

CHAPTER 6

The End of Slavery in Africa

Introduction

During 1903 and 1904, Salemi fled from the interior to the coast of Italian Somalia after a number of laws were passed by the colonial government that – at least in theory – abolished the institution of slavery. Salemi had, twenty years previously, been captured as a slave on the Mrima coast. He was then taken by traders to Merka, where he was sold to Sherif Omar, who kept him until 1896, when he was sent to Abiker bin Mire to pay off a debt. His new master worked him very hard in the fields, and even put him in leg irons. Salemi eventually escaped and fled to the coast.¹ Many other slaves also fled the plantation. Of Abiker bin Mire's original twenty working slaves, only eight remained by 1904.

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We never paid a *zakat*, partly because there were no cereals, but primarily because we did not own anything, we could not give anything because we had no ownership over anything at all. We could not even marry. After the arrival of the French, if we wanted to become independent we could try to pay a sum [*fansa*] to the master, and the master would have to free us. Money was rare, back then, so one would give animals. But

¹ See Lee V. Cassanelli, “The Ending of Slavery in Italian Somalia: Liberty and the Control of Labor” in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 316–317.

before the French, ransom was not possible because we had nothing, we could not earn anything either. . . . Life was different, and a slave had no independence. A slave was like one of the animals of his master. He could not move without his master's agreement. . . . Now many old masters are not powerful anymore. The sources of their wealth were animals and milk, which allowed them to support their dependents. But now it's the time of money and *tuwo*. Now, the old masters are our younger brothers. We may even send each other reciprocal gifts to commemorate our past relation. Our old masters can remember about us and send us clothes or sugar. There is no more slavery. Thanks to the [whites], we have entered the market. . . . I have two arms. Give me one job, any job that I can do, and I will not look for the former masters again. And even if an old woman cannot work, she can still go to her relatives, rather than her masters, if they have a job and can support her.²

Slavery ended when the English arrived. The English were stronger than the slaves' masters; the masters had nothing to say against them. . . . But the fields were the property of the masters and the masters retained them; the slaves had nothing. The masters still reaped crops, but not as before, because now their own slaves had been let go and they had to hire workers. . . . The local people could get plots, but only with difficulty, as European-run plantations took up many hectares. For us individual cultivators the available land was just small plots, as you see it is until today. The fields had been taken by the Europeans for sisal planting, as for Europeans sisal was wealth. . . . The workers for these sisal fields came from the mainland: from Tunduru, Songea, and the Wamavia from Mozambique.³

In late 1913 – long after slavery had supposedly been abolished – Amadou Diop bought a boy for 400 francs. The boy (whose brother had also been sold) was forced to work for Diop, who when brought

² From an interview in Ader, Niger, with a descendant of slaves. Interview conducted by Benedetta Rossi; see Benedetta Rossi, "Without History? Interrogating 'Slave' Memories in Ader (Niger)" in Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein (eds.), *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 536–554.

³ From an interview with Mzee Sefu in Mingoyo, Tanzania. Interview conducted by Felicitas Becker, "Common Themes, Individual Voices: Memories of Slavery around a Former Slave Plantation in Mingoyo, Tanzania" in Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein (eds.), *African Voices on Slavery*, 71–87.

to court admitted that he had enslaved the boy, but noted that this was still common practice:

Yes. I bought him from a Mauritanian during the winter of 1913. I paid 400 francs for him. The Mauritanian found me in Diadj. He spent a day in my concession and once we agreed on the price, I accompanied him to Same where he gave me the child. I bought that child to replace my son, who is a soldier. I know very well that I have done wrong and that the purchase of people is prohibited, but like everybody else does in Gandiolais, it did not bother me [to purchase the child].⁴

The demand for children as slaves was strong during this period: they were easier to control and exchange. Eventually, a district tribunal investigated the case, and the two boys were returned to their mother. Diop, on the other hand, was sentenced to five years in prison.

By the end of the nineteenth century, millions of Africans were slaves. Slavery was deeply embedded in African political, economic, and social structures; indeed, Africans – more than ever before – depended on slave labor. No one seriously questioned the legitimacy of slavery as an institution. Yet, by the middle of the twentieth century, slavery had largely disappeared. The legacies of slavery remained potent, and *individual* slaves continued to work in some places, but slavery as an *institution*, for the most part, ceased to exist. To understand this transformation, we must turn to the European conquest and occupation of Africa. Colonial rule transformed how Africans governed themselves, the kinds of economies they could develop, and the ways in which they viewed labor, all of which led to the decline and end of slavery in Africa.

This process was (yet again!) complex and contradictory, as this chapter's introductory stories illustrate. Lovejoy has aptly called the transition a "slow death" of slavery.⁵ In most of Africa, slavery persisted for decades after the conquest. Colonialism introduced new possibilities and problems for Africans. Masters and slaves often looked to preserve or remake slavery in a time that was dominated

⁴ Cited by Richard Roberts, "A Case of Kidnapping and Child Trafficking in Senegal, 1916" in Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein (eds.), *African Voices on Slavery*, 404–414.

⁵ Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

by uncertainty. African slave owners, in particular, sought to preserve control over current and former slaves. Colonial governments usually wanted to end the slave trade within Africa but hoped to perpetuate unfree labor in their colonies when possible. But colonial regimes also depended on European parliaments for their budgets. In all countries – except maybe Portugal – abolitionist sentiment constrained the colonial regimes' policy options. Thus, colonial officials on the ground often had to satisfy abolitionist sentiment at home, while also (sometimes secretly) pursuing policies that allowed slavery to persist or that sought to replace slavery with less coercive forms of labor mobilization. Many colonial states played what W. G. Clarence-Smith has called a "double game": they created a "facade of abolition" by passing laws that technically abolished slavery without, in practice, actually ending it.⁶ In general, then, both European officials and African slave owners perpetuated the structures of dependence. Yet, slavery gradually faded away. Why? In the short term, the broader decline of the internal African slave trade made the reproduction of indigenous slavery difficult. Over the long term, the political economy of Africa changed. By the 1930s and 1940s, colonial legislation, new forms of labor mobilization, currencies, tax and land use policies, and the rapid growth of an export-oriented, cash-crop sector led to the decline of slavery. Slaves and ex-slaves increasingly moved into the wage labor sector. Colonial policies and economic changes do not tell the whole story, however. The end of slavery was also produced by slave resistance. Slaves fled their masters or sought to renegotiate the terms of their bondage in order to improve their living conditions and status. Such actions by slaves demonstrate that, while many forms of African slavery theoretically encouraged the assimilation and incorporation of slaves, in practice they largely failed to do so, or they set such profound limits on slaves' rights that slaves took the opportunity brought by colonial rule to successfully challenge and resist their exploitation in ways that were often unexpected and surprising.

⁶ See Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884–1926* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 114 and W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Slaves, Peasants, and Capitalists in Southern Angola, 1840–1926* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 31.

The Colonial Conquest and African Slavery

Anti-slavery was one of the central justifications for European expansion in Africa. In 1890, as the occupation of Africa was under way, the major European governments signed the Brussels Conference Act, which committed them to ending the internal African slave trade and protecting fugitive and freed slaves. Although colonial governments never made a public commitment to end slavery as an institution, they tied their own expansion to anti-slavery ideology, expressed in a humanitarian language that garnered public approval and support. By 1903, the entire continent, with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia, had been occupied. Despite the altruistic and paternalistic rhetoric, in the conquest period (peaking in the 1890s), Europeans relied on slavery to help make the colonial conquest possible. Colonial powers aimed to run their regimes as cheaply as possible, but they needed soldiers – labor – to fight and to occupy the parts of Africa they claimed. They often turned to African slaves, runaway slaves, or freed slaves. The use of former slaves and captured labor as soldiers, even if they were paid, was both cheap and effective.

Colonial powers used slaving strategies similar to those used in nineteenth-century African states: they sought to acquire dependent individuals on whose loyalty they could rely and who could help them build states – all in a context where labor (and loyalty) was hard to find. In most cases, African soldiers were used in areas that were very distant from their places of origin. In the minds of colonial officials, this practice ensured that the soldiers would feel no loyalty to those they were fighting, killing, raiding, or “policing.” The use of slaves and ex-slaves in this way increased the violence inflicted on Africans. The soldiers of the Belgian colonial army or *Force Publique*, for example, had an especially well-deserved reputation for violence. They seized women, beat up civilians, and plundered homes with impunity. The Belgians were especially effective at making soldiers of the *Force Publique* – many of whom were slaves or ex-slaves – view themselves as fundamentally different from the population they terrorized; they were loyal only to each other. Although he was speaking about conditions in modern Zaire, Gen. Molongya Mayikusa’s depiction of the nature of the *Force Publique* nicely describes the nature of the colonial army

[that] used to resemble an army of mercenaries who lived removed from the population at large. This is reflected in the fact that the soldier

considered himself an elite, while viewing civilians as nothing but “savages.” The soldier [was] a person without faith or soul, torturers of the civil population.... The antagonism was exploited to a point where the military and the civil populations, though united by blood, thoroughly and profoundly detested one another.⁷

The British, Germans, French, Belgians, and Portuguese relied on African soldiers to effect conquest. How were African soldiers acquired? Sometimes slaves were forced to join colonial armies. Some were simply bought on the open market or from their masters by Europeans and then made into soldiers. In many instances, slaves became colonial soldiers in the hope of improving their economic and social prospects. Indeed, they were generally freed after service. The success of colonial armies was partially a result of the decisions of former slaves, who looked to military service as a means to emancipate themselves; dependence was often a route to power in Africa. For slaves, joining colonial armies provided protections and opportunities otherwise unavailable. Thus, the use of acquired slaves as soldiers was widespread. When Frederick Lugard and the British East Africa Company invaded Buganda, for example, they used large numbers of slave soldiers who originated from the southern Sudan. Likewise, the British West African Frontier Force (WAFF) was composed of large numbers of slaves or former slaves, as were the French *tirailleurs* who conquered large parts of what became French West Africa. Similarly, what became the Congo Free State, King Leopold II's agents and officers “redeemed” slaves and conscripted them into the *Force Publique*. Although colonial officers claimed that they were in effect freeing slaves, redemption was simply a cloak used to hide the actual exchange of human beings. In practice, Belgian officials demanded that local chiefs send them conscripts. Chiefs often chose to offer up persons who were already slaves, although they provided free persons of especially low status as well. Finally, many *Force Publique* soldiers had simply been captured in the numerous colonial raids and warfare (in the Eastern Congo especially).

It was common practice to allow African soldiers to acquire slaves captured during military campaigns as a reward for their service and to maintain their loyalty. In other words, colonial armies lived off

⁷ Mwelwa C. Musambachime, “Military Violence against Civilians: The Case of the Congolese and Zairean Military in the Pedicle 1890–1988” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, 4 (1990), 648–649.

plunder not much differently than precolonial armies did. Gaining access to female dependents as servants and wives was one of the central attractions of colonial military service for Africans. In Buganda, the slave soldiers who served the British controlled an average of eleven “followers,” including female slaves and slave concubines.⁸ During the conquest of Southern Nigeria, Hausa soldiers, many of whom were former slaves, did not just loot and seize property, but deliberately released Hausa slaves in the Yoruba towns they conquered or occupied. No doubt many retained female slaves for their own use as “wives.” French military officers in West Africa regularly distributed female slaves to their soldiers, as well as to their African allies. In 1891, 3,000 such slaves were distributed to African soldiers by Colonel Louis Archinard. Likewise, in 1898–1899, a military expedition sent to occupy Chad spent most of its time enslaving women instead. Six hundred female slaves were then distributed to African soldiers, who only months before had been soldiers in the armies of African states, in order to “buy their loyalty.”⁹ The French often argued that they were doing these women a favor; in reality, they were making them into slave wives and domestic servants. For the women, such arrangements no doubt offered a degree of protection in a time of strife and violence. But they were not simply dependents. They were *slaves*, which reduced the rights, protections, and privileges they could claim in comparison to free wives. The use of female slaves by colonial armies was not limited to British and French Africa. African soldiers in the German colonial army, or *Schutztruppe*, in Tanganyika commonly possessed female slaves. Europeans everywhere also kept slaves themselves or simply sold them into the open market for profit. In 1894, *Commandant* F. Quiquandon, for example, owned 140 slaves he had captured in a raid. The scale of these slaving operations was large and involved considerable violence. During the capture of Sikasso in 1898, one witness noted that about 4,000 captives were first gathered, and then “[e]ach European received a woman of his choice. . . . All the *Tirailleurs* received at least three each.”¹⁰ In another case, also in French West Africa, an observer commented that African

⁸ See Mark Leopold, “Legacies of Slavery in North-West Uganda: The Story of the ‘One-Elevens’” in *Africa* 76, 2 (2006), 186.

⁹ J. Malcolm Thompson, “Colonial Policy and the Family Life of Black Troops in French West Africa, 1817–1904” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, 3 (1990), 439.

¹⁰ Thompson, “Colonial Policy and the Family Life of Black Troops,” 439.

soldiers returned “with their prisoners marching 40 kilometers a day. The children and those who are too tired are clubbed or bayoneted to death. One does not have time to concern one’s self with whether they are free or not.”¹¹

Early Colonial Rule, Abolition, and Slave Labor

If colonial states relied on structures of slavery during conquest, their reliance on slave labor generally increased during the early colonial period, although the approaches taken by colonial powers differed. Colonial officials were a varied lot. In some cases – especially in parts of French West Africa – officials created the conditions for liberation via legislation, whereas the British, Portuguese, and Germans successfully squelched emancipationist impulses. Whatever the views of individual officials, most colonial governments soon passed legislation that affected slavery and the slave trade in Africa (for example: 1833 in South Africa, 1874 in the Gold Coast, 1897 in Zanzibar, 1900 in Uganda, 1901 in Nigeria, 1903–1905 in French West Africa, 1907 in coastal Kenya, and 1910 in Mozambique and the Congo). Most colonial powers focused on legislation that ended the internal slave trade, reduced the coercive power of the masters over their slaves, or abolished the “legal status” of slavery before the courts without immediately emancipating slaves. Initially, colonial states were weak. Colonial officials were faced with the reality of creating colonial administrative structures while having few resources at their disposal. Because no European governments wanted to expend substantial metropolitan capital in Africa, colonial officials needed to finance their administrations with whatever they could extract from Africans. Although they had access to the means of destruction, and a substantial technological advantage, they had too few colonial officers in the field and understood very little about the societies they had conquered. At conquest in 1903, for example, Lugard had 231 officers (few of whom spoke Hausa, the local language) to “administer” roughly 10 million Africans in Northern Nigeria alone. As a result, in the early phases of colonial rule, Europeans were dependent on African intermediaries (as clerks or interpreters, for example), African soldiers and police,

¹¹ Thompson, “Colonial Policy and the Family Life of Black Troops,” 439.

and, most important, local ruling elites. All colonial states needed to work through Africans, although their methods differed.

The precarious nature of early colonial rule dramatically impacted slavery and abolition. Although every colonial power claimed to have abolished the internal African slave trade – and often claimed to have abolished slavery itself – colonial officials almost uniformly sought to maintain slavery or, at the very least, to limit the impact of abolition. As Jan-Georg Deutsch notes, “local administrative officers ignored the practices they were supposed to suppress, circumvented them, or neglected to inform slaves of their legal rights.”¹² Most officials believed that slavery was necessary to maintain a ready supply of workers and to boost local productivity on which colonial states depended. Because colonial states generally needed cooperative relationships with African elites, many of whom owned substantial numbers of slaves, colonial officials hoped that by keeping slaves in place they would maintain important local alliances, which would have been at risk had African slave owners lost all their slaves. Until World War I (1914–1918), African slave owners and colonial officials essentially collaborated to maintain the institution of slavery in one form or another; in short, slavery was simply too essential to be immediately abolished in practice. When one French visitor to Dar al-Kuti suggested that emancipation be pursued, he was met with this response from al-Hajj Tukur, an important advisor to the sultan:

What would you have us do without slaves? Where would you want the sultan to obtain porters necessary for your travels? Who would cultivate the fields? Look at our arms (and he showed me the thin arms of a Fulbe). Do you think they are strong enough to turn over the earth? Where would you have us find the cattle that your government requests if we had no slaves to give to the northern Arabs in exchange for their herds?¹³

Until World War I (and sometimes later), colonial governments were also unable to eradicate slave raiding and dealing. Men, but especially women and children, were bought and sold under the noses of

¹² Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c. 1884–1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 2.

¹³ Cited by Dennis D. Cordell, “The Delicate Balance of Force and Flight: The End of Slavery in Eastern Ubangi-Shari” in Roberts and Miers (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 160.

every colonial power. In short, the exchange of slaves often continued for a period of time, which further undermined early abolitionist policies. In Nigeria, for example, Hamman Yaji, Emir of Madagali, raided, killed, and enslaved thousands of people, which he carefully documented in his diaries, until he was arrested and deported in 1927. Thus, to reiterate, early colonial states were economically dependent on slavery in ways similar to precolonial African states. They sometimes used African labor directly. In other cases, they allowed Africans to use slave labor. In all cases, slave labor was an essential component in the development of many early colonial cash crops. Eventually, most colonial states sought to replace slave labor with other forms of usually coerced labor, although the extent to which that occurred varied over time and place.

In 1833–1834, the British abolished slavery in the Cape Colony of South Africa. However, abolition produced problems, not the least being that tens of thousands of free burgher settlers in the frontier regions of the Eastern Cape depended on slavery and resented any British intrusion into their management of labor. This resentment led to the migration of settler households out of Cape Colony and into the interior in what became known as the Great Trek. These *voortrekkers* did not just take their slaves and servants with them into the interior; they sought to acquire more slaves in the process. In the three central areas of the *voortrekker* settlement – Transvaal, Transorangia, and Natal – the *voortrekkers* raided surrounding African societies for slaves. Many slaves thus acquired were children whose parents had been killed by *voortrekker* guns. Although these slaves were often called “apprentices” – or sometimes *voortrekker* households claimed that they were simply caring for “orphans” – there was both an active slave trade and a substantial slave population in the region; indeed, these supposed “apprentices” were captured through violence and could be bought and sold like slaves. For example, in 1851, after the capture of two children, their mother

came to Voussie, and begged for the children, and was refused them. She then begged to be allowed to serve along with them, and was permitted to do so. She soon afterwards ran away with them. After a time, Mr. Voussie met one of them in possession of a Boer in Albert district, and asked where he got it [her]. He said he had bought it [her] from Baillie. Voussie produced his title-deed [to the child], and recovered possession, and upon asking “Sara,” how she came there, she stated that

she had been recaptured, and that her sister had been sold to a Boer in Aliwal.¹⁴

Although Afrikaners agreed to prohibit slavery and slave trading north of the Vaal River after the 1852 Sand River Convention, little changed. Like elsewhere in Africa, *voortrekkers* (by mid-century they were called Afrikaners) and the British recognized that the abolition of slavery in the interior was essentially unenforceable and in practice meaningless. As a result, thousands of slaves were captured and put to work. But what did these slaves do? The vast majority of enslaved children and women worked as domestics in Afrikaner households or as farmers and herders. Cash cropping in sugar cane, coffee, maize, wheat, tobacco, and cotton emerged in this period (especially in Western and Central Transvaal), so labor was in high demand. Although children were technically only in service (as “apprentices”) until adulthood, very few were ever manumitted and were, in practice, treated like property, as one contemporary noted in 1859: “They will tell you that they are ... apprenticed till the period of manhood, when they are freed. Don’t believe it. Unless they make a run for it ... they are slaves for life.”¹⁵

In the British-controlled Cape, ex-slaves likewise had few options or economic resources. Many would soon, in the words of R. L. Watson, resume “their role as an exploited labor force.”¹⁶ Between 1834 and 1838, freed slaves worked as so-called apprentices and received no wages in a system that was virtually indistinguishable from the slave labor regime that dominated the region before abolition. Apprentices in the Cape could not leave their masters and could even be subject to sale via the sale of their contracts. Although former slaves challenged their masters when they broke laws that were supposed to protect them as apprentices, they were often ignored; indeed, the laws that protected ex-slaves were not normally enforced. After full emancipation in 1838, many slaves/apprentices left their former masters, especially in frontier regions, but few had the economic resources to sustain long-term independence. Cape farmers feared that the end

¹⁴ Cited by Elizabeth A. Eldredge, “Slave Raiding across the Cape Frontier” in Elizabeth A. Eldredge and Fred Morton (eds.), *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 120.

¹⁵ Cited by Fred Morton, “Captive Labor in the Western Transvaal after the Sand River Convention” in Eldredge and Morton (eds.), *Slavery in South Africa*, 174.

¹⁶ R. L. Watson, *Slave Emancipation and Racial Attitudes in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

of slavery would create a labor shortage. In response to fears about the danger of ex-slaves and the lack of labor, two master-and-servant ordinances were passed in the Cape. The 1841 ordinance effectively enhanced white control over black labor. The law levied criminal penalties for worker “misconduct” that included “refusals or neglect to perform work, negligent work, damage to master’s property through negligence, violence, insolence, scandalous immorality, drunkenness, gross misconduct.”¹⁷ The punishments included periods of forced labor, imprisonment, or the docking of wages. The 1856 ordinance sought to control and discipline ex-slave labor by levying similar penalties. In the Cape, then, even after abolition, ex-slaves remained in highly coercive and dependent relationships with their masters, former masters, and employers.

Although the legal status of slavery was abolished in the Gold Coast in 1874, it took until 1908 for that policy to be extended to the Asante region of the interior. Colonial officials on the spot recognized that slavery was central to elite power and wealth in Asante. These officials were concerned that immediate emancipation would alienate the political elite and destroy local production and prosperity. Slave labor was, for example, more important than free labor in the planting of cocoa trees. Slave labor helped initiate the cash-crop revolution in the region between 1900 and 1916. Early pioneers of cocoa production used slave labor, the labor of pawns, and short-term free coerced labor. Kwame Dei, an early producer of cocoa, used slaves on his cocoa farm, for example. Austin notes that “it is reasonable to conclude that the speed and scale of the early growth of cocoa cultivation owed much to the inputs of coerced (slave, pawn, *corvée*) labour, supplementing self and free family labour.”¹⁸ Wage labor was not common in the period before World War I. The only way to expand production beyond the family was to use coerced labor, although over time the acquisition of slave labor became increasingly difficult.

French West Africa was more complicated. The French used slave labor as early as the 1880s. During the French invasion of the Western Sudan, Joseph Gallieni established so-called liberty villages that housed runaway slaves who seized the opportunity brought by

¹⁷ Roberts Ross, “Emancipations and the Economy of the Cape Colony” in Michael Twaddle (ed.), *The Wages of Slavery: From Chattel Slavery to Wage Labour in Africa, the Caribbean and England* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 142.

¹⁸ Austin, *Land, Labour and Capital in Ghana*, 241.

French intervention to flee from their masters. A major goal of the French was not to provide succor to slaves, but to address the labor shortage they faced (and to encourage slave flight from their enemies). The “freed” slaves who inhabited these villages were used as a captive labor force. As soon as the French no longer needed their labor, they were returned to their masters. Throughout the 1890s French officials aimed to keep slaves in place to preserve craft and agricultural production. Many slaves continued to work producing cotton, sorghum, millet, or salt, among other things. But after 1900, when civilians took over much of the administration of the region, real attempts were made to reduce the sale and traffic of slaves, and fugitive slaves were no longer *supposed* to be returned to their masters, although the regulations were unevenly followed. Thus, civilian French officials – including Ernest Roume and William Merlaud-Ponty – sought to reduce the importance of slave labor in favor of other forms of labor mobilization, which undermined slavery between 1901 and 1914 (although their orders were often ignored by those who favored slavery on the ground). By 1908, wage labor and forced labor were much more common as a result. Yet, in places, the French still relied heavily on slaves as porters and to build railways into the interior, and slave labor remained essential to the production of groundnuts in parts of French West Africa until 1905.

Despite numerous anti-slavery decrees in German Cameroon, slavery remained an important productive institution during the first decades of colonial rule. Among the Douala, for example, commercial cocoa farming was initially dependent on slave labor, and slave prices rose as a result. Slaves were also used in palm oil cultivation. At the beginning of twentieth century, German colonial officials estimated that more than 400,000 slaves worked in German East Africa (Tanganyika). Slavery was not even legally abolished until 1922, when it was no longer German East Africa. German officials actually facilitated the buying and selling of slaves, and taxed many of the transactions to the benefit of colonial coffers. German officials believed that the best approach to sustain the colony was to allow slaves to continue working in the fields and thereby avoid a disruption in African agricultural production, focused especially on rice, sugar, and coconut. They were also concerned that the abolition of slavery would both wipe out the wealth of slave owners and reduce their own access to labor. A German colonial officer wrote: “[N]ow all major government projects are being carried out at the same time by slaves on the order

of the *majumbe* (chief) and slave owners” because local chiefs had no power to compel free people to work.¹⁹ Overtime, the growth of the colonial economy – especially wage labor – led by 1914 to a decline in the actual numbers of slaves from 400,000 to roughly 165,000 (using the numbers generated by colonial officials).

In Northern Nigeria, British officials – like the French – followed the path of “legal status” abolition. But the British officials were much more intent on limiting slave liberation. In 1901, the British issued a proclamation that ended the legal status of slavery. This abolition did not, however, free persons who were currently slaves; in short, all persons held in slavery before 1901 remained slaves. Slavery persisted in some regions until 1936, when it was finally and officially abolished. Certainly the *public* goal was to *eventually* eliminate slavery, but Lugard and his officials recognized that slavery needed to continue in one form or another for a long transitional period in order to ensure stability, the continued production of food and other commodities, as well as good relations with the elite. Otherwise, Lugard believed that the colony would be overwhelmed by social and economic disruptions:

The wholesale repudiation of their obligation, to labour by the entire slave class would in the case of men, obviously produce in every great town a mass of unemployed vagrants and increase the criminal classes: in the case of women it would tend to increase prostitution: while both classes would beyond doubt bring upon themselves unforeseen misery by cancelling the obligation under which their masters lie of providing for them in sickness, or caring for their wives and children during absence from their homes.... The upper classes would be reduced to misery and starvation, and as a consequence to hostility against the Europeans who had brought this chaos about. The result would probably be a rising throughout the Protectorate, with which we do not have the Force to deal. Our ill-advised action would therefore possibly result in both ourselves and our supposed philanthropy being swept away.²⁰

Slaves therefore continued to work throughout Northern Nigeria. Slave labor was central to the groundnut boom of 1912 and 1913–14. Although many free farmers produced groundnuts, the emir of Kano and other slave owners used slaves extensively on large landholdings to produce groundnuts for the external market. Emir Abbas, for

¹⁹ Cited by Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition*, 151.

²⁰ Cited by Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, 81–82.

example, used a large number of slaves in groundnut production at his agricultural estates in Fanisau.²¹ How did the British and slave owners keep slaves in place? The colonial state passed a vagrancy law to force slaves back to their masters and denied runaway slaves access to land through the codification of land tenure policies. Slaves who stayed in place had to pay their masters in kind, cash, or labor to even work on land owned by their masters. The British also encouraged a system of self-redemption that required slaves to pay their masters a fee before they were given their freedom. This effectively compensated masters for the loss of their capital investment and ensured that slaves remained in place for a substantial period. These British policies were nicely summed up by Charles Orr, who in 1911 argued that it was essential to deny slaves access to land until the slave “had contracted to purchase his freedom from his former master . . . in order to prevent vagabondage and occupation of the land by hordes of masterless runaway slaves.”²² Many slaves were either returned to their masters when they fled or the British simply looked the other way when masters recaptured them.

Slavery remained the dominant mode of labor mobilization in Portuguese Africa until at least 1911 (and sometimes much later). The Portuguese either wanted slaves to remain working for their masters or to work for the colonial state. In theory, the 1899 labor code committed Portugal to suppressing slavery and advocated that Africans be “taught” how to benefit from free labor, which essentially served to benefit the colonial state. Slavery was not “legally” abolished until 1910. The reality of the transition from slave to free labor was considerably more complex. Over the colonial period, the Portuguese (and nearly every other colonial power) used forced labor extensively. We cannot always call this forced labor slavery. However, in the early colonial period, forced labor depended on persons of slave status. It was, in effect, an attempt to continue slavery by simply calling it something different: “contract labor.” In Angola and Mozambique, Africans were required to sign labor contracts. Many so-called emancipated slaves were forced to sign five-year labor contracts with their “redeemers,” which effectively bound “former” slaves directly to their “former” masters under the guise of a labor “contract.” At expiration, the contracts were commonly and automatically “renewed” for another five years, without the knowledge or consent of the laborer. Slaves were

²¹ See Mohammed Bashir Salau, *The West African Slave Plantation: A Case Study* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

²² Cited by Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, 87.

even exchanged (sold) via this system of redemption. Thus, slavery and the slave trade were perpetuated under the guise of free labor. In a report published in 1925 – long after slavery was supposedly abolished – Edward Ross recorded the comments of a group of villagers put to work by the Portuguese:

They say that in the time of the [Portuguese] monarchy (before 1910), although they were slaves, they were better off and got more for their work. Their lot is getting harder. Things got abruptly worse for them in 1917–1918. The Government makes them work but gives them nothing. They return to find their fields neglected, no crops growing. They would rather be slaves than what they are now. . . . This Government serfdom is more heartless than the old domestic slavery, which was cruel only when the master was of cruel character. Now they are in the iron grasp of a system which makes no allowance for the circumstances of the individuals and ignores the fate of the families of the labor recruits.²³

In the parts of Portuguese Africa where slavery was widespread, the precolonial slave labor system was the basis for the emergent forced labor system of the Portuguese. Dependents and former slaves became the backbone of Angola's colonial labor force, for example, to the benefit of both the colonial state and Ovimbundu big men. Africans in this region continued to use slaves as well. Local Ovimbundu leaders in the highlands of Angola deliberately sent their slaves to meet the quota of laborers that the Portuguese required of them. They continued to use slaves in agriculture to produce cash crops for the market. In 1913, one Ovimbundu leader possessed roughly 100 slaves who worked for him producing commodities. The high labor demands of both the Portuguese and Ovimbundu elite led some to outfit caravans to purchase slaves in the interior. In 1926, Willem Jaspert ran across a caravan that was still buying and selling slaves.²⁴ The Portuguese also sought to acquire slaves directly. Colonial officials traveled throughout (and sometimes beyond) their colonies to purchase slaves, who were then forced to sign labor contracts. For example, roughly 70,000 slaves were purchased in Angola and sent to São Tomé and Príncipe mainly to work on cocoa plantations. Although these contract laborers were *supposed* to be paid, they seldom were. Masters found ways to

²³ Eric Allina, *Slavery by Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 76.

²⁴ See Linda Heywood, *Contested Power in Angola, 1840's to Present* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 44.

deny paying salaries. Sometimes masters imposed fines for bad behavior, or deducted money for periods of sickness. One observer noted that contract labor in São Tomé and Príncipe looked to him like slavery: “If this is not slavery, I know of no word in the English language which correctly characterizes it.”²⁵

Abolitionist Policies and African Slave Flight

Colonial officials and African slave owners ensured that slavery persisted well into the colonial period. There were major continuities between the precolonial and colonial periods. Slaves were widely used as workers and as soldiers throughout the continent during and after the colonial conquest. But slavery was also in flux. Colonial policies often had unintended consequences. Masters, slaves, peasants, settlers, artisans, and colonial officials themselves were faced with new *colonial* worlds that were filled with uncertainties and contradictions. Moreover, although many colonial policies served to reinforce slavery and dependency, others undermined slavery. Slave raiding and trading were increasingly restricted by colonial powers, as was the ability of African states to wage war. The reproduction of slavery *as an institution* became increasingly difficult. Many colonial powers also abolished the legal status of slavery. Although this was often window dressing – and many colonial powers sought to avoid implementing these policies in practice – legal status abolition meant that colonial states nonetheless intervened to reshape the relationship between master and slave. How? New colonial laws restricted the legal and coercive power that masters had over their slaves. In addition, legal status abolition meant that slavery did not exist before the law in courts, which undermined the power of masters. Although some colonial governments hoped that these policies would reshape slavery for the better, without fully destroying the institution, they sometimes led to the end of slavery. Other colonial officials hoped that their policies would lead to transformation of slavery into a different – although still coercive form – of labor, including contract labor. But most important, African slaves themselves took action against slavery. Slaves used the opportunities brought by the colonial conquest and legal status abolition to leave their masters. The decisions and actions of millions of African slaves

²⁵ Cited by Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, 126.

mattered. In some times and places, the pressure placed on colonial powers and masters by slaves led to the end of slavery more completely and quickly than anyone had envisioned.

Scholars have debated the extent to which slave flight occurred in the context of colonial rule. Although we have observed how colonial powers delayed abolition and accepted slavery, they all eventually issued proclamations that impacted the legal status of the institution. How did slaves respond to these colonial policies? Some argue that most slaves stayed in place. For them, the colonial period was not terribly disruptive and slaves had few reasons to leave their masters. Slaves preferred to remain within dependent relationship that offered opportunities for assimilation. These scholars take at face value the erroneous colonial assessment that African slavery was benign and that African slaves were invariably well treated. Other scholars argue that the majority of slaves left their masters, which led to tremendous disruption. As Getz noted, by framing the question as a choice between two extremes, scholars have oversimplified the options available to slaves.²⁶ Certainly there was much to keep slaves in place. Sometimes homes were distant memories or far away (or both). Some slaves were loyal to their masters and hoped for rewards. Some slaves succumbed to social and community pressure to stay, or they judged that the risks of staying outweighed the risks (and unknowns) of leaving. Women often had a harder time than men did because it was harder for women to gain access to land and labor and because they were concerned about the fate of any children they might leave behind. But most important, while it is clear that in many places slaves stayed in place, in other places the reactions of slaves led to profound disruptions. Hundreds of thousands of slaves fled from slavery to make new homes and worlds for themselves, despite the obstacles they faced. Slaves fled throughout parts of British and French West Africa. In German East Africa many slaves had left their masters by 1914. Slaves fled in places as diverse as Sierra Leone, Italian Somalia, Sudan, Tanganyika, Kenya, and Zanzibar. Even the slaves who stayed seized on opportunities brought by colonial rule to renegotiate the terms of their bondage. The choice was not simply whether to stay or go; rather, the slaves who stayed did so *not* because African slavery was automatically assimilative and benign, but because this specific historical period provided slaves with many more opportunities to expand

²⁶ See Trevor Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa*, 121–125.

their rights and to force masters to ameliorate slavery. Most slaves in Africa, then, experienced some kind of change in their status or position as a result of colonial policies.

Although slaves left everywhere, the scale of those departures varied quite substantially; there were regional differences in the scale of flight. In some places slavery was only gradually transformed. In others – often those with the most slave resistance – slavery ended more quickly and abruptly than could have ever been imagined by colonial officials or slave masters. Slaves had many reasons for leaving. But large-scale slave flight occurred most often in regions dominated by high-density slavery. First-generation slaves probably fled more often than those born into slavery. Slaves had the most to gain from flight when faced with highly commercialized slave systems that limited assimilation and that were highly exploitative. French West Africa is perhaps the best example of this unexpected movement from a gradualist to an immediate approach to abolition. French abolitionist policies led to widespread economic disruption and slave migration throughout their West African colonies. How? The *legal status* of slavery was officially abolished by the French on November 10, 1903. These instructions did not immediately end slavery; rather, slavery was no longer to be recognized before any court or tribunal. Other reforms followed that further limited the exchange of slaves and the practice of returning escaped slaves to their masters. In practice, the decree dramatically reduced the coercive power of masters over their slaves. They could no longer reclaim slaves, nor were their claims to slaves as property recognized in law. As Lovejoy and A.S. Kanya-Forstner note: “Henceforth, masters would be able to or reclaim their slaves only with the latters’ consent or by force – and the use of force would leave the masters themselves liable to legal action.”²⁷

French officials were concerned that these policies – and any further moves toward abolition – risked leading to social and economic disruptions. They were correct. Many slaves began to leave their masters. Much of this slave flight was initially focused in the Banamba region of the Middle Niger, where slavery was a central economic institution, although slave flight had been a broader problem since the conquest in the 1890s. The slave population was concentrated in settlements

²⁷ Paul E. Lovejoy and A.S. Kanya-Forstner (eds.), *Slavery and Its Abolition in French West Africa: The Official Reports of G. Poulet, E. Roume, and G. Deherme* (Madison, WI: African Studies Program, 1994), 9.

that surrounded cities, where they produced goods for export. In the spring of 1905 thousands of slaves began to leave their masters. The French initially intervened to broker an agreement that promised to improve the living conditions of slaves in exchange for their return to their masters; the French did not want this exodus to gain momentum. For example, promises were made to allow slaves two days to cultivate their own farms, and masters proclaimed that they would not break up slave families. This agreement lasted less than one year. Masters continued to treat slaves quite poorly; indeed, before the exodus in 1904, one French official noted that

slaves are poorly fed, mistreated, and poorly clothed. Masters rarely give them their two free days [which is theirs] by custom. They prefer to feed them poorly and to be assured of their labour all the time . . . Moko Tala, a slave of Touba, belongs to a master who “generously” gives three *moules* of millet [about six kilograms] for the rations of twenty-five slaves. The *services administratifs* estimated that a daily ration is one kilogram [of cereal] per person per day. Another slave called Hinebahalafé Konati, also of Touba, told us that twenty slaves of his master were given four kilograms per day.²⁸

The problem masters faced was that slaves had more options given the economic and political changes more or less accidentally brought by the French. Thus, in 1906, the exodus of slaves began again. The French were basically powerless to stop slave migration. The exodus at Banamba soon spread throughout the Middle Niger and Western Sudan. According to French reports, by 1908, some 200,000 slaves had left. By 1911, that number climbed to 500,000. Klein estimates that one in every three slaves had left their masters.²⁹ For French West Africa as a whole, perhaps 1 million slaves left their masters in this period. Eventually, the French were left with no other option than to support the slave exodus and look for ways to minimize the disruption. In this case, it was the slaves themselves who made a more radical French abolitionist policy inevitable. To what did these slaves flee? Some returned to their places of origin and farmed. But many more took up positions in the new colonial economy – as construction or railway workers, for example. Still others entered the cash-cropping

²⁸ Cited by Richard Roberts and Martin A. Klein, “The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan” in *The Journal of African History* 21, 3 (1980), 390.

²⁹ Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*, 173.

economy and produced peanuts as labor for others or on their own acquired land. Some took up weaving. Regardless, the importance of wide-scale slave labor in production for African slave owners was on the way out (in some places sooner than others): slaves could no longer be acquired, nor could slaves be subject to the necessary coercion. Yet, ex-slaves became a vital part of the new colonial economy, especially as workers and as farmers.

Although French West Africa probably experienced the largest number of slave departures, slaves everywhere sought to renegotiate the terms of their bondage in this period, which often involved some amount of slave flight. Slave labor gradually disappeared in German and British East Africa, for example. In some places colonial states managed to control the situation better. In Northern Nigeria, for example, the British were faced with problems similar to those the French faced. They too proclaimed that the legal status of slavery had been abolished, but nonetheless hoped to maintain slavery as an institution for as long as possible. Slaves still took advantages of the uncertainties of the conquest – and of British legal status abolition. In the early days of colonial rule, tens of thousands of slaves left their masters. Lovejoy estimates that 10 percent of the slave population fled – perhaps 200,000 slaves in all. Although the British desperately sought to keep slaves in place (and returned many fugitive slaves to their masters), they were, initially, unable to stem the tide. Large numbers of slaves (who had been central to the agricultural production of the Sokoto Caliphate) abandoned their master's farms. As late as 1907, British official Featherstone Cargill could comment: "The slaves are becoming more self-assertive and less willing to work for their masters. There is now practically nothing to prevent slaves asserting their freedom by the simple process of walking away from their masters."³⁰ Lugard outlined what the British faced, and their methods, in a 1902 report, which deserves to be quoted at length:

On leaving Sokoto I had a very disagreeable task to perform. Hundreds of slaves had secretly crowded into our camp, hundreds more clambered over the walls to follow us, and no prohibition would stop them. Turned out of the line of march, they ran parallel to us through the fields, or ran on ahead. I had promised not to interfere with existing domestic slaves; I had no food for these crowds, and in front of us was a desert untraversed and unmapped, in which the infrequent wells were far apart, and

³⁰ Cited by Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, 47.

could only supply a very limited amount of water. Moreover, this exodus of slaves would leave Sokoto ruined, and its social fabric a chaos. There was nothing to be done but send these poor wretches back, and instruct the Resident to enquire into all deserving cases. We did so, and presently found that the King of Gober [Gobir], who was following me with an army of 300 or 400 wild horsemen of the desert, had appropriated all he could catch. We made him disgorge them, and set them at liberty to return. Doubtless very many bolted to neighboring towns, but I considered my obligations of honour and of necessity were satisfied when I turned them out of my own following, and I did not enquire too curiously what became of them.³¹

Where did the 200,000 slaves go? Regions that had lost population in the precolonial period – often as a result of slave raiding, the British conquest, or famine – were repopulated by these fugitive slaves. Slaves sought to return home, where they established new farm and villages. In later periods ex-slaves took advantage of economic opportunities, especially in wage labor, that were brought by the British colonial state. In sum, although the British kept slaves in place through law, regulation, and force until 1936, the decisions slaves made nonetheless had a major impact on the formulation and exercise of British abolitionist policies.

Finally, we turn to three examples beyond West Africa: Italian Somalia, the Sudan, and British East Africa. In Italian Somalia, many ex-slaves joined agricultural settlements operated by Islamic orders to secure their freedom. In this region, 15,000–30,000 slaves sought to reduce their dependency on their masters or former masters. They did not want to work for European wages, but instead farmed on land provided by Islamic religious orders. So many slaves found alternatives that slave-based agriculture rapidly declined throughout the region. Flight to the protection of Islam (especially Sufi orders) was not unique to Italian Somalia. In the Senegambian region, for example, Amadu Bamba's Mourides attracted thousands of ex-slaves. They worked in agricultural settlements for the order – usually for eight or so years – and then were allowed to marry. Ex-slaves thereby acquired land, wives, and children. In the colonial Sudan, British officials believed that the immediate emancipation of slaves would lead to the creation of a population of landless, dangerous, criminal, and lazy ex-slaves whose freedom would lead to economic collapse. As

³¹ Cited by Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, 45–46.

a result, British officials did their best to avoid the question of slavery whenever possible. Colonial land tenure and agricultural policies ensured that tens of thousands of slaves remained working for their masters, who produced cash crops for export (cotton) or consumption (sorghum, dates) that were in high demand. As they did in Northern Nigeria, colonial officials returned runaway slaves and passed vagrancy laws to keep slaves in place. Still, slaves continued to run away. Although Ahmad Sikainga is no doubt correct that most slaves stayed with their masters, the main path to freedom in the Sudan during the early colonial period was flight. The case of the Sudan demonstrates that even when a colonial state was quite successful at keeping slaves with their masters, flight became perhaps the best option for slaves seeking freedom or autonomy. In the areas of the Sudan where there was available land and potential for cultivation, many thousands of slaves ran away and established new villages and farms. Some also left for urban centers or to become soldiers. Slave flight also affected large parts of the East African coast. Here too scholars disagree about the numbers of slaves who fled. Regardless, evidence demonstrates that slave flight was a common response along the East African coast in the early colonial period. Fred Morton argues that this flight was not a new phenomenon; slaves had been fleeing to form their own communities throughout the nineteenth century.³² In the 1890s, thousands left to work on the railroads or in urban areas and thus abandoned slave-based plantations and estates. Thousands more took advantage of colonial rule to run from their masters, despite the efforts of many British officials, both before and after slavery was legally abolished in 1907.

Abolition and Renegotiating Dependency

Although slave flight occurred regularly, many slaves stayed in place during the early colonial period. Slaves born into slavery, who often had more protections and opportunities than first-generation slaves, were the most likely to stay, whereas those first-generation slaves subject to the most direct and complete economic exploitation were the likeliest to flee. Fleeing meant risk. For many, old homes were too far

³² Fred Morton, *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873–1907* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990).

away and economic opportunities too unlikely to make flight worthwhile. Dependence and attachment via clientage and even slavery were, moreover, routes to power throughout the precolonial period. Remaining attached – and protected – as a dependent was often a better long-term option for slaves, as long as their rights and protections were acknowledged or expanded. Slaves who remained affiliated with their masters did not simply submit to the status quo. They sought to refashion the relationship between masters and slaves. In short, as with flight, the early colonial period offered slaves opportunities to reduce their exploitation, which in some cases led to the end of slavery as an institution. As legal status abolition took hold in many places – and as the internal slave trade declined – slaves who stayed often found themselves in better positions to negotiate with their masters than ever before. This was especially the case in places that experienced substantial slave flight, because the slaves who remained were even more valuable to their masters.

What did negotiation look like in practice? Slaves normally sought protections for their marriages and families as well as more control over when and how they worked. In the Gold Coast Protectorate, legal status abolition occurred in 1874, which was so early that slaves had few opportunities in urban areas or in the wage labor sector. Although some slaves certainly fled, a significant number stayed in place and sought to renegotiate the terms of their dependency. In some cases, slaves cleared unoccupied land that they then worked for themselves on their own time and controlled what they produced. But it was much more common for slaves to retain ties to their masters. In the latter case, slaves were given land in close proximity to their master's holdings. In return they gave their masters service in the form of labor (or in later periods a portion of their crops) in a sharecropping-style arrangement.³³ The success of slaves varied over time and place, but in all cases the master-slave relationship was being reworked. Slaves had more control over their time, their farms, and their produce. But they were still dependents. Getz notes, for example, that slaves regularly gave gifts to their masters to confirm their lower and still dependent status.

³³ See Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa*, 133–134 and Raymond Dumett and Marion Johnson, “Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti and the Northern Territories” in Roberts and Miers (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 88–89.

In other cases, masters came out on top in the negotiation. In Northern Nigeria, for example, many of the slaves who stayed in place paid a sum known as *fansar kai* to their masters. These slaves worked for themselves for a portion of each week. Over time they accumulated cash through the sale of crops or via wage labor, and gave some of those proceeds to their masters. Once they paid the full *fansar kai* amount or price, they were freed, which was otherwise known as self-redemption. Colonial officials ruled that all slaves should have the option to redeem themselves whether or not their master agreed. These practices sometimes reduced the direct supervisory control of masters over slaves, and slaves gained more control over what they produced. But in the case of Northern Nigeria, the room for slave negotiation should not be overestimated. Self-redemption benefited masters (who were compensated for the loss of their capital assets by the slaves themselves) and the colonial state (which managed to keep many slaves in dependent relationships with their masters for a long period) more than it did the slaves. In cases when a slave refused to work for his or her master, they could lose their access to land, food, and clothing, for example. Masters retained substantial control over the work lives of their slaves. The colonial government and masters, for example, imposed the payment of *murgu* on slaves. In order to work on their own account – a necessity if slaves were to pay the redemption fee – slaves had to pay an annual fee in cash – *murgu* – to their masters for the right to do so. In other words, slaves had to pay for the right to pay for their own redemption. Thus, tens of thousands of slaves continued to farm for their masters during the wet season. During the dry season they sought work to meet the cash payments required by their masters, but were otherwise closely connected to their masters' farms and the agricultural cycle. Many slaves did not seek self-redemption but instead worked portions of their masters' farms in exchange for paying rent, often in kind.

Renegotiating dependency occurred outside West Africa as well. Along the Swahili Coast of East Africa, for example, British colonial officials abolished the legal status of slavery in Zanzibar in 1897 and in Kenya on the coast in 1907. On the islands especially, British officials sought to preserve as much of the power of slave and plantation owners as possible while keeping slaves in place. Although this process favored the interests of the colonial state and the masters, slaves used the changes brought by colonial rule to gain control over their work and family lives. On the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba, and

on the Kenyan mainland, slaves successfully redefined their positions. Many sought inclusion and control by acquiring property, participating in social, religious, and community rituals from which they had been previously barred because of their slave status, or appropriating the dress of free people for themselves.³⁴ Slaves also renegotiated the terms of their work. In Zanzibar, some slaves reduced the number of days they worked for their masters from five to three and managed to reduce their labor requirements on the days that they did work for their masters. The results of these struggles varied: some slaves negotiated payments in kind or cash to their masters in lieu of labor; they farmed more or less for themselves. In 1902, for example, ex-slaves on Suliman bin Mbarak's estate made agreements to work three days per week for their ex-master in exchange for access to land and the right to work outside the plantation for wages on their off days. They were even paid for the cloves that they picked during harvest.³⁵ In other circumstances slaves became independent smallholders by clearing new and previously unused land for themselves. Cooper argues that slaves resisted the labor demands of plantation owners *and* the attempts of the colonial state to make them into landless wage laborers: "Ex-slaves did not merely resist two conceptions of labor which they regarded as oppressive. They used elements of each against the other: new kinds of jobs created by the colonial economy enabled ex-slaves to escape the plantation, while access to plantation land kept ex-slaves from becoming too dependent on those jobs."³⁶ Indeed, slaves often tried to work for more than one landholder or engaged in casual urban wage labor in an effort to reduce their dependence on a single person.

Slaves fought for these changes. Nonetheless, slaves faced persistent economic and social barriers. Access to land and control over work could be difficult to achieve, especially in the early colonial period. Many remained in dependent relationships with their former masters. Although slaves and ex-slaves farmed on their own accord, and often left if masters were stingy or cruel, masters retained the rights to the land they occupied and the crops they produced. The 1907 abolition of slavery in Kenya allowed masters to go to court to claim compensation if slaves left their estates or refused to work. Indeed, at

³⁴ See Laura Fair, "Dressing Up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar" in *The Journal of African History* 39, 1 (1998), 63–94.

³⁵ Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 77.

³⁶ Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*, 4.

the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of ex-slaves cleared and farmed land north of Malindi. Thirteen years later a rich landholder from the city arrived and demanded the slaves pay rent for the land they occupied. After the slaves refused, the landowner took the case to court and gained title to land and to the rent he demanded.³⁷ In Zanzibar, masters retained their rights to clove trees, which made it difficult for slaves to establish clove farms and enter the market themselves. The East African plantation economy came under increasing stress and eventually disintegrated, first on the mainland and then on the islands, but struggles over access to land – as well as between master and slave – remained central and contentious issues well into the colonial period, which indicates just how intensely slaves and former slaves pursued their freedom and autonomy. We know less about what happened beyond the coast in the immediate East African interior. Nonetheless, it is clear that slaves were not used in production extensively and were fewer in number than on the coast. Miers argues that here the British essentially ignored the institution. It took at least a decade for slaves to learn that the British no longer returned runaway slaves to their masters.³⁸

Slavery, Labor, and the Maturing Colonial Economy

If half-hearted abolitionist policies and the actions of slaves themselves helped transform and end slavery in Africa, so too did colonial economic change. Initially, it suited many European colonial officials to use African dependent labor. Slavery kept Africans working within a new colonial system and ensured collaborating African slave-owning elites remained loyal. New markets opened for cash crops (such as groundnuts, cocoa, cotton, and rubber), which led to new opportunities for African workers. As colonial governments became more established, knowledgeable, and competent, they sometimes nudged the abolition of slavery along in the hopes of creating (in the minds of colonial officials) a more disciplined and hardworking labor force that produced what the colonial officials wanted (although until World War II they did not want to make Africans into *workers* but simply wanted them

³⁷ Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*, 183.

³⁸ Suzanne Miers, "Slavery to Freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa: Expectations and Reality" in *Slavery and Abolition* 21, 2 (2000), 251.

to work more efficiently while retaining their rural homes, livelihoods, and identities). Coupled with the general decline of slave raiding and the end of warfare between African states, both of which produced the majority of slaves before conquest, wage labor, increasing urbanization, effective taxation, the introduction of new currencies, and the growth of cash cropping helped erode more completely the institution of slavery in the years between the two world wars. These changes shaped the end of slavery in Africa in three ways: they further transformed the relationship between master and slave, they undermined the basic economic structure of slavery, and they helped change colonial abolitionist and labor policies.

Wage labor and cash cropping provided slaves with more opportunities outside slavery. Fugitive slaves more easily found alternative means of economic support, while those slaves who stayed enhanced both independence from, and negotiating power with, their masters. How? Some ex-slaves acquired land themselves, where they farmed the cash crops demanded by the colonial economy. Thus, European demand for groundnuts, cocoa, and palm products offered some slaves economic alternatives. In the Yoruba region of Nigeria, for example, some ex-slaves eventually became cocoa farmers, as they did in parts of the Gold Coast and Asante, although this process did not really take off in the 1930s and remained tied to slave labor and sharecropping in many places. Slaves more commonly used the colonial demand for a variety of cash crops to gain access to cash. The rubber boom in Upper Guinée, for example, offered fugitive slaves a chance to sell rubber. By collecting and selling rubber between 1890 and 1913, slaves financed their mobility and resettlement; indeed, Emily Osborn argues that “the rubber market should be considered seriously as a force in changing the labor and social relations of the Soudan in the first decade of the twentieth century.”³⁹ Likewise, Searing demonstrates that in the Wolof-dominated regions of what is now Senegal, cash cropping took off between 1890 to 1914, although it is also important to recognize that cash cropping began earlier. As free peasant household units increasingly became involved in the production of groundnuts, they sought access to labor beyond the family. Peasant farmers turned to runaways and ex-slaves (as well as to free migrants) as wage laborers to fill the increasing seasonal labor

³⁹ Emily Lynn Osborn, “‘Rubber Fever’, Commerce and French Colonial Rule in Upper Guinée, 1890–1913” in *The Journal of African History*, 45, 3 (2004), 451–452.

demand, which helped propel the growth of cash cropping and at the same time facilitated the decline of slavery by providing economic opportunities to fleeing slaves and by undermining (and outperforming) production on large-scale slave-based estates. Former slaves held by the Soninke of the West African Savanna likewise traveled widely in search of land and labor opportunities in this region, although until World War I they often worked only temporarily before they returned home to live beside their former masters until the next growing season. One French officer observed that “the former slaves of the Sahel go down in groups into Senegal where they covered the surrounding of the new railway line . . . with cultivated fields; once the growing season was over they regained their villages announcing their intention to return more numerous next year.”⁴⁰

The expansion of commodity production and the broader colonial economy did not just increase the demand for agricultural labor; it also led to new options in the service sector, including porters, canoemen, cooks, construction workers, and dock workers, among others, all of which provided new wage labor opportunities for slaves and ex-slaves. Slaves and ex-slaves rapidly moved into new economic niches brought by colonialism. Many supplied key commodities to Europeans, while others acted as interpreters, domestic help, or guards. Still others tried to acquire wealth through petty trade. Some ex-slaves joined Christian mission stations or churches, acquired an education, and moved into the skilled colonial wage labor sector. These migrations had an impact on the rural sector. In the Mauritanian Adrar, for example, nobles complained to the French in 1922 that slave women were leaving in large numbers for the city of Atar. Disputes over this issue continued well into the 1940s. Men too fled for the city. Agricultural production suffered as a result.⁴¹ Likewise, by the 1920s in the vast region of Equatorial Africa, recently acquired slaves had moved out from under their masters’ control into positions provided by the colonial government and economy.

Not all slaves benefited from colonial economic change, however. Although urban migration was quite common, some of these economic options were quite grim. Many slaves who could not acquire

⁴⁰ Quoted by François Manchuelle, “Slavery, Emancipation and Labour Migration in West Africa” in *The Journal of African History* 30, 1 (1989), 99–100.

⁴¹ See E. Ann McDougall, “A Topsy-Turvy World: Slaves and Freed Slaves in the Mauritanian Adrar, 1910–1950” in Miers and Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 372–373.

land or farms became what Murray and Nwokeji call “rural refugees,” who migrated to cities in search of a living.⁴² Ex-slave migrants who became wage laborers in colonial cities often performed the most menial jobs. Some ex-slaves, for example, worked as prostitutes. In addition, slaves in some areas were far removed from centers of colonial economic growth and migration routes. They had no or little access to wage labor or cash cropping, which limited their ability to acquire enough economic or social capital to change their lives. These transformations – and access to opportunities – were not always about choice. Environmental changes – such as drought or famine – might push more ex-slaves into labor migration whether they wanted to or not. This in turn tightened the overall availability of wage labor for both free and ex-slave laborers and no doubt drove some ex-slaves into undesirable occupations. Likewise, economic busts, especially during the Great Depression of the 1930s, made life even harder for ex-slaves, many of whom were already living close to the margins, as wages and crop prices declined. In really bad times, even the masters who still owned slaves were sometimes forced by their tightened economic circumstances to let them go. For a long period of time, forced labor, wage labor, and even slave labor coexisted; economic change was not immediate, nor did it affect slavery everywhere. Nonetheless, by the interwar period, the major economic transformations brought by colonialism contributed to the gradual but continual decline of slavery, as well as to the reorientation of the dominant forms of labor mobilization in Africa.

Gender and Abolition

Gender played an important role in the abolition of slavery in Africa. Gender affected opportunities available to female slaves during the colonial period. They faced what scholars have labeled a “double burden”: they were subordinated as women and as slaves.⁴³ Women slaves generally had less access than men did to the colonial economy. While male slaves might acquire land, profit from the sale of cash

⁴² The phrase is Murray’s, see C. Murray, “Struggle from the Margins: Rural Slums in the Orange Free State” in Fred Cooper (ed.), *Struggle for the City: Migrant Labour, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), 227.

⁴³ See Miers and Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 39 and Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women*, 1–45.

crops, and work for wages as porters, farmhands, or railway workers, women were generally shut out of these sectors. To be sure, women worked in fields, and were active in beer brewing and petty trade, and in places gained access to wage labor, but men tended to control land, highly paid wage labor, and the cash crops themselves. Although many women fled with men in groups, which gave them access to colonial economic opportunities, female slaves generally faced more difficulties leaving their masters independently and in becoming economically secure afterward. Of course, many women nonetheless fled. But in so doing they faced the reality that their families might be punished. They had to weigh the decision to flee against the possibility that their children might be sold or beaten as a result. In 1883, for example, one female slave in Senegal who had indeed fled her master stated: “I was a slave of Abdou Sarr, a farmer at N’Diebene. I escaped and received my freedom at Saint Louis. As soon as my flight was known my master in Kajoor sold my son ... in order to take revenge on me.”⁴⁴

The departure of male and female slaves further burdened free and slave women who stayed behind. The loss of so much labor meant that women took on larger labor responsibilities to make up the difference, which led to household instability. Free women sought divorces to protest their changed circumstances as slaves left in the face of their own rising workloads. Many colonial officials preferred to look the other way in cases involving female, household slaves. They usually considered female slaves to be part of the domestic unit – often as concubines – which colonial officials regarded as something akin to marriage. Female slaves continued to be exchanged and used as concubines for a substantial period of time. In Northern Nigeria there was a large clandestine trade in both women and children (often girls who were on their way to becoming concubines) until World War II. Indeed, even female children who were born after legal status abolition (1901) faced substantial risk in being forced into concubinage by free men. Free people considered these girls to have inherited their parent’s servile status despite British proclamations otherwise.

On the other hand, some women stayed in place because they believed that their best opportunity to improve their position was by remaining within their masters’ households. It is vital we do not ignore the sexual exploitation that occurred within these households. Slave women were regularly forced into sex and subjected to violence.

⁴⁴ James Searing, *“God Alone is King”: Islam and Emancipation in Senegal: the Wolof Kingdoms of Kajour and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 177.

Many slave women, furthermore, worked in the fields, far away from their masters and had little ability to attach themselves to kinship and household units. Still, female slaves embedded in some households developed opportunities to use their positions as slave wives or concubines – and as mothers of their masters’ (or their masters’ sons or uncles, for example) children – to belong more fully to not just the household but to the dominant, free society as well. In many Islamic settings, the children of concubines and free men were free themselves. These children gained access to all the rights of free people, including inheritance. Slave mothers of free children were also afforded more security and were regarded as something closer to full members of the household. In Zanzibar, for example, Laura Fair notes that “it appears as though the power of women’s fecundity to effect social mobility was widely recognized throughout Zanzibar society.”⁴⁵ In non-Islamic settings, female slaves could also be integrated into households, and had significant opportunities to move toward the center of belonging, most especially via marriage and motherhood; female slaves were, in short, able to manipulate their masters’ dependence on them as wives, nannies, wet-nurses, and domestics. Women in these positions no doubt saw their options in the colonial world differently than did men, boys, or unattached women and girls.

Freedom?

At the beginning of this book I argued that Africans understood and valued freedom. Africans sought membership in meaningful economic, family, religious, and political units. Membership offered protection, more autonomy, and control over work and family life. Slaves understood what freedom meant. In the words of Klein, “Some writers have questioned whether slaves understood the concept of Freedom. For the vast majority, freedom in whatever language they used meant in very concrete terms the right to work for themselves and control their family life.”⁴⁶ Slaves also sought the honor that had been denied under slavery. Slaves sought honor to challenge their masters’ social and ideological dominance. Slavery was fundamentally exploitative, but was also subject to continual negotiation between

⁴⁵ Fair, “Dressing Up,” 89.

⁴⁶ Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*, 177.

master and slaves. Long before the colonial period, slaves sought to expand their autonomy and to gain protection. This continued in the colonial period. Some slaves resisted their bondage by running away or rebelling. Others changed their names or bought and wore clothing that signified free status; indeed, some ex-slaves in Zanzibar even placed their deed of freedom in a small box hung around their necks like a necklace. Still others sought to better belong to the dominant society via marriage or service, or sought to enhance or protect their right to families (as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, or sons and daughters), or better control over their time and labor as slaves. In the words of Jeremy Prestholdt, “What enslaved and freed people seemed to desire ... was to define their own place in the social order, to represent their own political and social interests, sometimes in contradiction and sometimes in accordance with the interests of their (ex-) owners.”⁴⁷ Colonial rule offered slaves a broader range of opportunities than ever before: some chose to stay with their masters under adjusted work regimes, others fled to new farms, mission stations, or Islamic orders, and still others left to gain access to the new colonial economy as laborers or traders. Slaves knew what they were doing. Immediately after conquest in Kano, Nigeria, slaves clamored to touch the British flag because they believed it would set them free – and they sang the following song:

A flag touching dance.
Is performed by freeborns alone.
Anybody who touches the flag,
Becomes free.
He and his father [master],
Become equals.⁴⁸

But it is important not to overstate the extent of slave mobility and autonomy in the colonial period. In the words of Miers, “[T]he expectations of the humanitarians and the general public in the mother countries that slavery would disappear with colonial rule had not been met in some areas as late as the 1930’s and sometimes even later.”⁴⁹ Moving out of slavery was seldom uncomplicated. Inequality persisted. Sometimes slaves accepted their master’s hegemony and

⁴⁷ Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 135.

⁴⁸ Quoted by Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, 53.

⁴⁹ Miers, “Slavery to Freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 253.

acceded to their servile status. Everywhere both masters and colonial governments put up legal, administrative, and/or economic roadblocks to make the movement out of slavery difficult. Slaves often had to pay for their freedom. Many ex-slaves remained dependents for a generation or more; indeed, they were still embedded in power and economic relationships dominated by their former masters. Slaves of the Fulbe of the Savanna and Sahel zones of West Africa extracted rent from their (supposedly) ex-slaves until the end of the colonial rule, for example.

Ex-slaves likewise faced barriers that marginalized them. Access to land or high-wage occupations was difficult in places. In the case of Igboland, Nwokeji noted that “[e]ven after it abolished slavery, the colonial state ... could not alter the rural land tenure system that privileged certain groups with access to land on the basis of their charter status and continues to bind slave descendants as tenants, tributaries, or contract labourers of the freeborn.”⁵⁰ Likewise, in Lasta (Northern Ethiopia), ex-slaves (who were only officially freed in 1935) remained in marginal economic and social positions. Until 1975, their inability to hold land – or gain access to capital – meant that ex-slaves became part of a poor rural population that depended on temporary wage labor to make ends meet, and lacked the security and self-sufficiency that came with land ownership.⁵¹ In 1948, ex-slaves of the Tuareg of the Ahaggar (in the Sahara) earned two-fifths of the income of their former masters, and in Mauritania masters earned 60 percent more than their ex-slaves did and maintained control over land as well.⁵² In other cases, slaves out-earned their masters but were still inhibited by the stigma of slave origins. Even in the case of low-density slavery – when most slaves sought to be absorbed into dominant kinship units – the stigma of servile origins lasted for generations and prevented many ex-slaves from acquiring the powers, obligations, and protections that came along with full membership and insider status.

More broadly, as they lost control over some of their slaves, masters became even more concerned about differentiating between

⁵⁰ G. Ugo Nwokeji, “The Slave Emancipation Problematic: Igbo Society and the Colonial Equation,” 341.

⁵¹ See James McCann, “‘Children of the House’: Slavery and Its Suppression in Lasta, Northern Ethiopia, 1916–1935” in Miers and Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 354–355.

⁵² John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 144–145.

themselves and other freeborn (the honored) and slaves and ex-slaves (the dishonored), even if the economic bonds between master and slave had been broken. In the 1950s in a village in Gambia, David Ames recorded that

Jam [slaves] are still expected to show deference in the presence of the free born. How-ever, some of them have taken advantage of the freedom given them by the British and as one elderly freeborn man put it, they throw their hats as far as they can. Jam still take off their shoes when greeting their masters and respectfully greet them as 'grandfathers'. Not all jam, of course, follow these patterns; some of them avoid such behaviour to the extent that they are permitted to do so by society.⁵³

Some ex-slaves maintained deferential relations with former masters so in times of trouble they would at least have other economic options should their crops or wages not be enough. Roberts recorded an interview with a descendant of slave owners in the French Soudan, in which the master's paternalism cannot disguise the persistence of an unequal power relationship grounded in the necessity for the ex-slave to both honor and serve his former master:

[A] type of kinship was substituted for slavery. But masters retained a certain superiority. The former slave, however, had the right to work for himself, but continued to render services to his former master. The former master remained his protector and the head of the family. He presided over marriages, baptisms and circumcisions of the children of former slaves. He called him his "son" and the former slave called him "father." Former slaves would never agree to their former masters carrying even the smallest load in their presence. Age meant nothing.⁵⁴

Although colonialism brought some slaves opportunities, colonial rule was itself fundamentally exploitative. Early on, fugitive slaves were regularly returned to their masters; Lugard himself said: "[It was] lucky that nothing gets into the papers" because he was "up to all sorts of dodges ... for avoiding the slavery proclamations."⁵⁵ As time passed, colonial roadblocks to freedom became subtler. Ex-slaves not only faced increased taxation; they often had access to only the most difficult and menial jobs, which paid low wages. Many ex-slaves had

⁵³ Quoted by Martin Klein, "The Concept of Honour and the Persistence of Servility in the Western Soudan" in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 45, 179/180 (2005), 835.

⁵⁴ Richard Roberts, "The End of Slavery in the French Soudan, 1905–1914" in Miers and Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 295–296.

⁵⁵ Miers, *Slavery to Freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 252.

little (or nothing) in the way of capital, and were especially vulnerable to fluctuations in the price of food and other essential commodities. Even ex-slaves who chose to farm cash crops made ends meet by engaging in dry-season and temporary migrant labor (or by driving a taxi in Dakar, for example). Some masters, on the other hand, became more exploitative and cruel and used slave labor as best they could to profit from the colonial economy. In short, for many the struggle out of slavery took place over generations and, in general, did not put an end to economic inequality.⁵⁶ Although by the end of World War II slavery had largely died out, colonial governments had replaced slavery with other coercive measures and policies designed to mobilize labor, ranging from land alienation, to forced labor, to compulsory crop production in addition to wage labor. By 1945, colonial governments generally avoided using direct and violent coercion to acquire labor, but they did not become overnight humanitarians. The end of slavery in Africa is not the story of colonial progress; rather, colonial governments continued to seek control over African bodies and labor for their own purposes.

Did slavery end everywhere? No. Often, in lieu of slaves, masters and others in need of labor turned to pawns and pawning, which increased quite dramatically during periods of the twentieth century (and which was sometimes simply a cloak that covered the actual exchange of slaves) when access to currency or labor or was scarce, or when the economy was in crisis. Although slavery was basically dead, in some parts of the continent a clandestine trade in slaves persisted. Women and children especially continued to be traded (even after World War II, in parts of the continent). Likewise, servile status did not disappear completely. At the very least, slave descent continued to carry a stigma. For some the stigma of slave descent affected their choice of a potential marriage partner or their ability to inherit land and wealth. In more extreme cases slavery simply continued; indeed, the fight for liberation from slavery is a continuing one. It was only in July 1980, for example, that Mauritania officially abolished slavery (and it was only criminalized in 2007), which effectively demonstrates that servility in some parts of Africa continued to persist long after colonial rule and continues to be a political issue in Mauritania itself. The problems associated with contemporary slavery in Africa are not restricted to Mauritania. Forms of slavery continue to exist throughout the Sahara

⁵⁶ This is Martin Klein's phrase.

and Sahel. In Niger, for example, girls of slave descent are transferred via sale to men who use them as slave concubines and domestic labor. In Sudan, years of war led to the enslavement of Dinka women in large numbers. Anti-Slavery International managed to interview Ahok Ahok, for example, who explained how she had been enslaved:

Our family was captured about six years ago [i.e., about 1994] when we were already fleeing north and had crossed into the North into Kordofan. I was captured with my son, Akai, and my two daughters, this one called Abuk ... who was about eight at the time, and a younger one, about two. We were taken by a tribe called Humr [i.e., Misseriya Humr], who split the three of us up. The man who took me subsequently sold me on to some other nomads to look after cattle, for about 130 Sudanese Pounds. I had to look after their cows and spent about six years with them before I managed to escape to Makaringa village. ... Meanwhile, my three children had been taken away by others. For six years, until I reached Makaringa village, I had no news of them. When I reached the village, my son Akai heard where I was and joined me there. He is with us at this CEAWC centre. We then contacted the Dinka Committee and they were able to find my daughter Abuk, who had been renamed Khadija. She had initially been put to work looking after livestock, but had got into trouble when some animals had escaped – she was too little to look after them. After that, she was employed as a domestic servant. She hardly speaks any Dinka language now, only Arabic. ... I still have no news of my youngest daughter and am still hoping to find her.⁵⁷

Anti-slavery organizations have emerged in countries of the Sahel and Savanna to advocate for slaves and ex-slaves. *Timidria* in Niger and the Dinka Committee in Sudan both continue to fight against slavery. In the 1970s, former Mauritanian slaves created *El Hor* (Free Man) to fight against the oppression of slaves and former slaves in that nation. In the 1980s, *El Hor* brought cases to the courts on behalf of slaves in order to demonstrate that despite the abolition in 1980, discrimination remained all too common. A similar organization, *SOS-Eslaves*, emerged in 1995. It focused on assisting rural slaves and on developing international linkages.⁵⁸ *El Hor* and *SOS-Eslaves* – and those labeled slaves or of slave descent – continue to face many obstacles:

⁵⁷ Anti-Slavery International Report, *Is There Slavery in Sudan?* March 2001, 11.

⁵⁸ The local politics and history is too complicated to fully recount here; see E. Ann McDougall, “Living the Legacy of Slavery: Between Discourse and Reality” in *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 45, 179/180 (2005), 957–986.

It is uphill work.... Some of their members have been imprisoned. Seeking help through the courts is usually useless. Shari'a courts maintain that slavery is legal. Since no laws have been passed, laying down penalties for enslavement or detailing the rights of slaves, other courts and local officials maintain that they have no jurisdiction if slaves bring cases for custody of their children or try to establish their right to remain on the land they farm. Former owners may also claim the property even of freed slaves when they die.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Slavery as an institution disappeared only gradually throughout Africa. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, slavery was too important and widespread to be simply and neatly abolished. Many colonial states aimed to perpetuate slavery as long as possible; colonial officials continued to use slaves as soldiers, workers, or concubines, for example. Eventually, colonial policies gradually chipped away at the institution. By World War II, slavery in most parts of the continent had hit a reproductive dead end. Because new slaves could no longer be acquired through war, raids, or sale, slaves who had been manumitted, fled, or died could not be replaced. This, coupled with political and economic changes – as well as the decisions and actions of slaves themselves – led to the end of slavery in West, East, and Central Africa. Many slaves fled or sought to renegotiate the terms of their bondage. All sought the respectability and honor that had largely been denied them. The end of slavery in South Africa paralleled these broader processes. In the South African case, abolition did not end exploitative relationships between master and slave but recast them in ways that appeared more palatable to humanitarian interests while still securing the overall interests of masters. Eventually, the transition to paid farm and mining labor in the nineteenth century reduced the scale of slavery, but at the cost of the imposition of a harsh and relentless system of labor migrancy. What also changed were broader African ideas about labor. Ideas about wealth in people still mattered to a degree, but many more people were integrated into wage labor markets. Although slaves used the market to gain freedom and independence, wage labor

⁵⁹ Suzanne Miers, "Contemporary Forms of Slavery" in *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, 3 (2000), 723.

and colonial capitalism ensured that the path out of slavery was difficult. Many ex-slaves moved into tenuous positions for low wages. More broadly, abolition and emancipation opened the door for the even more intensive exploitation of African workers by other means, as Cooper notes: “Ultimately ... free labor implied the submission of workers to a uniform code of laws, to the rigors of the market, and to internalized discipline, in contrast to the person control and coercion of the slavemaster.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Cooper, *Slaves to Squatters*, 2.