval medical report, like a 40-page report because they were concerned that the British believed it was just another form of slave trade, which is the title of the paper, and it records the whole process of how the people were interviewed, the questions they were asked. I gave that paper originally in Mauritius, and when I read the questions in French, everyone was laughing because the questions are very sophisticated. But from the Portuguese side, I've got a register of the 330 people – or whatever it was – who were recruited on the same ship. So I've got the [original] French ship materials, and I've got the [corresponding] Portuguese [documents], which is unbelievable.

27 Edward Alpers, "'Le caractère d'une traite d'esclaves déguisée' (the nature of a disguised slave trade)? Labor recruitment for La Réunion at Portuguese Mozambique, 1887-1889", *Ufahamu*: *A Journal of African Studies* 40, no. 1, (2018): 3–32.

**F.B.**: *And now you can cross them over.*

**E.A.**: A couple of those names were... one of the [recruits] had an English name. It is really sad. Patrick Harries really has helped me a lot [to understand the complexities of southern Mozambique at this period], just months before he died suddenly. I had stayed with him the first time I went to South Africa, and I remember leaving [and] he was marking papers the day I left, you know, stacks of papers in a dark room trying to get done [laughs]. I mean, I met him a couple of times afterwards, but I had only met his wife that one time, a really nice woman. So I wrote a note of condolence to her and said: "It's really sad, he was so much younger than I am", but she thanked me for writing and replied: "Patrick was really encouraged by your correspondence because he was worrying that he would go stale in retirement," but "he saw how active you are, and how interested you are in your work", so I felt really good about that. I still have a book to write about Tanzania from the fieldwork I've done. I've only published one article about that, in a sort of *Festschrift* for Isaria Kimambo.[28] So I have to go back. That's a book I really want to finish before I drop dead.

**F.B.**: *That's still going to take a long time, hopefully.*

**E.A.**: I hope so [laughs].

## 5. Some concluding thoughts: historiography from global perspectives and the multiple meanings of race, captivity and freedom

**F.B.**: *I think we could head towards a conclusion on what we are talking about – the freedmen, and slavery, and what this means in [a] global perspective. I think we could kickstart this by... well, when we actually get to grasp some important phenomena in modern African history, such as the rise and demise of trans-oceanic slave trade and these "la-*

28 Edward Alpers, "Kingalu mwana Shaha and political leadership in nineteenth-century eastern Tanzania", in *In Search of a Nation*: *Histories of Authority and Dissidence from Tanzania*, ed. Gregory H. Maddox & James L. Giblin (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 33–54.

*bor-driven imperial connections" you have written about,*[29] *it becomes clear that contemporary frontiers cannot serve as limits to historical knowledge.*

**E.A.**: No, no, not at all.

**F.B.**: *However, the imposition of these colonial regimes across the Atlantic, across the Indian Ocean, they all involved the creation and the reinforcement of these frontiers which required... I mean, it meant controlling the transit of people among them. So, what kind of effects these colonial interventions had to these diasporic communities?*

**E.A.**: Well, that's as a really good question. When we did this 2002 conference in UCLA, it was a huge conference, and I'd asked Vinay Lal, who's my colleague and teaches modern Indian history, he is Gujarati. I asked him if he'd summarize one set of papers, like eighteen papers, he was joking about that and he said "well, you know, up until now we have been talking about a kind of Indian Ocean with diarrhea. Now, when we got to the colonial period it's sort of a constipation" [laughs]. And it was about boundaries and borders. And in fact, subsequently when I taught my Indian Ocean class, when I got to that period and talked about colonialism, I would show a slide showing passports, things like that, and I said: "so, things have changed". Well, I mean, one thing changed: Africans stopped being [forcibly] exported, so that diaspora stops. It doesn't stop until the beginning of the twentieth century, but it stops. In the case of Mozambique, the colonial regime either forced people to grow cotton or to give them nothing [with which to pay taxes], so they went over to Tanganyika, or they were shipped off to South Africa, which explains why Mozambican historiography is mostly about South African migration or the liberation movement. Now, that's changing a little bit, but [until very recently] Benigna Zimba was the only historian at UEM [Eduardo Mondlane University] who cared about the slave trade.

29 Edward Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*: 118; and also: Edward Alpers, "To Seek a Better Life: The Implications of Migration from Mozambique to Tanganyika for Class Formation and Political Behavior", *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 18, no. 2 (1984): 367 – 388.

**F.B.**: *But those were the tropes.*

**E.A.**: Those were the tropes. To go to the South Africa, you might take a big ship and go down to Durban, or you could also go overland, and [eventually] by train...people went to Egoli, the Rand [to earn money]. What is interesting about what you are studying is that [northern Mozambique] was a border that wasn't policed, so people just wandered back and forth. And most borders weren't, but in East Africa, in British East Africa, they were very strictly Anglophone, there were common taxes, railroads, harbors and everything and that carried over into the initial years of independence, like the East African Airways, and then everybody had to have a "national this" or a "national that". So, you know, all the national airlines have gone bankrupt and now they are putting those things back together again. I mean, the biggest falling was in West Africa. You know what it took to place a telephone call from Côte d'Ivoire to Ghana? Telephone calls went from Abidjan to Paris, from Paris to London, and from London to Accra.

**F.B.**: *That makes no freaking sense.*

**E.A.**: No, of course not! And you look at the railroads too; the railroads all go from coastal ports [towards] inland, but do they connect across [boundaries]? The only line that connects across is from Saint Louis [Senegal], but that's going through all [former] French territory, so if you look at the [colonial] infrastructure of the twentieth century, what the colonial powers invested in, it was all extractive, you know, with certain amount of imports. And then of course the Portuguese leased out Niassa Province and Sofala and Manica Provinces for a long time.

**F.B.**: *Yes, and Mozambique has this same phenomenon, if you look at these corridors, Beira to Salisbury, and so forth. But I would like to ask you about these crucial aspects of these historical processes that are involved in studying the IOW which amounts to the creation of social and cultural identities with very clear trans-oceanic connotations, such as the* Shirazi *or the* Siddis. *What sort of comparative perspectives these case studies could elicit to historians working on this side of the Atlantic, with topics like, say, Afro-Brazilian religiosity?*

**E.A.**: Well, one area which I suppose now is an area of some contention, is the whole notion of Atlantic creoles. You know, that was what – I guess – Ira Berlin first did, and Jane Landers has written about it, that there were group of people who moved around the Atlantic, so you get this. What is interesting in the Indian Ocean – I touch upon this in *The Indian Ocean in World History* – teaching the Indian Ocean made me think of this: if you look at the Swahili Coast, if you look at the Malabar Coast, you look at the Coromandel Coast, you look at the coast of Southeast Asia, these are all areas where immigrants settled, usually Muslims from someplace else, and you can see what is happening. Once they settle, in some cases when they are intermarrying, they are becoming localized. If they don't intermarry or if they only stay within an endogenous group or something, then they take on a different kind of local meaning. So, look at the Malabar Coast: there is a whole group of people, the Muslim Mappilas, who married Hindu women and they've adopted matrilinearity, even though they are Muslims. But there is also another group of Yemenis who have stayed separate, brought their wives and everything, and so while they are part of the community, they are more separate.

And in the Swahili case... I used to tell my students: "What do you think sailors and traders, who are without their women, do when they are stuck when the monsoon doesn't allow them to go back? Well, you know, think: they party and they play music, and they hang out with the local women!" They take local wives...especially within Shia Islam [where] there is an actual format for this, but you know, you could do this, you could get married and divorced if you wanted to. This mixture occurs in East Africa, too. It is something I discuss in the piece about Kingalu mwana Shaha in the *Festschrift* for Kimambo. Kingalu was a Luguru whose father was from the coast. And he had family connections there and he was a Muslim, but his mother was Luguru. So he has all his ties and his claim to be the chief of Uluguru was through his mother, because they are matrilineal people. And you know, the Yao [of northern Mozambique] are matrilineal, but many become Muslims, so the same thing happens there. You know, traders coming in, they would have a

local family that they became part of or prominent in some way, but they also had family connections [at home] and they played these off in patrilateral and matrilateral ways. Each place, [each society], basically, figures out its own solution, and that is what is interesting.

It is very hard for people to grasp, though, this idea, but it is clear that in places like all along the coast that there are these integrated mechanisms and people have worked out their own solutions [to cultural difference]. And as they take place over time, they become accepted. And it is odd, I mean... the only time I was in Durban I had a Zulu friend who was an ANC guy, and he set me up to go out with some of his friends, and these were all guys who were trained as bankers. We went to a nightclub and I said "I want to hear some Mbaqanga". A couple of their lady friends were dancing a lot, and there were some Indians there, wearing *kurtas* and they were dancing with a big, high-stepping, you know? And then the Zulu guys said, "Look at these Indians, they are more Zulu than we are!" And I said that "you would never hear anybody in East Africa say that about any Indian", that they were more "African" in any way. And that is partly because the history [in East and South Africa] is different. I mean, the Indians were separate, but... I have now met some of the Makua from Durban, who have just gotten [their] land back. That Makua community, which is Muslim, came to Durban [as "liberated" slaves on British navy ships] and they were first called "Zanzibaris", but they were taken in by the Indian Muslims, they were helped. And so they have established their own... and now they are connected to Mozambique, a whole new outreach, it was fascinating to see that kind of thing. Anyway, I think that there certainly are comparative possibilities as far as the Atlantic world goes, you know, but it's really hard to think about as an American because it's all in the context of a dominant Europe in the Atlantic. Whereas, although it's certain that Euro-America was politically dominant in the colonial Indian Ocean world, culturally it's totally different, and British India isn't British anymore.

**F.B.**: *The color of the skin has very different meanings in those places.*

**E.A.**: Well, I'll tell you: my colleague Allen Roberts at UCLA, he's a very fine anthropologist, he and his late wife, herself an important

art historian, were part of an Indian Ocean project we had at UCLA. They had been at the University of Iowa before they came to UCLA, and they did a project with an Indianist colleague where they shot film in Zanzibar and southern India. There is a great moment in the video when they are interviewing descendants of a troop of African soldiers who had been recruited to Hyderabad by the last independent Sultan there. These guys now lived in a separated quarter in Hyderabad. So, in an interview with this one guy, he says "Jambo!" – everybody knows "Jambo"[30] – and they ask him "Where are you from?", and he says, "Africa". "Where in Africa?" and he says, "Mukalla". Do you know where Mukalla is? Al Mukalla is in Hadramawt [southern Yemen]. It was where their Sultan brought in African slave soldiers. I thought that was great. But the whole interview is conducted by an Indian woman who is their translator, who was from northern India. I had one of my very fine former graduate students, a Tamil woman born in America, and she is very dark. And she watched that film and she said: "I bet, if I'd been doing the translation, I could have gotten more out of these people". Because color matters so much in India [and Africans are looked down upon] that she felt that the translator wasn't presenting, not so much the words, but the whole kind of feel for things.

I've done a chapter in a book titled *Africa and Its Diasporas* co-edited by Behnaz Mirzai and Bonny Ibhawoh, that was the keynoter for the conference they organized that was part of the UNESCO "Slave Route Project." So I gave a paper [which] is called "From Bilal to Barack",[31] building on the subtitle of the conference, which was "Recognition, Power, and Equity". In it I go from Arabia to India to the United States. This was right after the killings [of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri] [...] you know, where young men were shot [by

30 "Jambo", or in modern standardized Swahili *hujambo* [sing.] or *hamjambo* [pl.], are common greetings formed by contracting the sentences *huna jambo/hamna jambo* – literally "do you have no problems?" – to convey the meaning of asking "how are you?".

31 Edward Alpers, "From Bilal to Barack: What are the implications for recognition, empowerment and equity in the African diaspora?" in *Africa and Its Diasporas*: *Rethinking Struggles for Recognition and Empowerment*, ed. Mirzai & Bonny Ibhawoh, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2019), 15-38.

the police]. And I was basically saying: "Black people can get positions of authority, but that doesn't mean that black people are treated well in the societies they come from". It is the first time I'd ever used references from blogs and online chats. The stuff on Arabia was fascinating; people wrote: "Oh God, everybody, every time something happens they'll say 'Bilal this', and 'Bilal that'. My family has lived here for four generations and we're still treated like trash". And India, of course, had terrible stuff. And this was noted... there is actually a fascinating piece that was done by one of the early Indian Africanists, like in 1970, it was published in *African Affairs*, where he says openly that "Indians have a problem with this". And so, there were a few people like [Kenyan politician] Oginga Odinga who visited India, but there was very little movement in that direction. And African students, as they do in China, they really have a hard time. Indians not only don't like black people, they don't like Africans.

**F.B.**: *Yes, I heard about problems with Nigerian students in Delhi....*

**E.A.**: Yes, and you know, people believe "they are all drug dealers", some of them probably were, but you know, just like in South Africa, with Nigerians and Congolese... but [obviously] not all of them. I feel it is important for me to write these things even if somebody in India doesn't like what I write, if they ever read it, because people need to know this, you know? So it's my little bit of activist leftover [laughs].

**F.B.**: *Yes, and you can definitely take the heat* [laughs]. *And so, I think we could wrap it up [with one last question]. Well, what can the study of key aspects of the systems of slavery and the struggles for freedom in the Indian Ocean World, such as the characteristics and the extent of maroon activity, tell us about the resistance and agency of enslaved and freedmen in contexts marked by African Diaspora, which is a heated topic of debate which really drove social history in the Americas?*

**E.A.**: No, no, I think there is nothing different about the Indian Ocean. I mean, people get enslaved, not just Africans, wherever people get enslaved they are going... you know, some of them will submit, and some of them resist, sort of like the Holocaust. There will be many different

forms of resistance. They take cultural forms, like songs, songs that the masters don't understand. That's the wonderful thing that, you know, Landeg White and Leroy Vail did years ago. There is a lot of material for that, I've written some about that kind of thing. They'll run away; they'll form families; they'll find ways; they'll try to perfect the skills they know so that they become indispensable artisans, bricklayers, shoemakers... you know, all these kinds of things. They'll find ways to establish dignity. They will – and undoubtedly that is the same all over, certainly everywhere in the African Diaspora – express their joys and pains through music and dance. Sometimes they have to do it in a way, in private, [as] some of them in Brazil... or sometimes they do it upfront. They do it in the context of their Christianity, otherwise there wouldn't be any Candomblé.

But the same thing exists elsewhere. And you know, eventually after freedom they do it in the context of the modern Catholic church. We have African drumming in the church and things like that. Once people get educated, they'll do it through literature, and there are memoirs. They'll do it through their religions – and that part, that is different. I mean, it's clear that one of the things I said, and I think it is still true broadly, is that there were no "Equianos" and "Duboises" and "Frederick Douglasses" in the Indian Ocean World, because all the people who wrote were freed slaves. I mean, it's a very different... and they wrote as Christians; we have all used that material, like the stories from [the Anglican boys' school at] Kiungani [Zanzibar], for example. But, you know, Islam doesn't have a tradition of writing about yourself. If you are really important, you become a Sufi master or something like that, people write hagiographies about you. But if you were a learned person you could move up through the ranks of the Sheikhs and you could become quite important in the context of your religion and your faith. And you could also trade – certain people did that. You could also, in the case of Habshis ... you know, if you were enslaved as a domestic servant, okay, you could become a concubine, and if you had a child, you would be freed [just] as your child. If you were a eunuch, you're not so lucky about having children, but you might become very

powerful. If you were enslaved as a soldier and were lucky enough to live, and you're a good soldier, you might end up like Malik Ambar, you know, a really important figure. So, one would have to ask... you know, wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to ask a living Malik Ambar "do you ever think about having been enslaved? I mean, what does that mean to you? Do you miss Ethiopia?"

**F.B.**: *[or] "What does it mean to be free or enslaved?"*

**E.A.**: What does it mean to be free? I don't know if you have seen it, there is a very good Oxford short biography of Malik Ambar [written] by Omar Ali, who is Deccani, [and] teaches at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has done research in Ethiopia as well as in India, which is very good. But you can't ask that question, I mean, you can't get an answer to that question. But there are some things... if you have a look at some quotes in my "African Diaspora in the Northwest Indian Ocean" article,[32] there is an account from the Hadramawt, actually Mukalla, by the British officer who was sent up there in the 1930s to finally bring it actually under British control. And he meets an old African soldier, asks where he is from, and he is a Ngoni, from southern Tanzania. So the Brit asks: "Oh, would you want to come back?" and he [the soldier] said, "No! They would just enslave me again!" So, once you've been enslaved, basically, maybe your family has been killed... but the question of what it means to be free is... God knows that is complex, I don't have the answer to that question! [laughs].

**F.B.**: *Absolutely not! I remember reading texts of Suzanne Miers[33] and everything [back] in college and, well, she was discussing about these eunuchs, about these mamelukes, these slaves that eventually got to high places and they were better off than [most] free people from those societies. These are complex questions for us to think about here in the Americas.*

32 Edward Alpers, "The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean: reconsideration of an old problem, new directions for research", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa & the Middle East* 17, no. 2 (1997): 62–81.

33 Suzanne Miers, "Slavery: A Question of Definition", *Slavery & Abolition*: *A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 24, no. 2 (2003): 1–16.

**E.A.**: I agree, especially since we are all operating in a reformed European notion, this post-Reformation notion of what freedom means in democratic societies, whatever that means. What does our freedom mean? Well, these are complex issues.

**F.B.**: *These are complex issues. Well, professor, thank you so much. It was a very, very good conversation.*

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