Similarities and Differences Between the Diasporas

The African diaspora in the New World and the African and Asian diasporas in the Indian Ocean vary in a few essential ways. The true definition of their slavery or forced labor explained their lifestyle and living conditions. The conditions in which different diasporas occur decides the number of differences and similarities between them. Going to the New World held its own distinct conditions compared to any diaspora into the Indian Ocean for a few reasons. The African and Asian diasporas in the Indian Ocean held quite a few similarities and affected similar regions over the same general period of time. Overall there were many defining factors of both the New World diaspora and the diasporas into the Indian Ocean.

The definition of slavery really varied from region to region, as well as the classification or type of slavery. In the New World, Africans were mostly caught and captured into being slaves for the New World. Being a slave in the New World meant that you would be a slave for life and any children that you had would be born into the same slavery. This kind of slavery of Africans is what most Americans think of when the word “slavery” comes up. Typically slaves in the New World worked on plantations and farms, but were also in charge of many domestic duties. This sort of system of slavery was called a “closed slave system”. In the Indian Ocean the most common type of slavery was the “open slave system”, which means that slaves are only slaves until they can gain an identity by being Muslim or can reach an identity in a similar way. Slavery in the open system typically lasted between three to ten years and averaged at around seven years.
Along with the “open slave system” there was also surfs, pawns, debt bondage, and corvee labor that occurred regularly in the Indian Ocean. These types of forced labor or slavery similarly occurred in the African and Asian diasporas in the Indian Ocean. The duty of these workers was often plantation labor and domestic duties, but occasionally could be used in military forces. The definition of slavery and type of slavery played a big part in how these different diasporas occurred.

The diasporas that occurred from both India and Africa into the Indian Ocean affected each other as they were both in the same overall region. The island of Mauritius was the center of a great deal of diasporas in the Indian Ocean. Under French rule of Mauritius there were African slaves from Mozambique and Madagascar that usually carried out plantation labor and some domestic duties, this is the same sort of labor that happened in the New World. Similarly the conditions of Mauritius for slaves mirror that of the New World in terms of how slaves were treated, often times they had poor living conditions and were whipped and beaten. British rule then took over in about 1810 and the anti-slave laws were passed in about 1820. Even with anti-slave laws these huge diasporas of people did not stop. Between 1834-1874 there were 400,000 Indians that were brought to Mauritius as indentured slaves. Prior to bringing Indians over the Chinese were brought over but it did not work out as well due to cultural disagreements. Indentured workers were cheaper to upkeep than slaves, many of these indentured workers were given a salary but essentially sold themselves away under labor contracts. As it was fairly common in the Indian Ocean, there was a fair amount of marronage that occurred, although typically petite marronage, which were mild rebellions. After an indentured laborer finished their contract, some of them became “sirdars”, which were
recruiters for getting more indentured laborers. These sirdars gained political power. In the New World it was impossible for slaves to gain any political power or to rid themselves of slavery unless their masters granted them the right. The African and Asian diasporas into the Indian Ocean played into each other, while the diaspora from Africa to the New World was much more separate.