In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were a variety of slave regimes in Africa. At one extreme, in many places in the far interior and in isolated spots between the major states and trade corridors, slaves were still marginal to society, forming one category of dependents in kinship systems but ultimately having little structural impact on the local economy or society. Other regions along the Atlantic coast had more slaves, although the outlook toward slavery was still in terms of dependency, even though the impact of the European market provided a situation in which slavery changed. From Sierra Leone in the west to Angola in the south, slavery was transformed as the interaction between enslavement, trade, and slave use influenced the organization of society. In some places, slavery was the basis for a mode of production; in a few areas, this productive system dominated the social formation. Two broad zones emerged: one strongly Islamic in the savanna belt, where there was a continuation and consolidation of earlier patterns of slave use and supply; and a second that was rooted in the tradition of kin-based societies that were now experiencing the transformation to slave societies. A final feature of this continuum of slave regimes was the foundation of European settlements where slave use shared some of the features of slavery in the Americas. These settlements were one bridge between the European-controlled productive regime in the Americas and the African-controlled system of slave supply.

The Expansion of Slavery

The external demand for slaves and the rivalry between African states directly affected the spread of slavery, for both caused tensions that led to the enslavement of people. The economy became dependent on exports to satisfy the personal desires of merchants and rulers and to provide many parts of Africa with a money supply, textiles, firearms, and other goods essential to
the economy and political rule. The fragmented political structure, reinforced by military purchases and the need to acquire slaves to finance imports, was related to a general state of insecurity that facilitated enslavement. These two conditions – the slave market and institutionalized enslavement – set the stage for the course of slavery in Africa.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the number of slaves increased, with the result that many societies experienced a social transformation. This transformation differed in the northern savanna, along the West African coast, and in west-central Africa because the nature of the export trade and other economic factors differed. In the northern savanna, where older patterns of economy and society continued, the transformation had already occurred, and slavery continued to be an important element in production. Women and children were exported in greater numbers than men, even though the domestic market for women and children was greater than for men. This market preference in both the export and domestic spheres meant that the cost of male labor was relatively low, which guaranteed the maintenance of labor supply for agriculture.

Along the West African coast and in west-central Africa (and in scattered spots elsewhere), by contrast, the export market favored young males, so that the domestic preference for women and children and the foreign trade complemented each other. As the rough calculations in Chapter 3 (Table 3.9) demonstrate, the sex and age distribution of the trans-Atlantic trade suggests that a large population of slaves was retained in those African societies associated with the export trade. Furthermore, these estimates suggest that a large proportion of the slave population available for domestic use consisted of mature adults over age thirty, children under age fifteen, and young women aged fifteen to thirty. Indeed, if the assumptions of these calculations are correct (that the newly enslaved population of the interior had a balanced sex and age profile), then the retained population of new slaves was larger than the exported population. Hence the 8.4 million slaves shipped across the Atlantic between 1600 and 1800 provide a rough indication of the scale of slavery within the exporting regions. Although these calculations permit neither an estimate of the size of the domestic slave population nor a comparison of the relative size of slave and free populations, the figures do indicate a steady and substantial influx of slaves into the local societies of the Guinea coast and its hinterland, possibly on a scale that exceeded the inflow of slaves into the societies of the northern savanna. As Thornton has observed for Angola, this demographic shift resulted in the expansion of population in the coastal enclaves and the commercial centers of the immediate interior where political power was concentrated.¹ The same pattern of population growth also occurred in West Africa. Losses were confined to the regions from where slaves came, a demographic shock examined by Manning.²

The influx of servile women, children, and older people reinforced social relationships based on dependency, including those deriving from kinship,
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Increased stratification meant that the relative importance of these dependent categories shifted. Strongmen, government officials, wealthy merchants, and military leaders controlled large followings of slaves, junior kinsmen, pawns, women, and clients. This group of powerful men formed the nucleus of a class society in which a relatively few people dominated the instruments of warfare, commercial credit, and the means of production. The warlords who enslaved people, whether in political conflicts or slave raids, were committed to the institution of slavery as a means of acquiring people for use in government, the military, and production. These warlords – aristocracies when they consolidated their rule – formed one part of a slave-owning class. The other part was made up of the merchants who traded in many goods but who also performed the vital function of transferring the newly enslaved to their final destinations. As a result of their access to slaves and credit, they too amassed large numbers of servile dependents. Like the warlords, they shared a commitment to slavery, participated in the slave trade, and exploited slave labor. Sometimes the merchants suffered from particular actions of the warlords, including raids on caravans or unstable political conditions that adversely affected trade. Sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between merchant-princes and warlords, for merchants could participate in slave raids or fight each other for control of markets and trade routes, and warlords could become actively involved in commerce or production. Furthermore, there were tensions between warlords, not only because of succession disputes but also because of the fragmented political order itself. Nonetheless, there was an identifiable class of slave owners who were those largely responsible for enslaving people, trading them as one more commodity on the market, and employing slaves on their own land for productive purposes.

While these class relationships altered kinship structures, there were still places with less social differentiation where elders coordinated labor, defense, marriage arrangements, credit, and other activities. The basis of social cohesion continued to center on a core of people related through kinship. In these social settings, slavery still functioned in the context of dependency. Slaves were non-kin, but they were absorbed into corporate groups to supplement the number of people in a lineage, thereby circumventing the biological limitations of reproduction. When lineage members could afford to do so, they could augment their numbers by purchase or the extension of credit for pawns. Slavery in this situation was very different from that in the emerging class societies based on slavery. Here a person, slave or free, owed his allegiance to a cooperative group in which mediation and direct involvement in decisions were characteristic, whereas the dependents of warlords and merchants followed the dictates of a lord or trader who gave them orders, no matter what their actual social status.

Despite the polarity of these two modes of production, one based on slavery and the other on kinship, the trend in the two centuries was toward the spread
of slavery, especially in the Muslim savanna, along the West African coast, and in west-central Africa. In some places, such as the Zambezi valley or the “middle belt” between the northern savanna and the forest, these two modes of production existed side by side in relative isolation from each other, except for the warfare and slave raids that brought both into temporary contact. In those places with the greatest concentration of slaves, separate peasant communities maintained social structures based on kinship, even though the dominant relationships in such regions relied on slavery. In large parts of the far interior, including the forest regions of the Congo River basin, the *sudd* region of the upper Nile, and the interlacustrine zone, slavery remained marginal to society. These areas were relatively unaffected by the spread of slavery in this period.

The Northern Savanna

Slavery was widespread in the Muslim states and near Muslim centers in the seventeenth century. Slaves continued to be used in armies, harems, and government administration, where loyalty could be closely developed within institutions that were centuries old. Slaves were also employed on plantations wherever merchants and aristocrats had access to large numbers of slaves. In some places, there may have been fewer slaves in 1600 than in 1500, but new developments probably had the net effect of maintaining the number of slaves at about the same level as there had been. As in the medieval period, slavery was associated with the export trade, which has been estimated at 700,000 persons per century, but the volume of this trade was relatively small – usually no more than 1,000 slaves per year for each route. Regional factors, including political rivalries and climatic conditions, generally had a greater influence on slavery than external demand. Only in the far west, where the trans-Atlantic trade and the trans-Saharan trade overlapped, was the external market strong. Even then, total exports from this wide region – Senegambia, inland to Bambara country – seldom exceeded 3,000 to 4,000 slaves per year for both trades until the eighteenth century, when the Atlantic trade alone accounted for as many as 5,200 people in the 1760s.

In theory, the conditions of slavery were supposed to improve over time. The ideological framework, based on adherence to Islam, emphasized the conversion and acculturation of slaves, not only for the many concubines and their freeborn children, but also for children brought up in the family, who might well aspire to freedom themselves. Second-generation slaves fared better than the newly enslaved and normally could expect protection from sale; at least this is what the slave trader Francis Moore found along the Gambia River in the 1730s:

And tho’ in some parts of Africa they sell their slaves born in the Family, yet in the River Gambia they think it a very wicked thing, and I never heard of but one that ever sold a Family-Slave, except for such crimes as would have made them to be sold had they been free. If there are many Family Slaves and one of them commits a Crime, the master
cannot sell him without the joint consent of the rest, for if he does, they will all run away, and be protected by the next kingdom to which they fly.⁴

Of course, masters could not guarantee that slaves would not be sold, and it is significant that Moore’s account confirms the right of masters to sell slaves, just as his report establishes that public opinion and the expectations of slaves limited the ability to exercise these proprietary rights.

Furthermore, masters could not always protect slaves against reenslavement, which appears to have been a frequent occurrence. The ideological framework continued to protect free men, particularly nobles and devout Muslims, from enslavement, as had been the case since at least the fourteenth century; by implication, this allowed the seizure of slaves, as well as non-Muslims, so that slaves could find that any improvement in their status through acculturation or birth was canceled. Once captured, no matter what their previous status, they were reduced to the level of trade slave, filled with terror of an unknown fate. The importance of reenslavement can be gleaned from the experiences of Mungo Park, who traveled through the western Sudan in the late eighteenth century. In Bambara country, he interviewed thirteen slaves purchased by a Muslim merchant. Eleven of these people had already been slaves at the time they were seized in a Bambara raid.⁵ Even though this sample is small, it demonstrates one of the dangers of slavery in the western Sudan – renewed capture and the risks of death then and later on the road.

The prevalence of slave raiding, warfare, and reenslavement indicates that the proportion of slaves in the population of the northern savanna was high, but there is a lack of detail on slave use during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Still, it is likely that slaves were used extensively in production, particularly in agriculture. Ahmad Bâ’s treatise of 1614 is typical of this problem of documentation; he made it clear that enslavement was common, but he reported nothing on the use of slaves.⁶ The warrior class of Senegambia and the Bambara states incorporated slaves, and merchants had access to slaves, who were almost certainly employed as porters, stock boys, and laborers in the fields everywhere that long-distance trade was important.

In the Senegambia, scattered reports suggest that slaves were common in the commercial towns. For example, Richard Jobson, an English slave trader on the Gambia in 1620–1621, found that slaves formed a considerable portion of the population of Sutukho, whose Muslim clerics and merchants traveled throughout the Senegambia region, from the kola forests in the south to the gold deposits of Bure and Bambuhu and probably to the desert edge in the north. Sutukho was apparently typical of many towns along the trade routes of the savanna. Jobson learned that in this Muslim town:

[N]o common people [non-Muslims] have dwelling, except such as are their slaves, that work and labour for them, which slaves they suffer to marry and cherish the race that comes of them, which race remaines to them, and their heirs or posterity as perpetuall bond-men, they marry likewise in their owne tribe or kindred, taking no wives but the
daughters of Mary-Buckes [i.e., Muslims], and all the children they have, are nourished and bred up, unto the ceremonies of their fathers.\(^7\)

Jobson clearly identifies slavery as an inherited status, and although he provides little information on the organization of slave labor, it is likely that slaves worked in the fields. The availability of slaves for export across the Sahara and on the upper Guinea coast helps confirm this possibility.

Similarly, the traditions of the Borno kings contain numerous references to raids on the pagan region to the south of Lake Chad, and despite the trade across the Sahara, many of these captives stayed in Borno. Mai Ali, who ruled in the middle of the seventeenth century, engaged in massive campaigns, according to a *mahram* written in 1658, seizing as many as 4,000 slaves in a single expedition. Ali distributed slaves to the learned Muslims of his court; how many and for what purpose are not known, but even if the actual figure cannot be accepted as anything more than an indication of large-scale, organized plunder, the implication is clear that enough slaves were available for use in productive activities.\(^8\) Certainly a few were used in administration; others were pressed into military service; and women were placed in harems. It is likely that others were settled in villages.

The Kano sarki, Kutumbi (c. 1623–1648), is remembered as a great slaver; his military officials were responsible for wars and raids that netted thousands of slaves. Some of these were settled around Kano, including those at one place where the spoils of a single raid – reputedly 500 slaves – were concentrated. One of Kutumbi’s generals apparently settled other captives at his headquarters at Ganjuwa, at least if his ability to forward to Kano some 2,000 slaves, whom he had seized in raids to the southeast, perhaps attacking Jukun, is any indication of his capacity to amass slaves. In building the town of Ganjuwa, he almost certainly relied on some of these captives.\(^9\)

In the Funj Sultanate of Sennar, Badi II (1644–1681) established a defensive network around his capital, where slaves were settled to farm the land and act as militia in case of an invasion.\(^10\) The original population of these settlements was supplemented by purchased slaves and new captives in the course of the next 150 years; by 1773, the slave population numbered 14,000 people. Their military importance was in fact marginal, because the men only had short javelins and shields, making them virtually no match for heavily armed cavalry that was the basis of Sennar’s power, as well as of most savanna states. The settlements were far more important as a source of agricultural produce than for defense.

The neighboring state of Dar Fur instituted similar policies during its period of imperial expansion in the eighteenth century. Sultans Tayrâb (1752–1785) and ‘Abd al-Rahmân (1785–1801) settled slaves on agricultural estates near their capitals, at Dar Fongoro, and on Jabal Marra and its foothills. Tayrâb brought many slaves to his first capital, Shoba, and later settled more slaves at Ril. Many of these slaves were Turuj Nuba who were seized in the Daju Hills of Kordofan; those settled at Ril joined other Daju already living there. ‘Abd al-Rahmân also relied on Nuba slaves from Kordofan for his agricultural

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enterprises. These slaves, known collectively as ‘abidiyya, were scattered in communities of various sizes throughout Dar Fur. The sultan appointed officials to administer these holdings, which produced food used by the army and the palace. Some communities had special functions other than agricultural work, including the manufacture of padded horse armor. Others were the homes of specialist military units. Some nobles may have had as many as 500 to 600 slaves on their estates.11

The link between enslavement, trade, and the use of slaves in production is clearly established for Futa Jallon in the eighteenth century. The establishment of this theocracy in the 1720s revolutionized the economy of this highland region. Tens of thousands of slaves were settled on plantations to supply the army and facilitate caravan traffic between the coast and the interior. These plantations belonged to merchants and the new Fulbe aristocracy, with the largest of these belonging to the Fulbe. Some idea of their importance can be gleaned from the account of Muhammad Kaba Saghanguhu, whose father, a merchant, had a plantation at Bouka, a short distance from Timbo, the capital of Futa Jallon. Kaba’s father was a “substantial yeoman, possessing 140 slaves, several [herds of] cows and horses, and grounds producing quantities of cotton, rice and provisions, which he exchanged for European and other commodities brought from the coast by the Higglers merchants.”12 Kaba was seized by highwaymen in about 1777 and sold to Jamaica. His account makes it clear that plantations of considerable size were owned by commoners in Futa Jallon, for his “mandingo parentage” set him apart from the Fulbe aristocracy that controlled Futa Jallon and owned most slaves. These holdings were substantial, amassed in such a relatively short time that there were several slave revolts in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Even after these uprisings were crushed, tension remained high. When this situation is considered in the context of the export trade to the Americas, which Kaba experienced along with tens of thousands of other people, it becomes clear that the effort to pacify the highlands and resettle the countryside with plantation slaves indeed transformed the social formation of the highlands.13

The jihad of Futa Jallon reflected economic and social pressures mounting elsewhere in West Africa, probably as a consequence of the periodic droughts. Fulbe cattle herders became more common than ever before, founding villages that served as bases for their seasonal migrations in search of pasture and water. The establishment of Fulbe government in the Futa Jallon highlands successfully repeated the earlier revolt in Futa Bondu (169os); other Fulbe did the same in Futa Toro in the 1770s.14 Fulbe pastoralists also appear to have become more numerous in Masina, south of the Niger bend, in the eighteenth century too, although they did not stage a revolution there. Nonetheless, their migratory patterns made them less susceptible to the mid-eighteenth-century drought; they could move their herds far to the south during bad times, and upon their return they often found whole areas deserted of population. In the central Sudan, which suffered less from these droughts than other parts of the
savanna, Fulbe immigrants inserted themselves into peasant society, moving about the countryside supplying cattle and goats to local markets in return for grain and manufactures. During the dry season, they could graze their herds on the fields; farmers often paid the Fulbe because of the manure left behind. This type of livestock management proved to be tremendously successful. The relative proportion of Fulbe in the population appears to have increased everywhere across the West African savanna, whereas other pastoralists, including various Arab tribes, moved westward into the Lake Chad basin and the border areas of Sennar and Dar Fur. Some herdsmen bought slaves, and, near the Hausa towns of the central Sudan, Fulbe masters established whole villages of slaves. Such settlements served as wet-season camps for the nomads, and some of the biggest slave owners and clan chiefs established relatively fixed transhumant patterns for their herds. These slave masters had different interests from those of the merchant class and aristocracies. Ethnic tensions and occupational specialization prevented the consolidation of a unified slave-owning class, and these divisive factors were often more important than class conflict between slaves and masters.

The information on a slave mode of production is scattered and often circumstantial for the savanna in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Court eunuchs, slave officials, and concubines are more visible in the historical record than field slaves, salt workers, and gold miners. Consequently, it is not possible to determine the relative importance of slave production, tribute collection, raiding, and trade to the incomes of the dominant classes. The effect of slavery is clear, however. Enslavement was a major function of government. This meant that individuals were safer when they were attached to nobles than when they were not. Enslavement was a form of social control; it was a highly exploitative method of population redistribution. Slavery permeated society, promoting other types of dependency as a means of security. Clientage was perhaps most important in the states and commercial towns of the savanna and southern Sahara. People attached themselves to a patron, working for him or fighting for him. Such quasi-feudal relationships were a by-product of slavery; failure to participate in such dependent relationships involved great risk.

The West African Coast and its Interior

It stands to reason that an area capable exporting at least 4.5 million slaves from the early seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century must have had a significant proportion of slaves in the local population. There were already many slaves in the interior of the Gold Coast by 1600; there were many more there and elsewhere along the Guinea coast soon after. By the middle of the seventeenth century, slavery was common on the Sierra Leone coast and in the Yoruba and Dahomey region in the Bight of Benin. Several decades later, and especially by the middle of the eighteenth century, the interior country behind the Niger delta and Cross River estuary experienced the
same trend. There were major differences between these areas that affected slavery. Firstly, the Akan area was matrilineal, whereas the other regions were patrilineal; hence inheritance rights and marital customs varied. Secondly, centralized states amassed large numbers of slaves in the interior of the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin, whereas in the Bight of Biafra interior and Sierra Leone, the absence of centralized states prevented the emergence of this sector (except Futa Jallon in the northern interior of Sierra Leone after the 1720s). Thirdly, there were major economic differences related to the availability of local resources. Nonetheless, the similarities in the institution of slavery over this area were strong: Slaves were killed at funerals and sacrificed at religious occasions and state functions. Slaves were also seen as kinless dependents who could be incorporated into domestic groups, and they were a valuable asset that could be sold if circumstances warranted such action.

In the coastal region west of the Gold Coast, slavery was more important as a means of acquiring dependents than as the basis of a productive system, except at relatively isolated port settlements. At Grand Bassam and Grand Lahou, for example, the volume of trade probably enabled some local merchants to employ slaves in agriculture and as porters and canoemen. Along the rivers of Sierra Leone, where there were no centralized states of any size, individual merchants also increased the size of their slave holdings in accordance with their success in business. Among the Vai, for example, Dapper found that slaves were inherited in the 1620s, but even during the height of the slave trade from this stretch of coast, European merchants could never obtain more than ten to fifteen slaves at any place on the coast, which suggests that holdings were relatively small. Still, slaves were common among the Vai. The same was true for the Sherbro; for example, slaves probably did most of the heavy farming for those families involved in hunting, fishing, salt making, and commerce. The salt region of Tasso had numerous slave villages in the early nineteenth century, although it is unclear how old these settlements were and when the concentration of slaves in them began. Almost certainly, however, the main development of these plantations occurred in the second half of the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. Such trading families as the Caulkers, descended from the English agent Thomas Corker of the Royal African Company, stationed on the Sherbro coast in 1684, were important merchants in the eighteenth century, and their access to slaves made it possible to employ many in agriculture.

In the interior of the Gold Coast, one of the principal functions of slaves was working the gold deposits. As early as the 1620s, Samuel Brun observed that the coastal Akan “have numerous slaves looking for gold in the sand near our fortress…. On one occasion, I found a good fifty slaves at the sea side looking for gold in the sand.” In the 1670s, in the area near the future capital of Asante: The Accasseeers, assuming many difficulties and risks, have the veins of gold in the mines explored to a considerable depth. They use all manner of instruments: huge iron hoes, baskets and strong ropes, not just to dig steps and galleries in the ground, but also to
retrieve the gold found there. They tell as well how very often a large number of slaves disappear in the mine shafts because of cavein.22

In the 1690s, Tilleman reported that:

The gold is dug out of the soil by the slaves of these Acaniers [Akan]…. When digging for it no notice is taken of any visible gold in the dug-up soil, but this soil is taken by the slaves in large wooden dishes and made into large heaps by the nearest water [for panning]. In the dominions of Petu, Sabu and Commendo, several hundreds of slaves are often to be seen seeking for gold … on the beach.23

The practice of using slaves in gold production continued under Asante. The risk of death in the pits was considerable because of the environment and relatively low level of technology. The rainy season left the ground damp for months, thereby increasing the danger of cave-ins. This risk was perhaps a major reason why custom forbade the Akan from mining gold themselves. Custom sanctified the exploitation of slave labor, and because the gold industry was so important to the local economy, both before the rise of Asante and after, the use of slaves in production marked a fundamental shift in the organization of the social formation.

Slaves were used in other productive activities too, sometimes on a large scale comparable to that occasionally found in gold mining. In Akwamu, for example, the “great caboceers” – who included government officials, nobility, and merchants – owned many slaves. When Tilleman visited the capital, Nyanaoase, in 1695, he found that plantations surrounded the city, and most of the workers on these plantations were slaves and pawns. These “caboceers” – abirempon in Akwamu – were an urban class; they had armed retainers who were used to enforce tribute collection in the provinces and who sometimes engaged in raids and war for their masters. Individuals might have hundreds of such retainers as well as other dependents, relatives, clients, servants, and slaves. The plantation slaves and pawns were settled outside the capital and almost nowhere else in the state, in part because they were needed to provision the large establishments in Nyanaoase and in part because the abirempon preferred to live at the capital. The plantations also raised crops that were sent to the coast to buy fish and salt; some produce was sold to European forts and slave ships.24

Asante too developed a slave-based plantation sector, again concentrated around the capital, Kumasi. Information on the origins of this sector is lacking, but accounts from the second decade of the nineteenth century suggest that the settlement of slaves in the vicinity of Kumasi had begun in the middle of the eighteenth century, if not a few decades earlier.25 Slaves lived in their own villages away from Kumasi, and their labor provided most of the foodstuffs needed to supply the army and large households of the aristocracy. It seems likely that similar concentrations of slaves were found around the capitals of other Akan states, including Denkyira, before it was destroyed c. 1701, and Akyem before
it fell in 1742. Similarly, the commercial towns of the forest-savanna frontier probably had a plantation sector as well. Muslim merchants were located at Bighu (destroyed in the 1720s), Nkoranza, Gbuipe, and Kafaba, among other places, and if the nineteenth-century successors to these commercial centers are any indication of past practice, then slave-based agriculture was vital to the provisioning of the caravan trade. As Asante conquered these towns, this commercial network was reorganized. Individual plantations and towns were eliminated, but the continued importance of the Muslim sector suggests that the relationship between slavery and trade was maintained.

At the towns on the Gold Coast itself, slavery was also widespread, and the functions slaves fulfilled were similar to those of the interior. The coastal merchants used male slaves as armed retainers, porters in the trade with the interior, crew on boats, and agricultural workers. Many slave women were taken as wives, and they also labored in the fields. Indeed, wealthy men on the Gold Coast conceived of their status in terms of the number of their slaves and children, as the Dutch merchant L. F. Romer observed in 1740: “A Negro only has his children and slaves, that is what riches consist of…. His children and slaves are really his wealth, his power and protection; the more he possesses, the more he is esteemed.” Slaves were bought or seized outright. Children were the product of polygamous marriages that were arranged through the manipulation of legal pawnship or the purchase of slave women. Their children were recognized as legally free – that is, they were not supposed to be sold – but they lacked kinship affiliation with their master-father’s kin for at least another generation until time and intermarriage blurred slave origins. Slavery enabled merchants to acquire dependents who could be incorporated into their establishments, but unless they were loyal and trustworthy, they could be sold, sacrificed, or exported.

The rationale for slavery differed between matrilineal and patrilineal societies, but the results were the same. It is easy to see why men wanted slaves in patrilineal societies: Slaves were the personal property of the owner, with no responsibilities to his kin. In matrilineal societies, slavery was also a means of bypassing kinship obligations. Among the Akan, whose society was structured through the female side of the family, kinship was a powerful organizing principle that tied men to their sisters and maternal uncles. They did not pass their wealth on to their children if those children were the offspring of a free woman who had lineage connections. Indeed, a man’s children by a free wife had stronger economic and social ties to the wife’s family. Slaves bypassed these restrictions and enabled wealthy men to establish large households that were dependent on them and not some larger kinship unit. Slave women in particular were valuable, for they lacked kin, and the children they bore had only a loyalty to their father’s family. Other slaves had the same relationship. There were no obligations that existed outside those for the master. Hence a man could depend on their labor and cooperation, because they had nowhere else to turn.
Except for the metropolitan districts of Akwamu, Asante, and other states and the commercial towns of the coasts and far interior, slavery was relatively unimportant; slaves supplemented existing labor in small holdings based primarily on kinship obligations. This peasant sector paid tax to the state and was subject to harassment from officials and their slave retainers. Occasionally, individuals emerged as small merchants, gold producers, or kola exporters, but inheritance customs and death taxes usually prevented the consolidation of a prosperous rural elite. Either entrepreneurs moved to the commercial and political centers, or their activities remained relatively small scale.

Oyo used slaves extensively in administrative and military capacities, which this state could afford to do, considering the role it played in the export of slaves to the Americas. The king (alafin) had a large staff of slaves who resided in the palace and adjacent compounds. These probably numbered several thousand in the first half of the eighteenth century and consisted of three categories. Eunuchs were one. Some guarded the king’s wives and children; there were also three senior eunuchs who were responsible for judicial, religious, and administrative matters, respectively. The second category of royal slaves was the ilari, designated as such because their heads were shaved and they were given special face and body scars. They served as the king’s bodyguard, royal messengers, and tax collectors. There were several hundred of both sexes and they had their own officers. The third category of royal slaves included large numbers of individuals with administrative and ritual functions. This system appears to have developed gradually, reaching its zenith before 1754 and the coup d’état of Basorun Gaha. Gaha dismantled the royal administration and substituted one of his own, probably relying on his own slaves. After he was assassinated in 1774, Alafin Abiodun (d. 1789) reestablished the royal slave system.59

This administrative structure relied on provincial slave officials, known as ajele, who were appointed to administer specific towns and were responsible directly to the king. These officials in turn required the services of numerous slave subordinates, including tax collectors, customs officials, and messengers. The ajele system was particularly important in governing the province of Egbado, through which the main route to the coast passed after 1770. Slaves were also a central feature of the military. Besides the personal bodyguard of the king, slaves dominated the cavalry, which was the backbone of Oyo power. Hausa and Nupe slaves tended the horses and staffed much of the cavalry force. Because of environmental factors, the breeding of large and strong mounts for the military was not possible in Oyo country. Horses had to come from the north, just as the experts in horse care did. In addition, many retainers of the military officials were slaves who often came from the north.10

Oyo’s military slaves received special privileges because of their position – they had the responsibility for the enslavement of other people. But they were not assimilated; they remained apart as Muslims and nonnatives. Indeed, their allegiance to Islam was indirectly promoted, for religion gave them status in a society based on the kinship ties they lacked. For many slaves, therefore,
identification with Islam became a feature of slavery. This did not imply exploitation, but it enhanced recognition as dependents.

Slave owners in the interior of the Bight of Benin also used slaves in productive activities, at least in Dahomey, which was a province of Oyo after 1726. William Snelgrave, a slave trader familiar with Dahomey in 1726–1727, provides one of the few glimpses of the economic exploitation of slaves, which he associates with other aspects of Dahomey slavery:

It has been the Custom among the Negroes, time out of Mind, and it is so to this day, for them to make Slaves of all Captives they take in War. Now, before they had an Opportunity of selling them to white People, they were often obliged to kill great Multitudes, when they had taken more than they could well employ in their own Plantations, for fear they should rebel, and endanger their Masters safety.  

Snelgrave’s account established the connection between three dimensions of slavery in Dahomey, including the execution of slaves, criminals, and prisoners at state functions, the sale of slaves to Europeans for export to the Americas, and the employment of slaves in agriculture in the domestic economy. The state executions and the export trade were effective methods of controlling the domestic slave population.

Unfortunately, the earliest substantial knowledge of the slave population at the Oyo capital comes from 1830, only a few years before the final collapse of the Oyo state. At that time, it was estimated that two-thirds of the people in the city were slaves, and it is highly likely that many of these were farmers and craftsmen. This situation probably dated from the eighteenth century, if not earlier still.

In the interior of the Bight of Biafra, from where more than 900,000 slaves came in the period from 1700 to 1800, many families had slaves, as Olaudah Equiano’s account from the middle of the eighteenth century makes clear. Equiano’s father had slaves in his household, and Equiano’s generalizations about slavery suggest that slaves were common. Equiano himself, after he had the misfortune of being kidnapped, worked as a blacksmith’s apprentice. Then he was sold to European merchants and eventually became a plantation slave in the Americas. His comparison of his experiences is instructive:

Those prisoners which were not sold or redeemed we kept as slaves: but how different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West-Indies? With us they do no more work than other members of the community, even their master. Their food, clothing, and lodging, were nearly the same as theirs, except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were free born; and there were scarce any other difference between them than a superior degree of importance which the head of a family possesses in our state, and that authority which, as such, he exercises over every part of his household. Some of these slaves have even slaves under them as their own property and for their own use.

Equiano was aware, however, that justice was not always served in his native land, not only because he had been kidnapped, but also because his father had
been involved in legal cases that indicate that illegal enslavement had become a serious problem. Indeed, slave merchants were customarily questioned to determine the legality of their merchandise. Only prisoners of war and criminals convicted of kidnapping, adultery, and murder were considered legitimate slaves, but merchants often carried large sacks to hide their wares, a heinous practice that Equiano experienced when he found himself inside one.

Equiano’s comparison of Igbo and American slavery presents the obvious contrasts between small-scale domestic slavery and plantation slavery; inadvertently, Equiano attests to the contribution of slaves to production in his homeland. Slaves did the same work as “other members of the community, even their masters,” which would involve agricultural labor, crafts, trade, and domestic chores. That this work was “no more” than what free people did cannot be accepted without qualification, however. Equiano left his country at the age of ten or eleven; his memory may well have been clouded by a romantic image of Africa and the influence of the British abolitionists who were his patrons. Nonetheless, the details of slavery – the possibility that slaves could own slaves and the social distance maintained between free persons and slaves – indicate a social formation in which slavery was common.

Other than Equiano’s brief account of the employment of slaves in production, there is simply little information to examine. The Aro settlements at Ikelandwu (Ndieni cluster) and Ndizuogu were founded by slaves. Aro traditions do not reveal the functions of slavery; they suggest that the founders were commercial agents, but it is likely that slaves were employed in menial tasks and that tradition has emphasized the possibility of social mobility and commercial success rather than agricultural work and head porterage, in which most slaves were probably employed. In the Niger delta, slaves were involved in economic activities too. They were needed to man the large riverboats that were already operating between Bonny, Elem Kalabari, and Old Calabar and the riverside markets of the interior. The Igala, Aboh, and Ossamari traders on the Niger River also had large boats, and they too probably used at least some slaves.

The types of slaves that were common in Equiano’s time included funeral victims, cult devotees (osu), and other persons dedicated to nonproductive and noncommercial uses. Secret societies and titled societies that wealthy and influential men (and sometimes women) joined sometimes required the sacrifice of slaves; at least, this was the practice in the nineteenth century, and there is no reason to suppose that conditions were not the same in the eighteenth century, if not earlier still. Osu were slaves dedicated to shrines and could not be sold because they no longer had a human master. Funerals were considered a time to display wealth through sacrifice; the killing of slaves was later a particularly conspicuous display, although horses imported from the savanna were also used, along with other valuable objects. Other nonproductive uses of slaves included the sacrifice of slaves to deities, such as to the salt-making gods at Uburu, the most important inland source of salt and the site of one major Aro fair.
Despite the gaps in the documentation for the Biafra interior – and indeed for other places too – the historical trend is clear. A mode of production based on slavery emerged on some parts of the West African coast. Among the Akan, this mode of production antedated the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; gold production, head porterage, and agricultural employment for slaves long preceded the boom in slave exports in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. The external trade reinforced and encouraged the expansion of a slave mode of production, but the American market did not cause it. Along the upper Guinea coast and in the Bight of Benin, there appears to have been a direct correspondence between the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the consolidation of a slave mode of production. Oyo, Dahomey, Allada, and other states struggled to exploit the possibilities of the export trade, and in the process slave masters employed their slaves in domestic production, apparently on an increasing scale. Along the upper Guinea coast, local merchant-princes emerged who used slave labor to advantage too, and the rise of Futa Jallon was closely associated with slavery. By contrast, in the Bight of Biafra, the interaction between enslavement, trade, and production only began to achieve a level of integration that can be equated with a mode of production based on slavery, and then only in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Slavery in West-Central Africa

Although slaves were used in agriculture, commerce, and other economic activities in west-central Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the social formation there was different from that of the northern savanna and the West African coast. A mode of production based on slavery can be identified, but the size of the export trade – perhaps 1,135,000 slaves in the seventeenth century and more than 2,365,000 people in the eighteenth century – demonstrates that west-central Africa remained primarily a supplier of slaves for sale to the Americas. In general, the export trade drained population from the productive sectors, concentrating slaves in some areas, often in connection with the export trade. The supply mechanism thereby influenced the expansion of a slave mode of production. So many slaves were exported that slavery assumed an importance similar to that in West Africa and the northern savanna. Slaves were used in the production of food, in porterage, and in other sectors of the economy.

Slavery was closely associated with the export sector and its supply network. Slaves were most numerous along the routes into the interior – Mbanza Sonyo to São Salvador in Kongo, Luanda to Kasanje and Matamba, the Loango coast to Malebo Pool on the Congo River, and Benguela to Bihé (in the eighteenth century). While these routes and the various routes that intersected with these points prospered, the size of the slave population increased; when political and economic conditions deteriorated, the slave population stabilized or declined.
Wherever slaves formed a substantial proportion of the population, their labor was an important component in production.

The concentration of slaves around São Salvador and Mbanza Sonyo in Kongo continued for the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century, even though the slave trade through the Kongo port of Mpinda declined with the collapse of the Kongo-São Thomé commercial axis. A belt of slave estates extended outward for a radius of 35 km around these two centers; the population of the capital district was between 60,000 and 70,000 people, most of whom were slaves whose agricultural labor supported the residents in São Salvador, which had about 9,000 to 12,000 people, comprised of nobles and their slave retainers. The population of the coastal district of Mbanza Sonyo was somewhat less but still had a substantial proportion of slaves. The report of Giovanni Francesco da Roma, a Capuchin priest, makes it clear that the nobles were preoccupied with managing a slave society. The slave population was sometimes difficult to control, and the hegemony of the large slave owners depended on keeping their plantation slaves and armed retainers divided.

As in the sixteenth century, the two urban districts were not typical of the rest of Kongo, which was less densely populated by small peasant communities of related kin. Nonetheless, one-third of the population lived near the two centers, and since the peasant lineages owned some slaves, it is possible that the total slave population of Kongo was more than 100,000, perhaps slightly less than the free population. The peasant and slave sectors were linked, moreover, for the state used enslavement as a political weapon. Whereas most slaves—both those dispatched from Kongo and those settled at São Salvador and Mbanza Sonyo—came from farther inland, some slaves, at least, were Kongo peasants who had failed to pay taxes or who had committed some action used to justify enslavement, as the reports of Giacinto Brugiotti in the 1650s make clear.

In the 1660s, civil war tore Kongo apart and effectively reversed the role slavery had been playing in the state, at least in the capital district. The Sonyo army sacked São Salvador in 1666, seizing many slaves. Between 1666 and 1678, the entire nobility of São Salvador left the city together with as many slaves and followers as could be controlled. The nobility moved to the provinces, where slaves continued to farm, but the great slave estates of the capital district were broken up. The winner in the civil wars was Mbanza Sonyo, whose population appears to have doubled during the last half of the seventeenth century, partly as a result of the slaves taken in the invasion of São Salvador. Sonyo now had the sole concentration of slaves; its government granted uncultivated land to nobles and missionaries, which was then cleared by slaves. Masters divided the land into two parts; the slaves worked the master’s fields, and the whole of that product went to the master. On smaller plots, the slaves were expected to farm for their own subsistence.

According to one Portuguese missionary, Cavazzi, who traveled through Kongo in 1657, slaves constituted half the population, although it is likely that Cavazzi based his estimate on Mbanza Sonyo alone. Those slaves in Sonyo, at least, he found poorly fed and frequently mistreated:
“they are exhausted by all manner of tasks; their lives are always very trying; the only payment they can hope for is a slight improvement in the treatment they receive.”

The Sonyo nobility exploited its population through the institution of pawnship and the taxation of the peasantry, as well as slavery. In the 1680s, the servile population included many pawns; one Capuchin missionary, Giuseppe Maria da Busseto, spent much of his time redeeming pawns, thereby collecting information on the prevalence of pawnship. Raids on the peasantry also continued. In 1701, for example, one noble seized fifty-eight people in a Kongo village that apparently had not paid its taxes.

With the decline of the commercial corridor through Mpinda to São Salvador (already underway in the early seventeenth century and finalized during the civil wars), the focus of slave concentration shifted to the south. This region – home of the Mbundu and location of Luanda – supplied many of Kongo’s slaves, but other slaves were also settled there, particularly after the foundation of Kasanje and Matamba. These slaves served three main functions: males were incorporated into the slave-supply mechanism as warriors; women bore children for their husbands and masters; and both males and females were used in economic capacities, especially agriculture and head porterage. There were other functions too, including sacrifice, but the contribution of slaves to enslavement, reproduction, and the economy were most characteristic of the slave mode of production here. Even sacrifice was important on the ideological level and reinforced social control.

The Imbangala war bands who moved north toward Kongo in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries relied on a type of slavery that required rapid assimilation and extreme dependence. Those slaves who became soldiers were boys; only uncircumcised youths were taken into the Imbangala ranks, and this meant that the oldest boys were often only seven or eight. The Imbangala also wanted women and older people as long as they could work. Some slaves had a less desirable fate: They were sacrificed before battle. It was reported that Imbangala warlords killed from one to five slaves before a raid, and these were fed to the warriors in a concoction that included sacrificed animals. This cannibalism had the military effect discussed in Chapter 5: It was one among many tactics that terrified people and helped give the Imbangala the military advantage through psychological warfare. The killing of slaves also had an important effect on the slave population, for it demonstrated the power that masters had over their slaves. Imbangala captives faced two extremes: they could be assimilated into the war band, with expectation of full membership as soldiers or wives, or they could be killed or sold to Europeans. The prospect of death had the desired effect of promoting assimilation among those slaves who were singled out from the trade.

Once the Imbangala became less interested in raiding for slaves and established more permanent commercial ties with the interior – a process examined in some detail in Chapters 4 and 5 – it was necessary to stabilize the
interaction between the kinless Imbangala and the Mbundu lineages. This stabilization was advantageous, and indeed necessary, for the lineages, because the Imbangala had a monopoly on trade and military power. Now the lineages accepted a tributary position to the Imbangala: They sent slaves and women to the *kilombo* centers. If they did not do this, they were raided. If they met Imbangala exactions, they could achieve a level of safety and might receive some of the imported goods obtained from the Portuguese. They could at least expect the freedom to buy salt and other necessary items. This consolidation of a more peaceful transfer of people from the lineages to the Imbangala *kilombo* indicates that slaves were common in the lineages by the last part of the seventeenth century.\(^48\)

The lineage slaves appear largely to have been convicted criminals, sorcerers, and people purchased from other lineages. It may be that some were victims of kidnapping and local quarrels. The relative importance of these sources is unclear, but it is certain that many of these slaves were not incorporated into the lineages. They could not be, for to do so would prevent their use as tribute. It was essential that each lineage should maintain slaves as a reserve for the Imbangala. Otherwise, full lineage members would have to fill the tribute quotas. The nature of slavery, therefore, reinforced kinship; slaves were held in common. They worked for the good of the lineage, and they could be sent to the Imbangala warlords when necessary. Slavery, therefore, had more of a political nature than an economic one. It developed to safeguard people who were related genetically. Slavery was a means of segregating people who were not part of the lineage and who could be exploited because of their lack of kinship affiliation.

At the height of the slave trade in the second half of the eighteenth century, Matamba (Ginga), Kasanje, and Portuguese Angola incorporated large numbers of slaves. Again, the relationship with the export trade is clear. According to census data, female slaves outnumbered male slaves by more than two to one – the exact inverse of the sex ratio in the trans-Atlantic trade from Luanda.\(^49\) Because females were often undercounted, the disparity was perhaps even greater. By this time, polygamy was widespread, probably on a greater scale than ever before. While the retention of women helped minimize the impact of the slave trade on the demography of west-central Africa, female slaves were concentrated along the trade routes and at political centres. Birthrates were probably still lower than among demographically balanced populations; at least studies of comparable situations in other periods would suggest as much. Nonetheless, the social formation was altered in a unique way. Some men controlled large numbers of female slaves and their offspring while huge tracts of countryside were devoid of people.

These women were used in production. They wove raffia cloth, a craft that traditionally belonged to males elsewhere in the interior. Apparently the shift from a male to a female occupation occurred because of the availability of women. Most agricultural laborers were also women who farmed their own
plots allotted to them by their husbands-masters. Plantation conditions appear to have existed only with the Portuguese and other merchants, although it is possible that some other slave owners had enough workers to organize field work in a regimented fashion. Marriage effectively protected women from this fate; instead, labor was obtained through a combination of the institutions of marriage and slavery.

Developments on the coast near Loango, a port frequented by European, especially British and French, slave ships during the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, demonstrate the kind of changes that occurred under the impetus of the demand for slaves in the Americas. The methods of enslavement became more common over time, so that conviction for murder, robbery, adultery, and debt were punishable through enslavement, and this punishment reveals that foreign trade subverted local Vili society and economy. The developments were similar to what happened at Luanda and Benguela. Severe punishment for theft and murder protected the operations of merchants and provided slaves for the merchants. Enslavement for debt helped guarantee credit arrangements. Previously, if the example of neighboring people is any indication of the traditional practice, debts could be settled through pawning. A change in the penalty for debt, therefore, reflected the greater commercialization of Vili society. The seriousness with which adultery was treated, however, reveals that dependency was still characteristic. The institution of marriage continued to be sacrosanct because custom required that marriage arrangements do more than unite two people in matrimony. Marriage tied kin groups together in carefully managed contracts that involved commercial partnerships, exchange of property, and reciprocal pacts for defense.

The manipulation of the legal system evident among the Vili becomes clearer when it is realized that the judges in cases resulting in enslavement were the largest slave owners and wealthiest merchants. The incidence of slavery increased from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. At the height of the external slave trade, the number of slaves owned by a man was a sure sign of his wealth, for the size of a man’s following was an important indication of his commercial activities. Slaves were used as porters to carry ivory, copper, and other goods from the interior. The number of slaves is a good indication of wealth in any society, but among the Vili, as among many African societies, dependency was crucial. Slaves were not only commodities. They were also people, and their loyalty was assured by granting them concessions as they participated more fully in the affairs of their masters. These acquired rights can best be seen with the Vili through the types of employment open to them. As porters in the caravan trade to the interior, they were allowed some freedom to act on their own account. Otherwise there was danger of escape and theft. As dependents of merchants, they were given certain safeguards for their future, and particularly for the future of their children. The inhabitants of the Loango ports were exempted from judicial enslavement. Anyone born there could not be sold into slavery, no matter what the crime. Other distinctions,
perhaps less serious but none the less instructive of the ways in which Vili slavery conformed to similar patterns of dependency, were also recognized. When an important man displayed himself officially, slaves carried goods behind him, while other dependents fanned him. It was the same at Luanda, Ambaca, Ndongo, and Benguela.

Lunda and Luba warlords participated in the slave trade because they could mobilize the population of the interior for enslavement, production, and trade. Slaves were channeled toward the Imbangala fairs, but many were settled around the Lunda centers, as the case of the capital territory of the *mwant yaav* (king) most clearly demonstrates. This district, the *mussumba*, was located in the fertile valleys of the Kalanyi and Luiza Rivers, two tributaries of the Lulua River. The actual capital was moved when a new *mwant yaav* came to power, but throughout this district were plantations, worked by slaves and poor women. The origin of this plantation system is closely associated with the rise of slave trading. It may well be that Luba was also drawn into the orbit of the slave trade in the eighteenth century and that patterns of slavery in Luba were similar to those in Lunda. Luba was centered in the area around Lake Boya and the Upemba Depression, further into the interior than Lunda, but political and commercial expansion are associated with the eighteenth century. Although there is no direct evidence for a firm link with slave exporting, the Luba kings established slave villages and slave lineages as a result of raids and expansive wars.

Most of the inland states incorporated slaves in ways not unlike other matrilineal societies, in which men wanted slave wives in order to negate the legal rights of in-laws. For slave women, there were no relatives. Hence many women found themselves in servile relationships that were substituted for other types of dependency based on kinship. Slave children, moreover, were probably assimilated as adopted kin, as they were in the nineteenth century. The status of slavery became less onerous over time, and children born into slavery – perhaps only a small portion of the total slave population – could expect to grow up as members of their master’s lineage.

In west-central Africa, the social formation combined modes of production based on matrilineal kinship, slavery, and tributary relationships. The region was more directed toward the export trade than the West African coast or the northern savanna; the 3.5 million slaves exported to the Americas between 1600 and 1800 appear to have come from a smaller population base than was true in West Africa and the northern savanna. The social formation was distorted accordingly. Kinship structures encouraged the incorporation of slave women, even though lineage society was rooted in matrilineal customs and thereby tied together through free women. This contradiction between the pull of matrilineages and the power of men who accumulated slaves and pawns found a resolution in tributary relationships. Warlords exacted tribute, often in the form of slaves, from the lineages; when regular payments were not forthcoming, slave raids accomplished similar results. The preponderance of female
slaves in the lineages and among the commercial and tributary sectors was achieved through the export of disproportionately large numbers of men. The articulation of slavery with tributary and lineage structures demonstrates that the social formation of west-central Africa was first and foremost a supplier of slaves for export. The connection with the Americas was essential to this formation; the productive sphere was really concentrated there, despite some development on the periphery of west-central Africa itself (see further discussion in this chapter).

**European Slavery in Africa**

The slave populations in the European enclaves along the Guinea coast, in Angola, at Cape Town, and in Zambezia were generally associated with trade, including the slave-supply mechanism; these slaves manned commercial establishments, performing menial tasks, loading and unloading ships, and transporting goods into the interior. Some slaves also worked on farms to supply ships and the European outposts. Other slaves served as soldiers, capturing people for export or guarding trade slaves. These slaves – owned by Europeans and Euro-Africans – should be discussed in the context of slavery in the Americas as well as slavery in Africa. Their existence was directly related to the expansion of the European economy that included the development of plantations and mining in the Americas, the evolution of the slave-supply mechanism in Africa, and the growth of trade with Asia. By the end of the eighteenth century, the slaves in the European enclaves may have totaled 60,000 to 100,000.

By the eighteenth century, there were perhaps 5,000 or more slaves at the European outposts along the West African coast; many of these were owned by chartered companies, although the number belonging to Euro-Africans appears to have increased. At James Fort on the Gambia, there were thirty-two company slaves in 1730 and forty-three in 1763, and, given that the population of the fort was usually not greater than a hundred or so, slaves formed a large proportion of the inhabitants. At the larger French posts at Saint Louis and Gorée, the percentage of slaves was even greater, reaching as much as 86 percent of the population. In 1755, for example, Saint Louis had 648 slaves, 98 owned by the French company and 550 by residents. The number of slaves was reported to be 3,108 in 1776, 1,858 in 1779, 2,000 in 1785, and 2,400 in 1786. At Gorée, there were 768 slaves in 1767, 1,200 in 1776, and 1,044 in 1785.

Along the estuaries of the upper Guinea coast, the number of company slaves was usually several hundred at the major shipping points. Except for convicted criminals, these slaves were not exported; instead, they were trained to operate the local stations. On the Gold Coast, the Dutch and English trade castles kept slaves as domestics, agricultural workers, craftsmen, and common laborers. Most Europeans took concubines as well. These slaves and their descendants who had the skills needed by the European factors sometimes were successful
in investing on their own. Along the upper Guinea coast, such Afro-Europeans occasionally owned plantations near the major commercial centers, supplying rice and other foodstuffs for the local market and the slave ships.\textsuperscript{55}

The largest concentration of slaves at the European enclaves associated with the slave trade was in Angola, where Portuguese missionaries, traders, and officials had owned slaves since the sixteenth century. Even though the southward shift of Portuguese activities from the Kongo-S\u00f3o Tom\u00e9 axis to Luanda reflected a decline in the importance of both Kongo and S\u00f3o Tom\u00e9, there continued to be European-owned slaves in both places. S\u00f3o Tom\u00e9 – greatly reduced in importance as a plantation colony after the 1590s – nonetheless still relied on slave labor, although on a relatively small scale by comparison with the Americas. In Kongo, missionaries and merchants employed slave labor from the early seventeenth century on; one man – Gaspar Alvar\u00e9s – reportedly owned “one hundred plantations of arimos [small farms] in Kongo and Angola, and thousands of slaves,” which he amassed before 1632, the year he gave his holdings to the Jesuits.\textsuperscript{56} All the missionaries used slaves extensively, both in agriculture and as porters.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the greatest concentration of Portuguese-owned slaves developed in the area centered near Luanda between the Dande River in the north and the Kwanza River in the south, inland as far as the Lukala River. There was a second region further south around Benguela inland to the edge of the central plateau. These areas became centers of plantation agriculture operated by Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese who were involved in the slave trade with the interior.\textsuperscript{57} Some estimate of the size of the slave population can be gained from the Portuguese census of 1777 and 1778, which establishes that slaves formed a considerable portion of the population in the core areas of Portuguese control. Women outnumbered men in this population – far greater percentages of male slaves being exported. As a result, women performed much of the agricultural labor in the region, and the demographic structure of the slave population reinforced the patterns of labor organization.\textsuperscript{58} Portuguese slave owners relied on female labor in the production of foodstuffs needed to feed the trade slaves and to stock the slave ships. The use of slave labor was a logical extension of the export trade, because some slaves could easily be put to work in the business of sending the majority to Brazil.

The accumulation of slaves at Cape Town and in its hinterland was also a by-product of European commercial expansion, although the connection with the trans-Atlantic slave trade was more indirect than slave use along the Guinea coast and in Angola. Founded in 1652 as a way-station in the Dutch trade to the orient, the Cape settlement catered to ships passing to and from India and Indonesia, whose cargoes included cowries and textiles for the slave trade as well as spices and other goods for European consumption. Even the cowries and textiles were first imported into the Netherlands before being reexported back to Africa. A few slave ships from southeast Africa and Madagascar stopped at the Cape for provisions, but this trade was small until the end of
the eighteenth century. The flow of trade brought slaves, however; most came from Madagascar; some came from southeastern Africa, and some even came from Asia.\(^5\)

In the early years of the colony, the Dutch East India Company owned most of the slaves at the Cape, who were used to maintain the port facilities, and the Company always remained the largest single owner of slaves. By the first two decades of the eighteenth century, the Company owned more than 400 slaves; thereafter its holdings remained relatively fixed in size, averaging several hundred until after mid-century and attaining a peak of 946 in 1789. Many of these slaves were kept in company-owned barracks, first built in 1679 and expanded in later years. The occupations of the company slaves included the range of activities needed in the port: carpenters, masons, coopers, smiths, stevedores, and general laborers, although some were also gardeners and shepherds. As is evident in these occupations, the company had a major influence in determining the nature of slavery; commercial operations were foremost in the treatment of slaves and in the governing of virtually all aspects of the colony.\(^6\)

As the number of Dutch immigrants increased in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, slavery became an essential part of the expanding colony; free whites considered manual labor fit for slaves or Khoikhoi, who were reduced to servile status as tenants or dependent shepherds. The white population expanded from only 125 in 1670 to 1,695 in 1711. Thereafter, population continued to grow slowly, reaching 4,511 in 1750, 7,736 in 1770, and attaining a high of about 20,000 by 1798. Many of these settlers were also associated with the transit trade around the Cape, but some whites moved into the interior, where they opened farms or raised stock. By the early eighteenth century, the slave population was already equal to the number of free whites – approximately 2,000 slaves by the second decade of the century. The company decided in 1717 to discourage the immigration of more Dutch in favor of importing more slaves; thereafter, the slave population grew even more rapidly, eventually reaching a total of 25,000 in the 1790s.\(^7\)

The size of slave holdings varied considerably, although in general holdings were not as large as on the plantations of the Americas. In the early eighteenth century, some settlers owned considerable numbers of slaves, but most settlers owned only a few, if any. One governor had more than 200 slaves settled on his estate at Vergelegen, and other colonists had from 10 to 20 slaves each.\(^8\)

By the middle of the century, this range of holdings was well consolidated; there were relatively few large slave holdings; only seven owners had more than fifty-one slaves, with the largest having ninety-four slaves. Nonetheless, these seven masters had 24 percent of all the colony’s slaves. Another 25 masters held between 26 and 50 slaves, and 117 owners had between 11 and 25 slaves. These figures are significant because they demonstrate that a relatively few individuals owned most of the slaves at the Cape, and these same individuals dominated the agricultural economy. The company satisfied its requirements
for basic provisions by issuing supply contracts to the highest bidder, who then enjoyed a monopoly of the company’s business. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of slave owners had only a few slaves, so that in the white population as a whole there was a high incidence of slave holding. In 1750, almost half the male population owned at least one slave.\textsuperscript{63}

In many ways, slavery at the Cape was a cross between the slavery of the Americas and the castle slavery of the European commercial establishments along the West African coast, as well as enclaves at Luanda and Benguela.\textsuperscript{64} Because the company was the largest single slave owner and many townfolk worked in commercially related activities that depended on the transit trade between Europe and the Indian Ocean, slaves were shielded from the harshest forms of slave management. Furthermore, the size of slave holdings also meant that many slaves had the opportunity to acquire skills that allowed for the possibility of some improvement in well-being. Nonetheless, race was a significant factor in the control of the slave population, just as it was in the Americas. The pattern of conversion to Christianity, miscegenation, manumission, and cultural change are more similar to the history of slavery in tropical America than to other European enclaves in Africa.\textsuperscript{65} The farmers in the hinterland used slaves as field hands, raising crops that could be sold at the port to provision ships and to maintain the town’s inhabitants. The wheat farms and vineyards of the interior averaged sixty hectares in the early eighteenth century; these were large farms, not plantations. The cattle ranges beyond the farms and vineyards were much bigger, but slave holdings were not large. The trekboers, as the Dutch settlers were called, relied primarily on dependent Khoikhoi and only a few slaves for labor on these frontier estates.\textsuperscript{66}

The Dutch community at the Cape prided itself on the differences between its treatment of slaves and the plantation slavery of the Americas. The comparison is instructive, even though the contemporary assessment needs considerable qualification, because the comparison is an implicit recognition that slavery at the Cape and slavery in the Americas were similar. As Commissary General J. A. de Mist, who was sent to the Cape in 1802, reported:

There is a great difference between the treatment of these slaves and [that] meted to those who are yearly shipped to America from the Congo and Angola. At the Cape they are, in the majority of cases at least, looked upon as permanent family servants.... The abundance of the necessaries of life and the comparatively easy work of fetching and carrying wood, herding cattle, tilling the fields, labouring in the vineyards or attending to the daily housework makes their lot in life quite tolerable, and if, at times, some inhuman wretch is found who ill-treats his slaves, nowhere is there a better opportunity of obstructing and altogether preventing this ill-treatment by means of good laws than at the Cape.\textsuperscript{67}

This account clearly establishes that slaves performed most of the work at the Cape. While de Mist was probably correct in suggesting that the lot of most slaves in the Americas was worse than the majority of slaves at the Cape,
the reasons for this were not because of a superior legal system in the Dutch colony. Rather, it was usually the case that slaves in small holdings, particularly at commercial centers, fared better than plantation slaves. In this sense, the Cape slaves benefited, but when allowance is made for a distinction between the town slaves and the agricultural workers of the countryside, which de Mist does not do in his portrait, then the Dutch settlement must be considered to be similar to the Americas.

Slave holdings among the Portuguese settlers in the Zambezi valley were also considerable, originating in the sixteenth century but becoming particularly important in the seventeenth. Here slavery was really determined by the military functions that the Portuguese had traditionally filled in the Zambezi region. Their earliest contacts were as mercenaries, and they acquired slaves to fill the ranks of their private armies. These soldiers, called *achikunda* (hence the ethnic name, Chikunda), sometimes farmed, but only to feed themselves, and more often they lived off the tribute provided by African peasants on the lands claimed by the Portuguese warlords. These vast tracts of territory, nominally granted by the Portuguese crown as landed estates that were supposed to revert back to the crown after three generations or some other specified period, in reality constituted a political order that received local recognition only because of the armed might of the slave soldiers. Ties of dependency characterized the relationship between lord and Chikunda warrior. They lived off the tribute extracted from the peasantry in the same way that Bambara regiments did in the western Sudan. Some slaves were employed in mining gold in the Zambezi basin; a few Portuguese settlers had as many as 300 slaves in gold production. Nonetheless, the dominant pattern was the use of slaves as soldiers.

Fernando de Jesus Maria described the corporate identity that prevailed among slaves on the *prazos* in 1762, revealing their essentially military function. It was not possible to order these slaves around as if they were mere chattels. As soldiers, they knew that the strength of the *prazo* depended on their support, and despite their slave origins, they secured for themselves a status above that of the free peasantry. Fernando’s account reveals this feature of slavery on the *prazo*:

The slaves which are kept in each household as though part of the entail are called the *botaca*. These slaves have a leader who is called a *mocasambo* and another second to him called *sachicunda* who is the same as the treasurer in these *botacas* who does all the business. The *senhor* [master] cannot give a single negro of the *botaca* away without the others all mutinying ... to the *mocasambo* the negroes have such a blind obedience that if it is necessary to execute any one of them he will briefly consult with the eldest of the slaves and the execution will be carried out at once without any demur.

Fernando was referring to the able-bodied men who were organized into military units of ten of twelve men under a *tsachikunda*, and together formed regiments under the command of a *mukazambo*. Production was left to the
women, who formed a considerable portion of the slave population. In 1759, the family of Dona Ines Pessoa de Almeida Castelobranco had an estimated 6,000 slaves, and contemporary Jesuit records provide inventories that confirm a total of 1,837 slaves on her two largest estates at Cheringoma and Gorongosa, exclusive of women and children. Ten prazo-holders had holdings of more than 1,000 slaves in 1759; 11 had holdings of 500 to 1,000 slaves; and there were many holdings with fewer than 500 slaves. Altogether there were some 33,500 slaves reported. Other holdings included those of Nicolau Pascoal da Cruz, who claimed to own 340 slaves in this same period. In 1788, the slave holdings of João Fernandes do Rozario consisted of 25 adult male slaves and 8 females on one prazo; at another, he had 20 men and 60 women; while at a third, he had 15 males and 30 female slaves. On a fourth prazo, the sexual division of its 60 slaves is not reported. In his household were 50 boys and 30 girls, as well as 42 slaves with special skills, but whose sex is unknown. Altogether João Fernandes do Rozario had at least 500 slaves.

Slavery in the Zambezi valley shared some features of local African ideas of slavery as a form of dependency, but Europeans and Afro-Europeans were the masters. The resulting adaptation of European models of slavery to the African setting helped transform the social formation so that it became connected with the slave trade. The prazo-holders increasingly relied on the export of slaves for a major portion of their income, especially in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Tribute from the subject peasantry was associated with slavery through the threat of violence which the slave armies of Chikunda could inflict on recalcitrant people. European forms of slavery were not directly imposed on Africans; rather the Portuguese became another group of warlords. The partial assimilation of the Portuguese into the local political economy merged the Portuguese need for slave labor in the Americas with African conceptions of slavery.

African slave owners did not generally exploit slaves in the same ways as Europeans because the possibilities of productive agriculture and mining based on slavery were largely absent, except in a relatively few places. This confinement of productive slavery reveals a crucial feature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The exploitation of slaves for purely economic motives was found in the European enclaves and in some places like Asante and Dahomey, but the association of slavery with the economy was more characteristic of the European sector than the African, except when the African sector was strongly associated with exports. The existence of prazos with large numbers of slaves in a region where lineages had only a few slaves is typical of this pattern. In effect, two modes of production existed side by side; estate holders, with their Chikunda armies and slave villages, were tied into a system of slavery, whereas the small peasant communities scattered throughout the Zambezi valley were only marginally affected by slavery and instead were organized on the basis of kinship.

While slavery underwent a transformation in response to the expansion of the slave trade, the nature of this transformation was unique in different parts...
of the Atlantic coastal basin. The interaction between indigenous patterns of dependency and the foreign trade resulted in major social changes. These were closely associated with centralized states on the Gold Coast and in the Bight of Benin, with a decentralized commercial confederation in the Bight of Biafra, and with a system of administered trade in west-central Africa. What linked all three tendencies was the legacy of an ideology based on kinship structures. Whether slaves were employed in production, as retainers, in the military, or as bearers of children, slavery strengthened kinship groups. The primacy of kinship remained secure even as the political economy became interwoven with the intercontinental network of slavery. Kinship helped define who could be exported and who would benefit from this exchange. Increasingly, slavery became the basis of social differentiation.

By 1800, Africa was divided into three zones, whereas in 1500 it had been divided in half. The Islamic frontier still existed; indeed it had expanded somewhat in the intervening centuries. Along the Guinea coast and in the Zambezi valley, the European slave trade had effected changes so that slave societies had emerged where previously there had been none. These were the two externally orientated regions where slavery was most pronounced. In between these two spheres was a zone in which slavery remained marginal to society.