

important in corroding the legitimacy of the system. Clearly, the market does not have the same effect in all social contexts.

In looking at the longer narrative, one is also curious whether Breman is moving away from a focus on the cultural and symbolic meanings of bondage in his categorical emphasis on its economic basis. Possibly, in distancing his own framework from that of Gyan Prakash, there is an assertion of the economic in a way that is not really sustained by his larger argument.

And finally, Breman's discussion on labour bondage raises larger issues that historians are grappling with today. How do we define the shift from unfreedom to freedom? When traditional and non-economic obligations weaken, does a labourer become free? Coming at a time when there is a renewal of a debate on questions of "free" and "forced" labour, Breman's study of labour bondage in West India is of crucial significance.

Three decades ago, *Patronage and Exploitation* charted new directions for studies on agrarian labour; this present work forms a major sequel by locating bondage in a historical perspective.

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ROCKEL, STEPHEN J. *Carriers of Culture. Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa.* [Social History of Africa.] Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH 2006. xix, 345 pp. \$29.95; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859008073367

"The omnipresent porter has become almost invisible – part of the scenery. History has relegated him or her to the background – to the 'enormous condescension of posterity' – like E.P. Thompson's English croppers, hand-loom weavers, and artisans" (p. 5). The image of portly, sweaty, sunburnt, pink Europeans, wearing solar topee hats and safari suits, followed by rows of grinning African porters, bearing boxes on their heads and tramping through the jungles and savannahs of Africa in single file, has become the stereotypical and popular image of European exploration in Africa.¹ Associated with this image of caravan porters is the representation, derived primarily from nineteenth-century anti-slavery discourse, of the porters as slaves. Concentrating on the porters that plied the trade routes of east Africa, Stephen Rockel sets out to trounce and revise the representation of the African porter as an unthinking shackled beast of burden, and to bring to the fore the independent specialist wage-labourer. Essentially Rockel has sought to take slavery out of, and introduce wage labour into, the African caravan trade.

Stephen Rockel begins his work by noting that for a wide variety of reasons the bulk of transport in Africa, prior to the introduction of motorized transport in the early 1900s, was conveyed by human labour; indeed, "Without porters, nothing would have moved" (p. 4). In the late nineteenth century transport routes powered by human power reached their furthest extension and sophistication. Rockel argues that the relationship between labour and transport that developed was such that "in sub-Saharan Africa, caravan porters were the first migrant labourers" (p. 4). Hitherto, according to Rockel, the manner in which African porters worked, organized their labour and employment, and saw and represented themselves, were all obscured by perspectives on Africa's past that were dominated by

1. An image that finds its contemporary representation and manifestation in tented luxury safari camps catering for well-heeled tourists across central and east Africa.

images and ideas of slavery drawn from the popular anti-slavery campaigns of the nineteenth century. Rockel refers to this as the “slave paradigm”, which operated in such a manner as to create “stereotypes of Africa as a continent of slavery, and Africans as incapable of achieving any degree of modernization on their own” (p. 230).

In contrast, Rockel sets out to turn this paradigm on its head, and to show that, “there was indeed a large free wage labor force in East Africa that emerged prior to the development of the colonial capitalist economy” (p. 6). These free wage labourers, “invented a unique working culture” (p. 4) that was informed by, and based in part upon, Nyamwezi ethnicity – “grounded in Nyamwezi cosmology and social norms” (p. 230) – which in turn could be considered to be akin to the “crew cultures” (pp. 23–28) of sailing ships and in particular New Zealand logging camps as described by James Belich in *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders, from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (1996).

Rockel’s careful and detailed historical research, which spans the gamut of contemporary oral interviews, archival spadework, and a good understanding of Nyamwezi ethnography, makes the convincing argument that East African porters were not the captives of the “slave paradigm”, but free professionals who took part in an economy of wage labour that was powered by both external as well as internal events. That is, migrant wage labour, according to Rockel, developed prior to the imposition of colonial rule; “The appearance of the professional or semi-professional porter was an African response to East African conditions and environments” (p. 6). Rockel shows how on the basis of indigenous pre-capitalist labour norms existent within Nyamwezi society, Nyamwezi carriers “invented a unique working culture” (p. 4), that was closely linked to “merchant capital and the global economy” (p. 6).

In a chronological manner his work traces the development of trading routes in east Africa, routes along which Nyamwezi (and to a lesser extent Yao) free men transported ivory and other goods from the interior to the coast. The comparatively stable decentralized political system of the Nyamwezi, coupled with the employment of slaves and women in agriculture, allowed men to travel. By the 1840s, Nyamwezi porters controlled and plied the trade routes that ran from the Indian Ocean through to the Congo basin (pp. 40–41). Working as a porter became a source of status, and over time it became a profession, governed by a strict set of norms and values that were grounded within Nyamwezi understandings of the world. Carriers transported not only goods and produce; they also carried a particular understanding of the world with them, an understanding which allowed for the self-regulation, preservation, and success of east African porters.

In keeping with a “crew culture”, Nyamwezi porters enforced a strict code of behaviour which ensured the preservation of the reputation of porters as a whole. This code governed all manner of issues relating to theft, desertion, payment, and leisure. It is in this context that Rockel tackles the seemingly incessant complaints of European travellers regarding go-slows, strikes, desertions, the alleged pilfering of caravan loads, demands for extra payment, and the like. Within the context of the crew culture, Rockel argues that “porters had considerable leverage over employers and if united could effectively defend their freedom of mobility and customary standards of work, remuneration, and discipline” (p. 164).

The professionalization of caravan portage over time, under the template of Nyamwezi identity, is elaborated upon by Rockel as he provides a detailed account of daily caravan life. How porters were paid, what they ate, how the caravans were organized, where campsites were established, where they walked, how they collectively negotiated

their wages, are all issues that are dealt with by Rockel. In addition, and of extreme importance, as they generally fall by the wayside in virtually all discussions of pre-colonial African communities, the roles and positions of women and children in the course of caravan safaris is also dealt with. Indeed, within the context of the safari, Rockel asserts that, “caravan women were pioneers who asserted a degree of female autonomy not available to most nineteenth-century East African women” (p. 128). The concept of joking relationships (*utani*), which existed between ethnic communities in east Africa, was developed by carriers in such a way as to ensure the security, sustenance, and survival of porters in an environment which was beset by all manner of instability (pp. 197–208). These issues and ways of doing became “the standards that were accepted by newcomers until the disruption of colonial conquest” (p. 65).

The imposition of colonial rule brought about structural changes in the relationship that had hitherto existed between labour and transport in central Africa. Rockel notes: “For Europeans, a way of life [as porters and those associated therewith] for hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, throughout sub-Saharan regions became a feature denoting ‘backwardness’, an anachronistic waste of labor, to be made redundant by modernization and investment in railways and then abolished as soon as possible by colonial governments” (p. 5).

Although the bulk of Rockel’s work concentrates on the geographical area that became known as German East Africa, Rockel has chosen not to cite any German archives; in addition, a number of the German publications referred to in the bibliography have been misspelled. Possibly, further research in German language sources will add to what is already a first-rate piece of work. It is unfortunate that the publishers have treated this excellent book so shoddily; a book of this quality deserves more respect. A number of picture and figure captions have been botched during layout, with whole lines missing (pp. 102, 106, 126, 224). Unfortunately this unwarranted butchering has even been carried over into the actual body of the text. As such chapters 7 and 8 end in mid-sentence, with the reader wondering what Rockel’s final words were.

Undoubtedly, many professional labour theorist’s will have qualms about Rockel’s work, and the extent to which the concept of “crew culture” obscures more than that it illuminates remains debatable. However, Rockel’s strength lies not in his ability to construct and deconstruct elegant theories relating to forms and categories of labour; instead, his strength lies in the hard labour of the historian’s craft in bringing together all manner of sources and references to reconstruct the daily “lived” lives of a very particular group of working people in Africa’s past. Indeed, Rockel’s work illuminates a hitherto completely overlooked aspect of African history, and as such his work will remain the touchstone for any professional interested in the relationship between labour and transport in Africa for many years to come.

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BANIVANUA-MAR, TRACEY. *Violence and Colonial Dialogue. The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade.* University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, Hawaii 2007. Ill. x, 270 pp. \$49.00; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859008083363

A little over a decade ago, succinctly summarizing key trends in colonial history, Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler might well have had a book like this in mind: “Colonialism has come