

SLAVERY BY ANY OTHER NAME

Reconsiderations in Southern African History

Richard Elphick, Editor

SLAVERY BY ANY OTHER NAME

African Life under Company Rule
in Colonial Mozambique

Eric Allina

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Preface

Teaching English in western Kenya more than twenty years ago, I encountered for the first time a hundred-year old belief about race and work in Africa. Michael Lubale, a seventeen-year-old Kenyan, showing me the building site for his future house, explained that he would soon reach the age to move out of the dwelling he shared with his younger brothers and into his own on the family compound. I offered to lend a hand in construction, and with a mischievous smile, Michael looked at me and asked, “Can *mzungu* dig?” I soon learned that, notwithstanding the smile he flashed, his question was a sober one, for I lacked the knowledge and ability to engage competently in many tasks that might be called “unskilled” labor, including the vital matter of hauling water. I still like to think Michael’s question reflected his general beliefs of *wazungu* (Kiswahili for non-Africans or, sometimes, whites in particular), rather than a specific assessment of my capabilities.

Since then, as the focus of my scholarly work shifted from the present to the past, I have come to understand how attitude as much as ability figures in the history of work in twentieth-century colonial Africa. Europeans believed, or at least claimed to believe, that physical labor in tropical climes was beyond their capacity, one justification for having Africans take on, almost in its entirety, the physical task of transforming the continent into an outpost of empire. Over the past twenty years I have continued to observe Africans’ skepticism, sometimes well founded, about whites’ capacity for manual labor. I hope the story told here goes a little way toward answering Michael’s question.

I could not have learned this story or written this book without the extensive documentation from the Mozambique Company's long-lost archives, held in Maputo at the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique. The company archives—generated by the private chartered company that governed the central Mozambican provinces of Manica and Sofala with near sovereign authority from 1892 to 1942—countless stacks of files with millions of pages, documenting Portugal's initial conquest, its policies, and its mundane daily operations, spent the decades after 1942 in a mysterious limbo. When the company's charter ended that year, the archives were packed into zinc-lined wooden crates and stored in a warehouse at the Indian Ocean port of Beira to await the sea voyage to Portugal. For reasons unknown, the crates remained in that port warehouse for the next thirty-five years, lost and, mostly, forgotten.¹ Mostly forgotten, but not entirely. In 1969, Alexandre Lobato, a historian of the colonial period and director of the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, journeyed to Beira from the colony's southern capital in search of information on the missing archives' passage to Portugal. The company's Lisbon administration claimed never to have received the wooden crates. When Lobato searched the old customs registers for the name of the ship on which the crates were to have sailed, he discovered that some company crates, contents unspecified, had remained in a Beira warehouse for a number of years before removal to another location. The site was unspecified.² Not until a 1974 coup in Lisbon ended Portugal's dictatorship and brought independence to Mozambique was the mystery solved. As the director of the archives, Maria Inês Nogueira da Costa, later described it, archival staff dispatched on a hunt in 1977 had "ransacked older buildings and warehouses in Beira, without uncovering any leads," then returned, in search of new clues, to the headquarter buildings of Beira's Civil Administration, which the Mozambique Company had built and transferred to the colonial state.³ There they found several locked outbuildings locals said had been shut up for years, their contents and the whereabouts of the keys unknown. They forced open the locked doors, and there were the long-lost archives.

The director of the archives, faced with the formidable task of tabulating, logging, and organizing the contents of several thousand boxes to create an inventory, placed the material under embargo until that work could be accomplished. A foreign scholar in Mozambique at the time, hoping to conduct research on the company, was denied access and could report only on "reputedly extensive" holdings.⁴ A Mozambican student who wrote an unpublished master's thesis on the company in the 1980s had only partial scattershot access to the archives.⁵ Not until the mid-1990s, when my own research for *Slavery by Any Other Name* began, did the entire contents of the crates become accessible for scholarly use.

This book is the first to make use of that long-lost trove, a singular lode documenting the Mozambique Company's comprehensive, and often brutal, system of forced labor, more extensive and longer-lasting than nearly any other in colonial Africa.

Although the noncorrosive zinc lining of the crates in which the documents rested for decades before relocation to the more controlled archival environment had protected them from moisture and pests, some reports, maps, correspondence, and memos showed the ravages of time. In the 1890s and early 1900s, some company officials wrote with quill or nibbed pens on tissuelike paper; a century later, the centers of their pen strokes had fallen out of the paper. Working in sometimes dimly lit reading rooms, I deciphered these documents best by holding them up to let the light stream through to illuminate the now hollowed-out letters. Perusal was easier for later papers since, by 1910, most officials, except in outlying backwater districts, had typewriters. On some reports that had made their way up the administrative hierarchy, successive readers had scrawled comments directly on the text, hard to read but providing useful information on the response of readers on the documents' journey. In these vast holdings I uncovered records of work gangs and "wizards" (colonial officials' sometime name for indigenous healers), of river dredging and rumors of rebellion, and other extensive documentations of the regime of colonialism in central Mozambique.

There are some figures whose ongoing and important presence in the narrative told here begs for biographical treatment, but details on individuals are often hard to uncover. This is true almost as much for some Europeans as for Africans; while the backgrounds of personalities well known in other contexts, such as Gungunhana, Edward Ross, or Joaquim Carlos Paiva de Andrada, can be easily fleshed out, such information for others is more elusive. The difficulty is most acute for many Africans, who, in documentary sources, are usually identified only by a first name and perhaps by district of origin, but the same is the case for the company's minor employees. One of the company's more intriguing personalities was José Luiz Ferreira, who served as district administrator in Moribane for the better part of two decades and was a persistent critic of company labor policy, presenting trenchant and principled critiques of forced labor, a self-confessed "negrophile" and proud of it. Unfortunately, however, I know only his name, which, while not quite as common as John Smith (Andrew Jones might be closer), does not help in tracing origins, which might explain his critiques.

The biographies of some company officials, such as João Pery de Lind, are more easily explored. Educated at the prestigious *Colégio Militar*, Pery de Lind was a senior official in Portugal's customs service when the company tapped him in 1900 to develop its customs regime. Six years later he became district admin-

istrator in Manica and, amid conflict between white settlers and the company governor in 1910, assumed the governorship when the sitting governor fled the territory. His eleven-year mandate as governor was the longest of any, and the hallmark of his administration was a near unflagging support for the largely Portuguese white farming community, centered in Manica and Chimoio. The sentiment was mutual, for the farmers have been said to have demanded that the district center be named for him, as it was, going by Vila Pery de Lind from the mid-1920s until independence in 1975. As much as Pery de Lind's origins explain his role, it is more or less what one might expect, because Portugal's aristocratic elite were almost invariably fervent supporters of its empire. On the other hand, the actions of a figure such as Ferreira are less easily explained and would make for a more unusual and engaging story that unfortunately cannot be told.⁶

Nor could I have written this book—or understood the history of the company or colonial rule in Mozambique more generally—without the interviews I conducted in 1997 and 1998 with more than a hundred individuals, mostly in Manica District. Some interviews were one on one; others occurred in small groups of from two to six people and with the assistance of a translator. The importance of what these interlocutors told me became clear during my first series of interviews in May and June 1997. Having passed most of the previous four months spending forty hours or more a week in Maputo's archives, I found that the language and mind-set of company officials had suffused my thinking. Their relentless use of the term “recruitment” to describe the often violent seizure of Africans for contract labor affected how I first heard people's descriptions of company rule. I remember how, when I asked if those who were taken for contract work had any choice in the matter, the response was dismissively descriptive: “He who wants, he who doesn't want—let's go.”⁷ That answer, repeated by many, usually accompanied by a facial expression suggesting that my question was naive, at best, made clear to me what appeared only rarely in the company's written records: the question of consent was entirely beside the point. The company's contract labor was a modern slavery in which choice played no meaningful part.

In conducting these interviews, I gave my assurance that each individual's identity would be kept confidential; thus I do not include interviewees' names or ages or birthdates. For most individuals, in fact, I do not possess birthdates, because, though I started out asking interviewees when they were born, I found that many elderly residents did not readily remember their birthdates, and others did not know them. A small minority responded by producing their identity card (*bilhete de identidade*); several possessed only an identity card issued during the colonial period. Others would apologize, saying that they had not brought their “pass” with them. As an outsider, often taken for a *branco* (white) of Portuguese origin or nationality, I quickly became uneasy with the exchange I had unwittingly

tingly reproduced, uncomfortably reminiscent of the colonial past, when a white official would compel Africans to produce their pass to be inspected to see if they had paid their tax or fulfilled the “obligation to work.” In one other mortifying instance, all too similar to my mind of colonial *machila* travel, a farmer easily twice my age picked me up and carried me across a small stream—so that I might not have to remove my shoes, roll up my pants, and wade across—after which I decided to avoid, in any way I could foresee, following in pathways established in the colonial era. In many cases, dates on identity cards are only approximate; I interviewed a number of persons several times, and tried to discern their ages by different means, referring to events such as the world wars (for example, “Hitler’s war”), the 1917 Makombe uprising, and the Spanish influenza epidemic, which proved to be a reliable point of reference.

The research for this book has its roots in my 2002 Ph.D. thesis, and while this book bears little resemblance to that work, the people and institutions who supported me have grown in number as the years passed.

Financial assistance came from the Foreign Languages and Area Studies fellowship program (under Title VI of the U.S. Higher Education Act), the Yale University Program in Agrarian Studies, the Yale University Department of History, a William Clarence and Ruth Anna Gaines Dissertation Fellowship from the Yale Graduate School, the Yale University Center for International and Area Studies, and the Fulbright-Hays doctoral dissertation fellowship program. Funds from the Colgate University Division of Social Sciences supported a return visit to Maputo in 2004. The American Political Science Association gave me a marvelous place to work as a Centennial Center visiting fellow in 2005. As a research fellow in 2006 at Yale’s Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Abolition, and Resistance, I had ready access to the Yale University libraries, allowing me to accomplish a great deal in a brief time. The University of Ottawa provided financial support for some late stages of research and, of outstanding importance, a leave from teaching in 2008; my thanks to François Houle for making that possible. I undertook my final pre-production review of the manuscript in the comfortable setting and with the kind support of re:work, the International Research Center on Work and Lifecycle in Global History, at Humboldt University in Berlin. The Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal granted permission to reproduce illustration 19, “Portugal is not a small country.”

My affiliation as a research associate at the Boston University African Studies Center gave me among the most valuable of all scholarly resources: good ideas. Students in two courses here in Ottawa, “Modern Slavery” and “Esclavage Comparée,” gave me the chance to work through some of those ideas out loud and asked useful questions about how to think about slavery.

A great number of people in Maputo helped me over the years, and while I cannot list them all, I would like to express my thanks in no particular order to Marielle Rowan, Michael MacDonald, Emmanuel Kreike, Carol Martin, Catherine Jazynka, Dona Rebecca and Sr. Solomão and the Bila family, Joel das Neves Tembe, Yussuf Adam, the Chernysh family, Custódio and Fernanda Langa, Vanessa Coelho, Júlio Ribeiro, Ilídio Matusse, David Hedges, Gerhard Liesegang, Rodrigues Sainote, Gerónimo Simões, Sra. Annabella, and Solange Macamo. Jeanne Marie Penvenne provided helpful introductions at an early stage of my research. The local staff at the U.S. Information Service in Maputo were an endless source of crucial information about how to get things done, and they helped me with countless tasks that I might never have been able to tackle on my own.

Special thanks go to Teresa Cruz e Silva, then director of the African Studies Center at Eduardo Mondlane University, and Luís António Covane, at the Ministry of Culture, two institutions that gave me key logistical support.

Thanks are also due to Maria Inês Nogueira da Costa, director of the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique (AHM) at the time I conducted much of my research, who greatly facilitated my work. I would like to express boundless gratitude to the staff of the AHM, who tolerated my initially atrocious language skills and general ignorance in the early days of my research and gradually helped me work more effectively.

I join a long list of scholars who pay homage to the exhaustive knowledge of António Sopa at the AHM. His guidance and suggestions were tremendously helpful, as were his quiet encouragement and interest.

In Manica, I received assistance from a number of people, including Henrique Querol, Abdurramane Machon, Samuel Ganhão, José Gumbo, and Sr. Corrence. Special thanks go to Guilherme Chazuca, who shared his warm hospitality and knowledge of his father's chiefdom. Nicholas Chazuca provided some timely help with translations. Domingos Artur do Rosário, then head of the Arquivo Património Cultural office in Chimoio, offered generous support on a number of occasions.

I owe an enormous debt to Sr. Davide Franque of the Manica District office for Education, Culture, and Youth. Sr. Davide was of immense help in contacting potential interviewees and organizing interviews. His contacts in Manica proved invaluable in collecting oral testimony, and he was exceptionally generous with his time.

As a graduate student at Yale I received tremendous support from Bob Harms, who guided my research with a steady hand. Jim Scott taught me the value of reading omnivorously, and Geoffrey Parker drilled me in important research skills, while Paul Landau shared his careful, nuanced reading of south-

ern African history. Sandra Sanneh and Ann Biersteker helped me learn Shona. From the Agrarian Studies Program I learned how to engage across disciplines and world regions. While I was an undergraduate at Harvard, Leroy Vail was a great influence on my early and continuing interest in African history, and I have deep regret that he did not live long enough to read and improve this work.

Elsewhere, I was supported by many friends and colleagues, including some who, happily enough, fall into both categories. They include Eric Morier-Genoud, M. Anne Pitcher, Martin Murray, Sue Cook, Charles Mironko, Bruce McKim, Didier Péclard, Sarah and Laina Bay-Cheng, Jarrett Barrios, Douglas Hattaway, Robert Bowers, Susan O'Donovan, Heidi Gengenbach, Jessica Schafer, Jolie Olcott, Andrew Jones, Fred Cooper, Jane Burbank, and Thomas McDow. Special thanks go to Benedict Carton, whose interest in my work was essential to its progress.

Jessica Allina-Pisano was a constant sounding board during much of the time I worked on this book, and she contributed to my thinking in important ways.

Dick Holway, at the University of Virginia Press, and Richard Elphick, editor of the *Reconsiderations in Southern African History* series, gave their consistent support and helped bring the book through a prolonged journey toward publication. Raennah Mitchell, also at the Press, made sure I kept to schedule and answered many of my questions. Robert Burchfield did a marvelous job copyediting the manuscript, using his fine eye for detail to ensure an even style, making certain that I closed any remaining gaps that might otherwise plague a reader. Mark Mones carefully saw the manuscript through to bound books. Michael Southern drew the maps.

With my editor, the late Jeannette Hopkins, I was able to write a book I could never have imagined at the outset. I am glad to have benefited from her fierce resolution and indeed refusal to let the book be anything short of the best it could be.

My family provided more indirect but no less vital support. Amy Allina invested unshakeable confidence in me, important from anyone but all the more so from a wise big sister. To my parents, I owe a good part of my love for ideas and care for learning, as well as gratitude for their unfailing interest in and encouragement for my work, even when it took me far away for long periods of time.

Allison Hewlitt has given me more than I imagined possible, showing a bedrock faith that exceeds any other. Most recently, she and our daughter, Zoe Hanna Hewlitt Allina, have offered irresistible motivation to spend time away from this endeavor. If I stay lucky, it will always be so.

All translations here are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

SLAVERY BY ANY OTHER NAME

Introduction

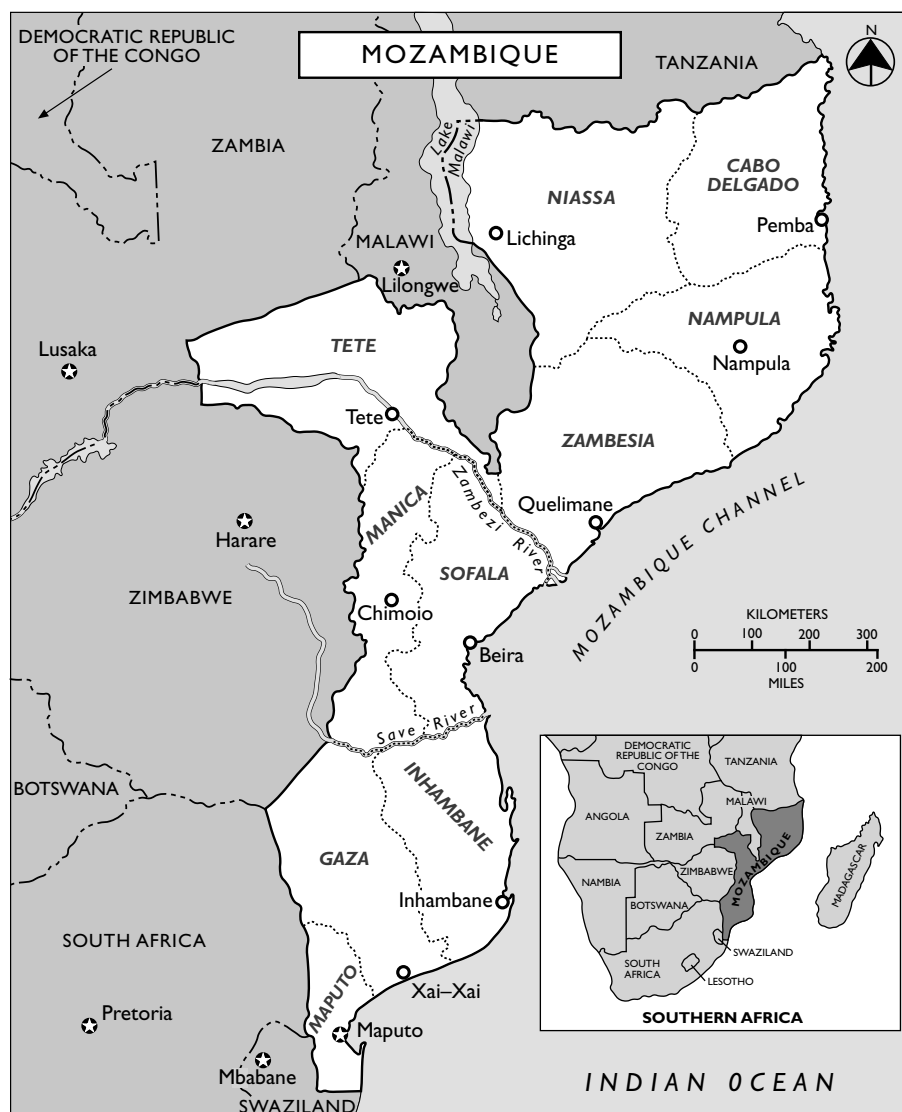
SLAVERY HAS DEEP HISTORICAL ROOTS IN AFRICAN societies. Long before the seventeenth century, when Europeans began to buy vast numbers of slaves for their New World colonies, many Africans had been held as slaves, and countless others were sent in servitude across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.¹ Enslavement of Africans by Africans was diverse, unlike the more uniform chattel bondage of the Caribbean and the Americas; some African-owned slaves were held as chattel, but many, possibly most, had meaningful, if limited, rights as members of their masters' communities.² Slaveholding by European settlers in Africa began in the mid-seventeenth century in the hinterland of the Cape of Good Hope, where the Dutch East India Company established a settlement at the continent's southernmost point, and in the Zambezi Valley, where Portugal founded large landed estates.³ Still, such slaveholding was relatively small scale compared to the later export of millions of Africans into the Atlantic world, a forced migration that, for centuries, made blackness virtually synonymous with bondage. By the nineteenth century, when Europeans ended their slave trading and freed their slaves, large-scale chattel slaveholdings had existed in New World outposts of colonial empire for hundreds of years. But the equation of slavery with chattel status did not end with abolition; it would continue to dominate twentieth-century colonial administrations across nearly all of Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴

For Portugal itself, slavery was part of a pioneering past in Africa that began in 1415 with the sacking and occupation of the North African city of Ceuta,

known at the time as the “flower of all other cities of Africa.”⁵ First among the European empires to expand to Africa, Portugal led the way in slave trading from the mid-fifteenth century until midway through the seventeenth, when its empire’s influence began to wane worldwide. For another two centuries, it continued to occupy a series of entrepôts along the west, west-central, and east African coasts, and by the later nineteenth century’s “Scramble” for Africa, memories of past dominance led Portugal to assume an outsized role compared to its lesser status in the broad imperial pantheon. In that era of “high imperialism,” without the political, financial, and human capital to compete with powers like Britain, France, and Germany, Portugal decided to outsource parts of its African empire, especially in the southeast region known as Mozambique, long reputed to have been a land of biblical wealth.⁶ Europe’s other imperial powers had depended on chartered companies three centuries earlier in their seaborne scrum in south and southeast Asia, and now, as they vied for African territory, nearly all once again established private companies to reinforce their presence in Africa.

In the crucial early phase of outsourcing empire in Africa, European colonizers chartered private companies to undertake the strategically vital but costly and bloody tasks of conquest and of colonial occupation. Cecil Rhodes’s British South Africa Company governed the territory later known as Southern Rhodesia until 1923. British entrepreneurs also created companies in Kenya (the Imperial British East Africa Company) and in Nigeria (the Royal Niger Company). Germans did so in Tanganyika (the German East Africa Company). The French government rented out more than 270,000 square miles of France’s claim in central Africa to concessionary companies, and the Belgian king, Leopold II, on his own, since his government had no interest in an African empire, pursued a vast private fiefdom in the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, leasing parts to private companies in return for a share of the profits. In the face of international protest over abuses, the Belgian state was persuaded in 1908 to take over the territory from Leopold. Most outsourcing companies held statelike powers for a decade or so and then were replaced by formal colonial administrations around the turn of the twentieth century. Only the companies Portugal established in Mozambique outlived Rhodes’s own.

Under a fifty-year charter granted by the Portuguese Crown in 1892, the Mozambique Company ruled much of central Mozambique (the state ruling the rest), and it ruled longer and with more autonomy from the state than any other chartered company in Africa. The company’s founder, Joaquim Carlos Paiva de Andrada, a staunch supporter of Portuguese imperial ambitions, had launched several expeditions in Mozambique’s Zambezi Valley and neighboring regions in the 1870s, a decade before many other adventurous European explorers ventured



Map I. Mozambique in southern Africa

into the “Dark Continent.” His efforts to harness private capital to state authority achieved little until, in 1888, he established the Mozambique Company and received a royal charter, its final terms fixed four years later. In return, the Portuguese Crown was to receive 7.5 percent of all net declared profits and a 10 percent holding of company shares.⁷

The Mozambique Company, fusing state and commercial enterprise, built and operated the colonial apparatus with an economic monopoly in its more than 60,000-square-mile concession. Its rule rested on a foundation of forced African labor that differed from, and in some respects surpassed, past forms of bondage. When the company’s charter expired half a century later, in 1942, its territory, comprising the provinces of Manica and Sofala, passed to direct control of the Portuguese colonial state, which had continued to rule the rest of Mozambique. The colonial state bureaucracy absorbed the company’s administration, with most company employees continuing in their posts in a colonial government that was to last another thirty-two years, until a revolt in 1974 by junior army officers in Lisbon overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship. Independence came to Mozambique a year later.⁸

Slavery by Any Other Name is the story of how the Portuguese empire ushered in a vast forced labor system, of its ideological posture toward Africans, of its policies and practices and their impact on Africans’ lives, and of how Africans withstood oppression, employing strategies to outmaneuver the company’s schemes. Many African forced laborers perished in the process, but some prospered.

The freeing of chattel slaves worldwide had begun with the Haitian Revolution of 1791, and the era of abolition continued, propelled especially by Britain’s prohibition of the slave trade in 1807 and by British abolition of slavery in 1838. The era ended with Brazil’s outlawing of slavery in 1888.⁹ But in the last weeks of the century, Portugal passed a new colonial labor law that led to a system of sub-contracted slave labor within its now shrunken empire of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé e Príncipe (two islands off the West African coast).¹⁰ The Mozambique Company’s royal charter to administer part of central Mozambique had been awarded in 1892, and Lisbon’s 1899 labor law applied to “natives” only, not settlers—therefore, to blacks and not to whites. By its mandate, “All natives of Portuguese overseas provinces are subject to the moral and legal obligation to seek to acquire through work the means they lack for subsistence and to improve their own social condition.” The law exempted, or purported to exempt, certain classes of people: chiefs, women, men over sixty, boys under fourteen, the sick and invalid, and those serving in police forces. Thus, youth fifteen and older and men up to sixty who were judged “fit” were compelled to work: “They have

the full liberty to choose the means of meeting this obligation, but, if they do not comply in some way, public authorities may impose it upon them.”¹¹ The phrasing “choose the means” implied a choice, and for some there was; but for most, the reality was otherwise, and hence the law introduced a new form of bondage. The statutory exemptions of certain groups were honored only in the breach: when white colonists’ demands for workers exceeded the number of those judged “fit for labor” and legally liable for seizure, colonial officials took not only them but those by law exempted: elderly men, young boys, women, and even chiefs as well. Even Africans with wealth or those who found work on their own, or who practiced an officially recognized profession (such as tailoring), or who cultivated fields of a specified extent (the precise size determined by local officials), could also be swept up in helter-skelter operations that one administrator described as “a type of ‘steeple chase.’”¹² At such times, the colonial police might “take any which one.”¹³ Elderly men who spoke with me in 1997 and 1998 of their own experiences with forced labor recalled “the time of *pata pata*” (a Shona ideophone for the sound of feet striking hard surfaces) to express the noise of an onrushing press gang.¹⁴

Portugal’s colonial administrators enforced the new labor law by a system they euphemistically called “contract labor.” The “contract” committed Africans to work for the colonial state administration or for private employers, but the workers never saw, or signed, a copy of an actual written contract. Nor, in the face of threats from the state’s armed police, could they have given true consent. Sham contracts were carried out with sham wages, workers paid rarely, and wages often garnished. And although the contracts specified a fixed period of time, workers were often held longer if replacements were late or hard to find. Official reports often used, without self-consciousness, the term “*rendição*” to refer to the replacement group; it may be translated as “relief” but also, more accurately in this context, as “ransom.”¹⁵ The slaveholders of South Carolina’s rice plantations or Jamaica’s sugar plantations never denied that they held slaves captive through purchase or inheritance, in a system endorsed and enforced by law. In colonial Mozambique, on the other hand, administrators camouflaged their coercion of Africans behind the legal fiction of “contracts.” And while many earlier slave owners were frank about considering black people inherently inferior and hence justly subjugated, the Portuguese administrators who oversaw subcontracted slave labor claimed that compelling Africans to work, “by force if necessary,” would improve the Africans’ “moral and material well-being.” They justified their modern labor slavery as Europe’s moral duty to civilize the “Dark Continent” and “transform beasts into men.”¹⁶ Thus, António Enes, who led the commission that prepared Portugal’s colonial labor code, wrote in 1893: “Work is the most moralizing of

missions, the most instructive of schools . . . the education that will manage to transform beasts into men. . . . I don't know if Africa will some day have a Messiah; if it might, the good news of its Gospel will be a commandment to work, and its radiant heavens will be opened only for the happy workers!"¹⁷ The success of the abolition movement, Enes argued, had granted Africans the "liberty not to work" and thus the freedom to remain in a "savage state."¹⁸ Colonizers bore a responsibility to correct this excess; compulsory labor would civilize the savage.

Imposing such burdens on Africans as part of the colonizing project alarmed some observers, especially missionaries and others who saw through the faux contracts. Critics, perhaps inspired by the victories of the early 1900s campaign by English and American activists against the rubber atrocities in Belgian king Leopold's Congo Free State, pressed colonial powers to bring their governing practices in line with the rhetoric of the civilizing mission.¹⁹ Some singled out the contract labor system in São Tomé, where African slaves (mostly from Portugal's west-central African colony, Angola) toiled to produce cocoa for the British chocolate manufacturer Cadbury.²⁰ One, Henry Nevinson, published an article in *Harper's* in 1906 lambasting what he called Portugal's "modern slavery," which he claimed was no different from "the old-fashioned slavery of our grandfather's time."²¹ Others, through the second decade of the twentieth century, targeted Portugal's reliance on servile labor in Angola and Mozambique, where forced labor was the backbone of the colonial economy to a far greater extent than in other regions in Africa.

In 1924, the League of Nations formed the Temporary Slavery Commission to investigate "the question of slavery" worldwide, and in 1926 the league passed the Convention on Slavery, its aim to eliminate "slavery in all its forms," but, in fact, reflecting the era's orthodox definition of slavery, defined it as "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are attached."²² The convention did note that forced labor could develop into "conditions analogous to slavery," but left to local authorities the power to decide how and whether to change forced labor practices. Even the league's 1930 Convention on Forced Labor left a number of loopholes and lacked enforcement mechanisms.²³

None of the other colonizing powers relied on forced labor to the great extent Portugal did, nor had any granted private companies the nearly complete autonomy the Mozambique Company enjoyed, though they, too, were unwilling to yield forced labor. France objected to proposed League of Nations' limitations, such as limits to length of enforced service and a ban on the use of military conscripts for nonmilitary labor, and continued to recruit forced labor widely throughout its African colonies. Forced labor similarly underpinned Britain's

African empire from the Cape to Cairo, and forms of unfree labor some considered “analogous to slavery” existed elsewhere in British-ruled territories in Asia.²⁴

The open criticisms of colonial labor practices and ensuing debate in closed League of Nations commission hearings reflected an uneven transition from an older imperial politics to an incipient international order guided partly by new humanitarian principles. Part of what made it uneven was the inchoate discussion of those principles, evident in disagreement over what forms of labor were consistent with postabolition ethics. The fiercest opponents of coerced colonial labor, some nearly direct descendants of abolitionists, seized on the political language they knew best and condemned colonial practices as “a modern slavery,” but, blinded by their faith in the civilizing mission and too attached to the idea of their “grandfathers” slavery, they were unable to develop a critique of new forms of coercion. Neither the missionary critics who asked, “Africa: Slave or Free?” nor League of Nations investigators questioned the premise of colonial rule itself, and so the resulting debate sought only to draw distinctions among policies considered acceptable and not acceptable in a European-dominated Africa.²⁵ But even consensus colonial policies were ambiguous in their impact. No one was more aware of such ambiguity than those charged with putting policy in to practice; but the resulting ambivalence and occasional dissent voiced by the Mozambique Company’s local officials were typically lost on the higher-ups.

At the most senior levels of Portugal’s colonial administration, government officials resisted criticism, whether from within or without, of its colonial rule, and, with the rise of António Salazar in 1928 (a supporter of Franco’s dictatorial rule in Spain and an admirer of the era’s fascist movements of Italy and Germany), the hostility to outside interference grew. Nor did the Salazar dictatorship tolerate internal dissent; officials in the colonies went to great lengths to impede the efforts of inquisitive visitors who sought to investigate its policies there.²⁶ In the Depression years, international concern over abuses in the colonies diminished. In the aftermath, fascism in Europe championed the subordination of citizen to nation and individual to society, viewing the labor of colonized and otherwise subjugated peoples, in Africa and in Europe, as a contribution to the collective good, an injunction most cynically and chillingly expressed in the concentration camp injunction “*Arbeit macht frei*.” Ironically, with World War II came a remarkable expansion of forced labor in Africa as the Allies mobilized resources to clothe, feed, and equip the world’s fighting forces.²⁷ The end of the Mozambique Company’s charter in 1942 did not end its practice of forced labor.

With the war’s end, Britain and France banned legalized forced labor in their African colonies. Britain, if reluctantly, granted independence to India under the sustained civil disobedience of Gandhi’s nationalist movement. The “wind

of change” began to blow through Africa, but Portugal only stepped up white settlement and investment in its African colonies; with its control of the Azores, a refueling point for transatlantic flights vital to Cold War strategists, it escaped the international impetus for change.²⁸ Salazar’s rigid mercantilism demanded that Portugal’s colonies support the home country with raw materials for industrial production. Protestant missionaries, who had earlier kept track of labor abuses, had been weakened by Portugal’s 1940 agreement with the Vatican to grant the Catholic church special status in its colonies in return for a measure of control over mission personnel posted to Portuguese Africa. It became more difficult for troublesome Protestant groups to operate there.²⁹

In 1961, Ghana, newly independent and led by pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah, filed a complaint with the International Labor Organization about Portugal’s colonial labor practices, claiming a violation of the Forced Labor Convention of 1957, to which Portugal was a signatory. Although the resulting investigation did not reach such a finding, the international attention led Lisbon to abolish its system of legalized forced labor in 1961, a century and more after its abolition of chattel slavery. Empire was ending in Africa, and most colonies were emerging as independent sovereign states.³⁰ Yet Portugal’s African colonies were not yet free; like South Africa, which was effectively independent from Britain since 1934 under the Statute of Westminster, and like Southern Rhodesia, whose white minority regime unilaterally declared its independence from Britain in 1965, they were no longer outposts of empire but independent islands of white domination.³¹ Independence for Portugal’s colonies did not come until 1975, after a dozen years of guerrilla warfare against white rule by African nationalist groups, most with Chinese or Soviet backing, and after the 1974 coup against the dictatorship in Lisbon by Portugal’s junior army officers—most of modest social origins, without the nostalgic attachment to empire of the aristocratic top brass, and weary of colonial wars. Five and a half centuries after Prince Henry the Navigator led Portugal’s first African conquest in 1415, of Ceuta in North Africa, the Portuguese empire had come to an end.³²

In the precolonial era, in most parts of Africa lasting until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, African slaves were rarely treated as chattel, but as socially marginal individuals with fewer rights than others. Various studies have explored the processes through which diverse categories of people lost rights and tumbled into subordinate status; a number explain how internal political and social hierarchy shaped Africans’ participation in international trade networks, most especially in the Atlantic slave trade, and some of these studies acknowledged, ambivalently, that certain of the related practices constituted slavery.³³