

MIGRATION AND FORCED LABOR IN THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY OF SOUTHERN MOZAMBIQUE, 1920–1964

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ABSTRACT: This paper revisits the historiography of forced labor and mobility in southern Mozambique during the Portuguese colonial era by reexamining several key works in the field. It seeks to understand how the population of southern Mozambique constructed a social imaginary on the margins of the civilizational fiction designed by colonial rule. Avoiding a state-centered or legalistic reading of this history, the article stresses the fragility of the colonial/modern design and the fundamentally compulsory character of colonial labor, and contrasts these against the diverse responses developed by colonial subjects. In particular, the article seeks to understand how the “repertoires of power” that colonial rulers used to consolidate their power reframed the processes of migration and social mobility. Colonial rule altered preexisting practices and conceptions of mobility within southern Mozambique, transforming them into exercises more analogous to domestic forms of resistance. As the dynamics of social mobility

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preceded the formation of the modern/colonial state, they can be reconstituted as a parallel logic and rationality, which existed alongside the constructions of the colonial enterprise; as a result, many of the policies undertaken by the colonial state were primarily geared toward ending this relative autonomy and controlling the movement of the colonized population.

Introduction

In a 1979 interview in Guija, in the southern Mozambican province of Gaza, 79-year old Gabriel Mukavi recounted a conversation he had with the local administrator in 1963:

You came to Africa for the wrong reasons, and you are guilty of that. I won't discuss the situation in other places, because I don't know anything about them, but I can talk about Gaza. What was it like when you arrived in Gaza, in the era of Ngungunhana? It was easy for you to capture him because you did it when Maguiguane was gone, he had left to consult with the ancestors and find food for the army. After capturing Ngungunhana you systematically oppressed the people, using Angolan soldiers, who went from house to house forcing our wives to wash their feet. . . . Afterward you chose some of us, the rightful inhabitants of the land, to be chiefs or *regulos*, while the Ngunis dispersed and disappeared. This is what you Portuguese did, but you will also leave this land, just like the Ngunis. . . . you began to promote backwards customs in our culture, even though these were the negative aspects you claimed that you were here to destroy.¹

This article is fundamentally an effort to reflect upon the meaning of colonization for the population of southern Mozambique. It pursues this objective by reexamining historical texts that discuss work and mobility during the Portuguese occupation.² In searching for a different method of understanding colonization, the article is more suggestive than conclusive, but it seeks to understand how colonized populations constructed a social imaginary, one that was located outside of the vast civilizational discourse that is too often prioritized when analyzing the colonial question.

In examining mobility and Portuguese rule, this article argues that the logical structure which gave birth to the colonial enterprise cannot in any way be understood as the foundation of "the state." The machinery created by the colonial enterprise was instead deliberately planned as a method of extracting surplus labor and using it to reinforce colonial rule. Although the colonial state's extensive discursive production drew upon ideological justifications of "progress" toward "civilization," it was only after the 1940s—if then—that the first attempts to transform this extractive machinery into

something like a state became visible. After the 1940s, the emigration of settlers from Portugal to the colonies brought the development of laws and institutions similar to those which existed in Europe.³ Even then, these institutions were not imagined as a method of granting rights to the subject population. To the contrary, the colonial enterprise was characterized by constantly pushing men into its extractive machinery. This process defined what I call (following Agamben) “the state of exception,” which sought to impose a wide array of compulsory measures, particularly measures aiming to impose forced labor.⁴ These measures, taken as a whole, aimed to subjugate the population—which was often distant from the colonial state and suspicious of its motives—and render it dependent upon the colonial state. They were only partially successful. Colonial authorities remained dependent upon the police and the military to sustain their territorial dominance.

Of course, it is possible to analyze the discursive justification of the colonial state, or to condemn the colonial state. But this would make the analysis a merely legalistic question, which is not my objective. The so-called “colonial state” is often characterized by scholars who study colonial rule as the evil twin of the “modern state,” as if the “modern state” represented some sort of yardstick for measuring the inhumane and coercive practices of its racist imperial cousin. In contrast, my approach is based on the argument that the so-called “modern state” was always more of an aspiration than a reality. What was constructed in the colonies, under the banner of colonialism, was a series of decrees and institutions that institutionalized “modernity” by applying it to people who had always been considered as a racial and cultural “other” and as an inferior population.⁵ Civilization and modernity functioned as a teleological fiction. They were sustained by the evolutionary and racially-defined ideology of progress and development, and injected into the European ethos as a type of missionary endeavor that obscured its violently messianic character. From this perspective, the colonial state *was* modern—or, put differently, the “modern” (its institutions, its ideas, its foundations) lies within the matrix of the colonial project. The modern was also colonial; the colonial cannot be viewed as external to the intra-European processes of constructing nation-states. In the case of Portugal, the repertoires of power used to conquer and dominate southern Mozambique show modernity’s fundamental violence—not just in its subjective aspects (such as constructing identities and laws for the so-called “natives”) but also in its objective aspects (such as imposing forced labor and imposing the hut tax as a “civilizing mission”).

So as to better analyze the construction of the colonial state, I adopt a slightly inverted perspective, from the very margins that colonialism

was creating as it was developing its repertoires of power.⁶ This is why Gabriel Mukavi's words are so enlightening: from his perspective, the Portuguese had come to Mozambique for the wrong reasons, and so, just like the Nguni, they would have to leave Mozambique after 70 years of occupation.⁷ The two subjects I use to effect this shift in perspective are the mobility and the labor of Africans subjected to colonial rule. Mobility preceded the formation of the colonial/modern state and was therefore constituted within a separate logic, parallel to the limits of the colonial state. To that end, much of the colonial state's machinery was directed toward ending this relative autonomy and controlling the movement of subjects. Examining mobility makes it possible to better understand the impact that the establishment of colonial rule had upon colonial subjects. It also facilitates a better understanding of how the repertoires of colonial power gave birth to an institution that we too often simply label "the colonial state" without examining its nature and its coherence. The colonial state cannot simply be evaluated or explained by looking at its efforts (whether successful or not) to control the population as workers and as subjects. Instead, we must also look at the social imaginary produced by the local population of southern Mozambique as it navigated and confronted the institutional machinery of the state.

The Function of Work to the Colonizer: Civilizing with the Law of the Whip

There is a large historical literature that examines migrant workers, women, forced workers, domestic workers, and mine workers in South Africa.⁸ Some of these works have sought to reconstruct how residents of southern Mozambique interacted with colonial rule; others are ethnographic works that, although produced through contact with the colonial state, can nonetheless illuminate the social imaginary of the local population, outside of colonial discourse.⁹ These works provide the basis for my investigation; although their objectives are different from my own, they provide sufficient material through which to reinterpret how residents of southern Mozambique navigated everyday life within the State of Exception, and how colonial law and everyday practice actually functioned, for both colonial rulers and the subject population.

The pioneers of Portuguese colonial occupation in Mozambique, men like Mouzinho de Albuquerque and António Enes, called for colonial action to be more "effective."¹⁰ To achieve this goal, they constantly sought to link together capital accumulation, military action, and territorial occupation—which, in turn, meant imposing forced labor and controlling the

movement of workers to South Africa. These initiatives were based upon legislation that called for the “protection” of the “native,” who was defined as someone who “was not domesticated by work, occupying the category of a person of a different nature, or of a great child, who must be protected and guided along the route of education.”¹¹

The difficulties of establishing this dominion immediately became evident. For one thing, the Portuguese government lacked the resources necessary to effectively occupy the terrain. As a result, they resorted to a series of chartered companies,¹² which were given vast concessions and vast administrative powers. Mozambique was divided into four territories: the area north of the Lurio River was given to the Niassa Company; from the Ligonha River to the southern banks of the Zambeze was governed by the prazos, most of which were later acquired by the Mozambique Company or the Zambezia Company; the territory between the prazos and the 22nd parallel was given to the Mozambique Company.¹³ Only a small area in Tete and the territory south of the 22nd parallel were directly administered by the Portuguese state.¹⁴ In practice, Portugal had relinquished its authority over the majority of the colony’s territory.

This weakness notwithstanding, the Portuguese took up the colonial enterprise with a new modernizing rhetoric. Portuguese officials recognized that the types of mercantilism created by the slave trade were outmoded, and demanded new economic methods, defined primarily by legislation that justified “the moral obligation to labor of Africans” as the apex of colonial civilization.¹⁵ In Enes’ words:

The state . . . should not be scrupulous in requiring and, if necessary, forcing them to work—that is to say, improving them through work . . . in civilizing themselves through work, these backwards blacks . . . a race that up to now . . . has never produced through its own spontaneous effort even a single example of civilization. . . .¹⁶

In this new context, forcing “native workers” to work signified the re-orientation of slave labor toward more modern methods of accumulating wealth, thus substituting the image of the slave for one of a “free worker” or a “contract worker.” Nonetheless, this process was not linear, nor did it occur overnight, for the population did not respond in the ways that Portuguese administrators hoped. The transition from slave labor to wage labor has been extensively discussed in the scholarly literature; here I will only highlight a few comparative passages that are important for situating my critique of the Portuguese colonial enterprise. Claude Meillassoux, in the late 1970s, observed a paradox in the articulation of the capitalist mode of production within African colonial contexts. After slave labor relationships

were officially abolished, most Africans returned to their previous forms of dependency, and returned as well to their previous modes of production.¹⁷ There was no way to bring people into the wage labor system, and for this reason “the domestic mode of production was paradoxically destroyed and preserved, because even though it still exists, its existence and its decisions are directly linked to the capitalist sector.” Frederick Cooper, analyzing labor relationships analogous to slavery, echoed Meillassoux’s analysis when he observed that “regular and constant work is exactly what the slave, or the freed slave, did not want.”¹⁸ Valdemir Zamparoni, for his part, in discussing the theory and practice of forced labor in Portuguese colonies, noted that “the various regulations concerning native labor were very detailed about the obligations of the natives, but extremely vague and ill-defined regarding their rights.”¹⁹ In the same vein, José Capela described the difficulty that the Portuguese had in obtaining labor from the region’s inhabitants: “In fact neither the objective nor the subjective conditions made it possible to create free wage labor. Workers could avoid providing their labor because, for better or for worse, they possessed other methods of subsistence and it was not possible to materially or psychologically attract them to the labor market.”²⁰

As all of these authors make clear, whatever the argumentative importance of debates over labor policies in the metropolis, the relations of production did not actually change very much in colonized areas. Contrary to colonial rhetoric about the local population’s vagrancy and laziness, in reality people did not see any benefits, rights, or assurances that would come from their incorporation into the new colonial system as “free workers.” This was in part because very little changed among the colonizers, who continued to treat workers as slaves. As Capela recounts, colonizers

continued to conceptualize and to treat Africans not as the citizens imagined by the Civil Code, but instead as slaves that they would always own. The first director of Public Works in Mozambique, a liberal sent from Lisbon, recounted his shock when, at the end of the month, owners came to collect the salaries of the [Public Works] employees.²¹

Ironically, or perhaps paradoxically, the “civilizing” policy that aimed to use wage labor to transform the “customs and habits” of the so-called “natives” saw no need to transform the “customs and habits” of the Portuguese colonizers themselves, who were accustomed to the rhythms of the slave trade, developed over centuries of unequal relationships. In fact, in reading many of the reports from this era, one is struck by how quickly the colonizers aimed to reinstate slavery as the only possible method of controlling the population, owing to the supposed vagrancy and laziness of the population.

These reports deliberately ignored African labor migration, and they (along with accounts, like Capela's, which are based upon them) are incomplete. By not including migration to the Transvaal mines and the Natal sugar plantations, they ignore a phenomenon that had taken on significant proportions within the African social universe. They also ignore its importance for understanding the legal and economic rationality of the colonized population. This rationality was ignored by colonial ideology. But this rationality must be understood if we are to understand the many ways that the population responded to colonial takeover and its subsequent impositions. There were many such responses: hidden forms of protest, like evading tax payments, working slowly, deserting work with the collusion of local chiefs, or sabotage; there were also more direct responses, such as protests from rural workers, strikes in urban centers, workers joining independent African churches, or written protests from intellectuals.²² All of these forms constituted part of the imaginary among workers confronting the power wielded by colonial rulers.

My economic bias in describing both the implementation of colonial rule and the responses to it is not random. This is because I am using the term "economic" to suggest particular aspects of colonial rule, namely those which originate in the rationality and subjectivity of colonizers and administrators. The term "economic" also captures the responses of people who were affected by these measures—a set of responses that encompasses a diverse set of people, men and women, old and young, chiefs and commoners, all of whom were forced to navigate the economic measures imposed by colonial rule, and whose economic and social positioning within their own worlds was being altered by the onset of colonial rule. Looking at the economic contours of colonial rule makes clear the serious obstacles that administrators and colonizers faced when attempting to implement their "civilizing project." These obstacles were not created by an absence of understanding among the colonized population. This was the explanation offered by the colonizers, because in their particular worldview, it was only possible to explain an absence of cooperation by citing the "uncivilized" condition of African workers, and by calling them lazy, ignorant, pagans, and so on. But the colonized population understood very well its role within the colonial project; they simply did not accept it. From this point of view, the implementation of the entire repertoire of laws and statutes that sought to control the "native" population through the guise of "civilization" represented, for the colonized population, an intolerable and illegible state of exception that was ultimately incompatible with their cognitive universe.

The Function of Work to the Colonized: Economic Dynamics of Domestic “Resistance”

As noted, migration toward the Transvaal was a longstanding phenomenon in southern Mozambique. The initial migrations were to the sugarcane plantations in Natal; with the discovery of gold in 1886, this migratory flux coalesced into a permanent migratory system.²³ The low concentration of gold on the Rand mines forced companies to focus extensively upon obtaining enough labor to mine sufficient quantities of ore that it would maintain the profitability of their extraction. To that end, they formed the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (Wenela), which was tasked with obtaining labor from outside of South Africa's borders in order to assuage fears among the mine owners that there were not enough workers in South Africa, or rather not enough who could be brought to the mines.²⁴ For its part, the Portuguese colonial administration viewed this migratory system as a way of bolstering its tax receipts and counterbalancing the shortcomings of its own economic model. These shortcomings should not be interpreted (as has often been the case) as the product of low mechanization and the absence of capital investments that would have spurred more efficient production.²⁵ This was part of the reason, but the economic incompetence of Portuguese colonial rule was also created by their racist convictions that the African population was lazy and unproductive, thus justifying the widespread use of forced labor to serve the economic and “civilizational” needs of the Portuguese.²⁶

Analyzing these two dynamics—on the one hand, the mobility of labor migrants going to and from South Africa; on the other hand, forced labor imposed upon migrant workers in Mozambique—alongside each other is necessary in order to better comprehend both the colonial administration and the way that people responded to it. In particular, it demonstrates the illegibility of the colonial state to the colonized population and their consequent refusal to accept the discourse it propagated.²⁷ While forced labor was legally consecrated within Portuguese colonial rule, it was never viewed in the same light by the African population, meaning that forced labor was never able to fulfill its stated function of integrating the African population within the developmental rhetoric propagated by the colonial state. Understanding the limitations of both civilizing discourse and its specific manifestations (such as forced labor) is crucial to understand the colonial state in its proper context; as noted at the beginning of the article, there is limited utility in effecting a more narrowly legalistic criticism of the measures used by Portuguese administrators to control colonial subjects. Instead, as

Veena Das and Deborah Poole have argued, it is more fruitful to examine “the many different spaces, forms, and practices through which the state is continually both experienced and undone through the illegibility of its own practices, documents, and words.”²⁸

The 1899 regulations which defined native labor, for example, were understood by colonizers and officials as a body of laws that would systematize the use of native labor. In their stated purpose, these regulations are valuable for the historian, because they provide a comprehensible compendium of orders that are easily accessible, and which can consequently be interpreted and interrogated. However, shifting the point of view to examine how these laws were understood by the people affected by them shows that the impact of the laws does not neatly align with their text; instead, they reverberated in ways that were not restricted to labor itself. For example, the word *chibalo*, used by the population of southern Mozambique to refer to forced labor, does not only mean forced labor; it also means injustice and suffering at the hands of someone else.²⁹ Most books on forced labor in southern Africa, starting with van Onselen’s influential work on Rhodesia, simply use *chibalo* as a synonym for forced labor, but examining the way that people actually use these terms makes it possible to locate both *chibalo* and “forced labor” within the logic that generated them.³⁰ Thus, discussing “forced labor” means examining not only labor, but also the broader colonial aspiration to dominate African subjects, grounded in racist beliefs of white superiority. Examining this aspiration shows how “forced labor” could acquire a positive ideological connotation as an instrument of “civilization.” In contrast, *chibalo* serves as a negative expression, created through the experience of subjugation. It too does not refer solely to labor; instead, it performs a negative ideological role that indicates random abuse and unjustified suffering.

Interviews with elderly Mozambicans graphically demonstrate this conception of *chibalo* as suffering, beyond the formal categories of voluntary, compelled, or forced labor utilized by the administration. For example, Mahawani Khosa, a former resident of Chokwe, in Gaza province, was interviewed by Alpheus Manghezi in 1979. Asked what he knew about *chibalo*, he responded:

Chibalo is a very old question because it began at soon as the whites set foot in Mozambique. They arrested us and forced us to work for nothing. They would arrest someone, make them do difficult work, beat them, and pay them 100 *escudos* per month. We suffered for many, many years, and it’s only recently that *chibalo* ended. *Chibalo* and the *palmatória*³¹ arrived at the same time, and now they are finished.³²

There are three significant aspects of this interview. The first is to associate *chibalo* with the arrival of the Portuguese in the region; as an emic

expression, the word may have existed to designate certain types of labor that preexisted colonial occupation. Nonetheless, I am not aware of any work that discusses in detail the origins of the term *chibalo*, nor does it appear in the dictionaries of indigenous languages of southern Mozambique, other than as a reference to forced labor. The second significant aspect of the interview is that the interviewee discusses two forms of labor, one paid and the other not. According to the official colonial labor regulations, all forms of compulsory labor were paid labor, although the various works discussed in this article all point to a much more complex reality on this issue. Finally, violence forms the central connection between these two forms of work, and was constitutional within the practice of forced labor.

Another interview taken from those conducted by Alpheus Manghezi and his team, and which clearly shows the perception of *chibalo* as linked to the idea of suffering and injustice, comes from Ms. Mindawu Bila, another resident of Chokwe, who lived through the Limpopo cotton colonization scheme:

I was part of the forced cotton cultivation scheme, and we suffered. We worked under the close supervision of heartless overseers, who whipped us for the smallest violation of their rules. For example, they ordered us to burn the cotton stalks after we harvested it, but some of these overseers wouldn't give us enough time for the stalks to dry before they were burned. We worked hard but they never paid us the correct price for our cotton. As a result, we eventually felt like it was too much and so we stopped growing cotton for the colonialists. *They said that we all had to grow cotton and that all the money we earned would be ours. We thought this was a good idea, and so we decided to grow cotton—to earn money* [italics mine]. But we soon understood that, although we had volunteered to grow cotton, they were always watching us, wielding the whip, forcing us to work. . . . They didn't count our work in terms of months, because this wasn't that type of *chibalo*, with a specific contract. Everyone did roadwork—they were all told to work on the roads for no pay. Today, after independence, life is better because we aren't subject to *chibalo*. When men came back from the mines, they had to pay 100 *escudos* to the *régulos*—"the *régulo*'s bread." Yeah, all the *magaizas* [miners returning from abroad] had to pay 100 *escudos* to the *régulo*, and the *régulo* didn't do anything for them.³³ Any miners who didn't pay this amount were taken to *chibalo* while they were home.³⁴

In contrast to the previous interview, Ms. Bila points to her initial inclination to participate in the labor system created by the Portuguese, which indicates a type of economic rationale related to the process of monetarization underway in the region—"grow cotton to make money." However, over the course of the interview, it is evident that cotton cultivation was implemented in an arbitrary and unjust manner by the colonial administration.

What appeared to be a contractual relationship, of growing cotton for a certain amount of time, was instead laced with irregularities (payment of taxes and fees), including the use of violence, illustrated by the whip and the overseers.³⁵ This interview again shows the idea of *chibalo* as a type of injustice, first for the lack of a specific length of time that the labor required, and also for the absence of any agreement regarding wages—both of which were fundamental within the economic logic of those affected. Through this interview, we can see that the distinction between forced and voluntary work made little sense for Mozambicans, because deception was central in both, and because the arbitrary violence of the colonial authorities meant that both were understood as being part of the same structure.

One final interview taken from those conducted by Manghezi in Chokwe in 1979 is from Ms. Oselina Marindzi:

I have to tell you something about my suffering. I suffered a lot because my husband went to the mines and never returned because of the fear of *chibalo*. What used to happen during those times is that my husband returned from the mines for a break, and then after he arrived, they would try to take him into *chibalo*. This is what the colonialists did to make us suffer. After he went to *Joni* [Johannesburg], never to return, I stayed here alone and I had to grow cotton to pay the hut tax that they said I owed to the colonial government. We were beaten by people like Albino Mabunda under forced cotton cultivation. They beat me and ripped up my cotton documents, saying that I was a woman who only caused problems, but I was not a woman who caused problems—I was just tired of being forced to grow cotton, cotton that didn't give me any benefits. I was being punished because my husband had fled because he feared going into *chibalo*. Because of this suffering, when I used to return home after working in the fields, I would always be thinking, desperately, what am I going to do? Where am I going to go? How am I going to get there?³⁶

The suffering of Ms. Oselina, aside from being associated with the absence of concrete economic benefits from growing cotton, is also associated with her husband's absence. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, as she points out, the causes of her situation are in fact based in the system of forced labor imposed by the colonial administration. Here *chibalo* acts as a disintegrating force, something that is cited in many other interviews. Luís Covane, in his work on the migration of workers to the Transvaal mines, shows how this system worked to divide families from agricultural communities, which they had to flee owing to the threat of *chibalo*. In this sense, *chibalo* was not only terrible because it was violent and arbitrary, but also and especially because it brought severe long-term consequences to the social structure of previously productive agricultural communities.

Disaggregating the many valences of *chibalo* from its ostensible synonym of forced labor makes it possible to more clearly understand that thing which historians habitually label as the “colonial state.” The colonial state is often accepted as a fact. This is itself based upon the self-presentations of colonizers and colonial officials, who presented their various laws and regulations as part of a universal logic. I instead propose moving toward a different heuristic, one which distinguishes between the self-proclaimed universal norms and the constant specific exceptions of the colonial administration, and which analyzes these twin poles as indivisible, continuous, and foundational. Thus, the “emergency” character of colonial rule, established to deal with an “exception,” served to justify a normalized set of administrative practices; in the case of Mozambique, a colonial administration established to deal with the exceptional problems created by so-called “lazy natives” was able to justify forced labor as the vessel of civilization—and, not coincidentally, affirm its own aspiration to sovereign power. Shifting the analysis to consider forced labor from the perspective of the African population reveals the illegibility of Portuguese laws and consequently the deceit within their claim to rational universality. This shift, in turn, makes it possible to adopt a less condescending interpretation of colonial rule; rather than analyzing the colonial administration from within its own field of vision, it becomes possible to understand it from the perspective of the colonized population as an external, extractive mechanism.

Shifting the perspective away from colonial laws, and into the perspective of the colonized, is not just useful in better understanding the colonial state; it is also essential in better understanding the social imaginary of colonized population. To that end, it is worth exploring the imbrication of forced labor with preexisting processes of social mobility, and using that imbrication as a lens through which to understand how colonized populations understood their labor. Numerous analyses have argued against the possibility of such an analysis, presenting mobility is an essentially involuntary response to capitalist impositions; as Jean-Paul Guademar has argued, for example, once “men surrender their behavior to the demands of capitalist growth, the capitalist strategy of mobility is at the same time a strategy of forced mobility.”³⁷ I want to move beyond this argument; even if this mobility is in one sense forced, because it is inevitable, it also sets off other processes that readjust the migrant’s social universe—readjustments which are not solely reducible to the political, economic, and juridical subordination of migrants.

In that sense, I think it is worth discussing one of the most interesting strategies drawn up by a specific group of individuals to confront the arbitrary and unjust reality of the colonial state. It is interesting because

it opens a series of interpretive possibilities, which show us the full extent to which administration strategies for rounding up inexpensive *chibalo* labor had to confront the varied responses of the people affected by the forced labor system. This is the case of the *Muchopes* studied by Jeanne Penvenne.³⁸ The example concerns a system of city cleaning and trash and waste removal from the city of Lourenço Marques, the capital of colonial Mozambique. This work was performed by *chibalo* workers, and although it was extremely insalubrious, the *muchopes*, according to Penvenne, “became the *chibalo* workers preferred for these jobs and, as a group, knew how to take advantage of the situation.”

According to Penvenne, after 1908, the work of cleaning the city was given to a Portuguese firm, which used *chibalo* to obtain its workers. Because it was important and delicate work, any problems subjected the firm to fines assessed by the city administration. The *muchopes*, even though they were *chibalo* workers, rapidly understood the problems they could cause their employers. Thus they were able to come up with a system that allowed them to quickly fulfill their assigned cleaning tasks, leaving them more time outside of work, which they could use to perform other jobs, which provided them with concrete benefits. Among these were gardening, artisanal work, and above all repairing goods that they found in the trash of better-stocked houses. Although these “extra” jobs were considered “illegal” under *chibalo*, they were frequently tolerated by the supervisors responsible for overseeing these workers, precisely because if they were punished, they could respond by not properly cleaning the city—which would have caused problems for their employers.

Another strategy, derived from the *muchopes*, was the creation of a system of tipping, which consisted in providing exceptional services for those residents who agreed to pay, and punishing those who did not cooperate, or otherwise insulted them, by knocking over their trash cans. This experience, among others collected by Penvenne, is important in demonstrating that although *chibalo* was an arbitrary and contingent system of compulsion, it was confronted not only by a narrative which highlighted its injustices, but also by a population that mobilized strategies which responded to its economic realities. The most common strategy was migration to the South African mines, precisely because this mobility responded to the economic rationality that I have sought to trace in these cases. Mobility therefore represented a dynamic process of adaptation and innovation among migrants who were faced with the encroachment of capitalism across southern Africa. Rather than representing an involuntary response to colonial rule, both the Portuguese and South African authorities quickly grew to understand that the mobility of migrant workers was the most

versatile and most complex driver of capitalist production in southern Africa.³⁹

To that end, the Portuguese tried to use their strategic position to take advantage of this phenomenon, signing a series of well-known accords with the South African administration between 1896 and 1909, which regulated the system of labor migration between Mozambique and South Africa.⁴⁰ Crucially important within these agreements was a deferred compensation system, in which miners were not paid until they returned to Mozambique. Portuguese authorities generated significant tax revenue from this system; as William Norman has observed, it allowed the Portuguese government not only to collect taxes directly from miners' wages, but also manipulate the exchange rate of miners' wages to Portuguese benefit, and further ensure that miners spent the money from their wages within Portuguese territory. Beyond those more tangible benefits, the system of deferred compensation gave the administration a sense that it actually controlled the migrants nominally under their jurisdiction.⁴¹

But while the colonial administration garnered significant advantages from these laws and treaties, their rule remained narrow, limited, and largely dependent upon African subordinates. Without local "chiefs," known in Mozambique as *régulos*, it never would have been possible to develop an efficient system of tax collection. Luís Covane, for example, has noted that:

Much of the money that migrant laborers earned was used to avoid being conscripted into forced labor by local authorities. Although Portuguese officials knew that migrant workers gave gifts to their chiefs to be exempted from *chibalo* and other types of undesirable labor, they were unable to actually control this phenomenon, dependent as they were upon the chiefs. This also explains why the Portuguese constantly said that Africans became arrogant with the money they earned in South Africa, because they used it to bribe chiefs and avoid being conscripted for agricultural labor.⁴²

Notwithstanding colonial mechanisms of control, the legal structures of colonial rule, and even the economic advantages of deferred tax payments, a series of extra-legal arrangements between migrant workers and chiefs allowed them to escape colonial obligations. Thus, while the accords between the colonial administration and the South African mining houses were formally defined in a way to benefit both sides, their impact within African society was quite different. Since colonial laws and obligations held no benefit for migrants' day-to-day life, they reacted by adapting pre-existing social and cultural practices (in this case, the practice of providing tribute to local chiefs) to meet the new aim of evading colonial impositions.

One can see similar dynamics in the phenomenon of “clandestine migration” to South Africa. “Clandestine emigration” was a legal offense, invented by colonial legislation, which made it illegal for migrants to leave Mozambique without official authorization. The category can only make sense when viewed through the excessively narrow lens of colonial legislation; in reality, there was no way for the Portuguese to control the mobility of workers, nor were there any penalties they could apply to South African employers who hired “clandestine” workers.⁴³ From the point of view of migrants, meanwhile, the conceptual division between “legal” and “illegal” migration was not based upon the prescriptions of colonial law or inter-governmental accords; it was instead based upon the much more concrete necessity of earning a living. Migrants who went abroad without official authorization were aware that they were committing an “illegal” act, but for the majority of migrants, these laws were economically illegible and socially illegitimate.⁴⁴

Colonial authorities defined migration as “clandestine” because they imagined that it was being undertaken as flight from taxes and forced labor, thus making such “clandestine” migration an act of resistance. But in reality, migrants made their decisions in a much wider social universe than the one imagined by colonial authorities. Of course, the fear of *chibalo* had an effect on migratory processes. Nonetheless, migrants also made their calculations based on a different type of rationality, one grounded in the culture of migration. The act of migrating also implied the search for social status, not just flight from the colonial state. Physical mobility was intrinsically linked with social mobility; migrants were not only seeking to escape the colonial state, but also to better fulfill their social obligations. Fleeing from *chibalo* was, in that sense, a pragmatic motivation, rather than an outright rebellion facing the colonial state. Indeed, it would be hard to justify going to the mines if the sole objective was to flee from *chibalo*, because the mines were in some respects worse than *chibalo*, at least as regards their working conditions; the daily tasks in the mines were extremely difficult, demanding tremendous physical exertion, and unsafe conditions brought with them the constant danger of serious injury or death.

For that reason, the choice between working for the South Africans or working for the Portuguese was not a choice that reflected some intrinsic difference between one form of work and the other. Instead, it reflected the choices that migrants made, choices that reflected their understanding of the different modes of production that operated in Mozambique and South Africa. These choices reflected the fact that migrants were confronted with two competing possibilities, two different modes of production. Migrants were able to exploit their ability as migrants to move between these two

different possibilities in ways that best met their specific needs. The co-existence of these two very different modes of labor made mobility such an important tool—not only as an economic strategy, but also as a social strategy. Migrants needed to monetarize their labor in order to navigate the world of colonial rule; mobility was an essential asset that allowed them to optimize their labor and effectively respond to the senseless and unjust demands made by colonial officials. But migrants were also operating within their own social and ideological realm, one which guaranteed them access to higher wages as needed, and thus allowed migrants to formulate the most appropriate response to the difficulties of their situation.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed labor and mobility from the perspective of the colonized population so as to make several specific arguments. One concerns the modernizing discourse of the colonial administration, which imaginatively presented forced labor as a force for civilization, without bothering to minimally develop any type of redistributive mechanism that would actually assist the social reproduction of the population. This analysis reveals the arrogance and essentialism of colonial ideology, as well as the violence through which colonial modernity was constituted. In that sense, forced labor is not just a way of understanding the Portuguese colonial impact; it also is a way of understanding its limitations. Analyzing forced labor as part of the language of power used by the Portuguese shows this language to have been utterly ineffective in obtaining compliance from the colonized population. None of the policies instituted by colonial rulers managed to inculcate their ostensibly modern and universal ideas among colonial subjects. To the contrary, these policies generated a contested response, a dynamic in which colonial subjects drew upon their social and cultural reserves and developed them in parallel with colonial rule. Showing the limitations of the colonial state, in turn, makes it possible to better analyze how it was perceived by the colonized population—not as a functioning state, still less as a civilizing force, but rather as an illegible, external, extractive mechanism.

Many scholars in recent years have contested this approach and argued against bifurcating colonial history into the dyad of colonizer and colonized. In particular, numerous studies have sought to disaggregate the colonial state by untangling the relationships between its various different economic and political agents—public and private, agricultural and industrial, and so on. But this approach reflects a particular positioning, one that is external to the perspective of colonial subjects themselves. For people

who lived through colonial rule, the colonial state's various manifestations were, as William Norman has put it, "indivisible and monolithic." Nor is this surprising, since (again following Norman) "the state companies and the mining sector tied themselves institutionally one to the other in all stages of the migration of miners to South Africa. . . . [F]or the Massingir miners, the State and mining companies were so strictly tied to each other that both were often talked of as a single entity."⁴⁵

The concatenation of the state instead supports the argument of José Luís Cabaço, who presents colonial occupation as a polarization between colonizer and colonized, in which the colonial necessity of rationalizing its expansion and the intensely hierarchical nature of colonial rule created two parallel societies. This duality is incontestable; even defenders of the Portuguese myth of colonial integration and racial assimilation (famously labeled "Luso-Tropicalism") cannot escape the fact that the colonial order was based on this division, whose key foundation was racial difference.⁴⁶

Adopting the perspective of the colonial population thus supports an understanding of colonial rule as a dual society, in which the agents of colonial rule effectively coalesced into a single monolithic entity. To extend that same portrayal to the colonized population itself, however, is an ahistorical construction, invented during anti-colonial struggles to create and legitimate a sense of national consciousness. This unity did not exist during the historical process of colonial domination. What I have instead tried to show is how the repertoires of power utilized by colonial agents and colonial officials set off an unpredictable chain of events, one which in turn set off an unpredictable chain of responses among those affected by colonial rule—responses that are not reducible to a reaction to the colonial state. The actions of colonized individuals are not necessarily evidence of confrontation with, or even of dissent from, colonial domination. Even as they were excluded, marginalized, and exploited, the colonized population responded based on specific subjectivities, produced by their particular circumstances. The elevation in rural living standards; the stabilization of existing social and cultural practices; the constitution of new subjectivities; the creation of new symbolic links between the rural and the industrial: all of these were not merely practices of everyday resistance. Instead, they represented a diverse set of social and political responses to colonial rule.

For that reason, labor migration should not solely be considered a response to the conditions of colonial rule. To be sure, taxation and forced labor were an important factor in the decision to migrate. Nonetheless, understanding the realities of migrant workers in southern Mozambique requires us to examine how their existing social imaginary was adapted to changing economic realities. It requires us, in other words, to examine

their pragmatic and rational capacity to choose coherent strategies adapted to their own lives, and to tailor their reactions to the injustices of colonial rule. Adopting this shift in perspective makes it possible to interrogate our assumptions about the colonial state—its contradictions, its civilizational discourse, its extractive machinery, and its inability to actually bring about the development of colonial society within the capitalist framework that it imagined. In contrast to its claims of civilizing colonial subjects through forced labor and freeing them from their “backward customs,” colonial rule created an economically dependent society, which in turn brought about an impoverished population, whose possibilities of agricultural-led development were sharply limited by forced labor and by the migrant labor system. All of these injustices further cemented the division between colonizer and colonized. Nonetheless, alongside the overarching processes of colonial rule, colonial populations themselves were able to pragmatically incorporate new types of relationships in their economic life. These new relationships made it possible to evade the impositions of the colonial state, seen as illegitimate and unjust by the subject population. It also made it possible for people to develop new methods of economic reproduction, drawing upon preexisting practices of mobility. This mobility forged new relationships between African social life and the international system of capitalist exploitation, making mobility the most dynamic element of the regional economy. Examining labor and mobility thus points toward a set of political and social languages which people used to adapt to political and economic change, a set of languages which are far too eloquent to be analyzed solely through the narrow lens of colonialism itself.

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Notes

1. Complete interview available in Alpheus Manghezi, *Trabalho forçado e cultura obrigatória do algodão: o Colonato do Limpopo e reassentamento pós-independência, c.1895–1981* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 2003), 35–36.

2. On this subject I particularly draw upon the works of Alpheus Manghezi, *Trabalho forçado*; Luís António Covane, *O trabalho migratório e a agricultura no sul de Moçambique (1920–1992)* (Maputo: Promedia, 2001); Valdemir Zamparoni, “Entre Narros & Mulungos. Colonialismo e paisagem social em Lourenço Marques, c.1890–c.1940” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 1998); Centro de Estudos Africanos (CEA), *O mineiro moçambicano. Um estudo sobre a exportação da mão de obra em Inhambane*, (Maputo: Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, 1998); Jeanne

Penvenne, *Trabalhadores de Lourenço Marques (1870–1974)* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 1993).

3. For a deeper exploration of this topic, see the important work of Cláudia Castelo, *Passagens para África. O povoamento de Angola e Moçambique com naturais da metrópole (1920–1974)* (Lisbon: Afrontamento, 2007).

4. I use the “state of exception” concept on purpose, based on the definition constructed by Agamben (2004): “. . . this no-man land, lying between the public law and the political facts and between the juridical order and life” (pp. 12) “The state of exception is not a special concession (like a war concession), but, while being the very discontinuance of the juridical order, defines its own baseline and limits.” (15). See Giorgio Agamben, *Estado de exceção. Homo Sacer II* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2008).

5. For more, see Michel Cahen, “Indigenato before race? Some Proposals on Portuguese Forced Labour law in Mozambique and the African Empire (1926–1962),” in *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking World*, eds. Francisco Bethencourt and Adrian Pearce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 149–171; Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, *Livros brancos, almas negras. A ‘missão civilizadora’ do colonialismo português. 1870–1930*, (Lisbon: ICS, 2009); Maria Paula Meneses, “O ‘indígena’ africano e o colono ‘europeu’: a construção da diferença por processos legais,” *E-cadernos CES* 7 (2010): 68–93; Lorenzo Macagno, “Fragmentos de uma imaginação nacional,” *RBCS* 24, 70 (2009): 18–35; José Luís Cabaço, *Moçambique. Identidade, colonialismo e libertação* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2009); and Patricia Ferraz de Matos, *As côres do império. Representações raciais no império colonial português* (Lisbon: ICS, 2012).

6. In this sense, the use of the concept “repertories of power” could be summarized in Fred Cooper and Jane Burbank’s quote: “The way the people who were responsible for the colonial administration, missionaries and overlords saw the Asian and the African people and the way they behaved towards them cannot be reduced to just some modern European attribute, the imperialistic strategies responded to the fact that people opposed resistance.” See *Imperios: una nueva visión de la historia universal* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2012), 394–395.

7. The Nguni are a sociopolitical group native to the northeastern region of what now is South Africa, which, by effect of the so-called Mfecane caused by the unifying movements of Shaka Zulu, migrated to the north, occupying the region which was known during almost the entirety of the nineteenth century as the “Kingdom of Gaza.” This “kingdom” occupied the southern region of Mozambique until 1897, when the last resistance was defeated by the Portuguese army. For more details see Gabriela Aparecida dos Santos, *Reino de Gaza: o desafio português na ocupação do sul de Moçambique (1821–1897)* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2010); Gerhard Liesegang, *A guerra dos reis Vátuas, do Cabo Natal, do Maxacane da Matola, do Macassane do Maputo e demais reinos vizinhos contra o Presídio da baía de Lourenço Marques* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Mozambique, 1995); and *Vassalagem ou tratado de amizade?: história do acto de vassalagem de Ngungunyane nas relações externas de Gaza* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Mozambique, 1986); Rene Pélissier, *História de Moçambique*.

Formação e Oposição-1854-1918 (Lisbon: Estampa, 1987); António Rita-Ferreira, *Presença Luso-asiática e mutações culturais no sul de Moçambique (até c. 1900)* (Lisbon: IICT, 1982) and Patrick Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (London: James Currey, 1989) 82-117, among many others.

8. Manghezi, *Trabalho forçado*; Covane, *O trabalho migratório*; Zamparoni, *Entre Narros & Mulungos*; CEA, *O mineiro moçambicano*; Penvenne, *Trabalhadores de Lourenço Marques*. See also Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa 1860-1910* (London: James Currey, 1994), and "Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus Extraction: The Nature of Free and Un-free Labour in South-East Africa," *Journal of African History* 22, 3 (1981): 309-330; William Norman, "Living on the Frontline: Politics, Migration and Transfrontier Conservation in the Mozambican Villages of the Mozambique-South Africa Borderland" (PhD diss., University of London, 2004); and finally the pioneering work of António Rita-Ferreira, *O movimento migratório de trabalhadores entre Moçambique e a África do Sul* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações de Ultramar, 1963), among others.

9. For examples, see José Fialho Feliciano, *Antropologia económica dos Thonga no Sul de Moçambique* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 1998); David Webster, *A sociedade chope: indivíduo e aliança no Sul de Moçambique (1969-1976)* (Lisbon: ICS, 2009); Henri Junod, *Uso e Costumes dos Bantus*, Tomo I e II (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 1996), among others.

10. For more on the so-called "Generation of 1895," see Lorenzo Macagno, "O discurso e a fabricação dos usos e costumes: António Enes e a 'Geração de 95,'" in *Moçambique ensaios*, ed. Peter Fry (Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 2001), 61-90.

11. Feliciano, *Antropologia económica*, 96-97.

12. Leroy Vail, "Mozambique's Chartered Companies: The Rule of the Feeble," *Journal of African History* 17, 4 (1976): 389-416.

13. For a brief introduction to the *prazos*, see Allen and Barbara Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900-1982* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), chapter 2; for a detailed discussion of this African institution, see Allen F. Isaacman, *Mozambique: The Africanization of a European Institution, The Zambesi Prazos 1750-1902* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972).

14. Cabaço, *Moçambique*, 26-108.

15. For more information about the anthropological aspects in the nineteenth-century Portugal, and also about the Colonial Act and the Indigenous Law concerning the treatment of the Mozambican population, see Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, "O Bom Povo Português: Antropologia de Nação e Antropologia do Império," in *Antropologia Impérios e Estados Nacionais*, ed. Lygia Sigaud (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2002). See also Rosa Cabecinhas and João Feijó, "Collective Memories of Portuguese Colonial Action in Africa: Representations of the Colonial Past among Mozambicans and Portuguese Youths," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 4 (2010): 28-44.

16. The speech is from 1899, cited by Feliciano, *Antropologia económica*, 28.

17. Claude Meillassoux, *Mulheres, celeiros & capital* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1977), 140.

18. Frederick Cooper, “Condições análogas à escravidão: Imperialismo e ideologia da mão-de-obra livre na África,” in *Além da escravidão: Investigação sobre raça, trabalho e cidadania em sociedades pós-emancipação*, eds. Frederick Cooper et. al. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização brasileira, 2005), 225.

19. Valdemir Zamparoni, “Da escravatura ao trabalho forçado: teorias e práticas,” *Africana Studia* n° 7 (2004): 307.

20. See José Capela, *O Escravismo Colonial em Moçambique* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1993), 23.

21. Capela, *O Escravismo*, 23.

22. Most of these practices are referenced in the works of Manghezi, *Trabalho forçado*; Covane, *O trabalho migratório*; Zamparoni, *Entre Narros & Mulungos*; CEA, *O mineiro moçambicano*; Penvenne, *Trabalhadores de Lourenço Marques*.

23. Luís Covane, *As relações económicas entre Moçambique e a África do Sul: 1850–1964: Acordos e regulamentos principais* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 1989), 13.

24. According to Covane, the populations that lived around the sugar cane plantations in Natal, encouraged by missionaries and British government agents, became producers of cash crops, and even subsistence farmers were able to produce enough surplus to pay their taxes, and thus had little interest in working for white sugar cane farmers: “Between 1856–57, for example, only 6.000 of the 30.000 needed workers in the Natal colony were recruited among the local population.” See Covane, *O trabalho migratório*, 86.

25. Penvenne, *Trabalhadores de Lourenço Marques*, 17.

26. Isaacman and Isaacman, *Mozambique: From Colonialism*, 34.

27. About legibility and illegibility of the law, see Veena Das and Deborah Poole, *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series, 2004), 225–254.

28. Das and Poole, *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, 9–10.

29. This idea of suffering is repeated in many of the interviews that Manghezi, Covane and Penvenne conducted during their investigations about colonial labor in southern Mozambique.

30. Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976).

31. The *palmatória* was a heavy, perforated wooden paddle used to beat people's hands, and was the most common method of punishment in the Portuguese colonies.

32. Manghezi, *Trabalho Forçado*, 18–19.

33. Similar to *chibalo*, the term *magaiza* is an emic expression. In this case its origin is related to the migration process to the South African mines; according to Lopes, Siteo and Nhamuende, it is an Anglicism used by speakers of southern Mozambican languages, derived from “inglizi,” the word for “English.” *Ma* is a prefix

that indicates the plural. See Armando Lopes, Benedict Siteo and Paulino Nhamuende, *Moçambicanismos: Para um léxico dos usos de portugueses moçambicanos* (Maputo: Editora Universitária, 2002), 90.

34. Manghezi, *Trabalho Forçado*, 51–52.

35. The whip was known as the *chamboco*, made of rubber and designed to drive herds of animals, sometimes called the *cavalo-marinho*, or seahorse, because it was often made of hippopotamus skin. The etymology is also derived from the Xichangan word “Sambuca.” See Lopes, Siteo, and Nhamuende, *Moçambicanismos*, 45.

36. Manghezi, *Trabalho Forçado*, 73.

37. Jean-Paul Gaudemar, *Mobilidade do trabalho e acumulação do capital* (Lisbon: Estampa, 1977), 17.

38. Jeanne Penvenne, “Chibalo e classe operária: Lourenço Marques 1870–1962,” *Estudos Moçambicanos* 2 (1981): 9–26.

39. Support for this point is particularly strong in Covane, *O trabalho migratório*, and Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*.

40. Covane, *As relações económicas*.

41. Norman, *Living on the Frontline*, 64; Covane, *As relações económicas*, 38.

42. Covane, *O trabalho migratório*, 99.

43. According to the law, a clandestine migrant was someone who was underage, who had been rejected by medical inspection, who was a criminal, who was escaping from the *chibalo* or the hut tax, or who lived north of the 22nd parallel. See Covane, *O trabalho migratório*, 106.

44. According to Covane, “the illegal migration flourished because the Portuguese colony could not absorb the workers who were unable to emigrate in the context of the agreements between the Portuguese Administration and the South African government . . . The low salaries paid in the territory, relatively high wages paid in the South African mines; forced labor . . . and heavy hut tax are some of the factors that played a key role in motivating the illegal emigration.” See Covane, *O trabalho migratório*, 107.

45. Norman, *Living on the Frontline*, 72.

46. Cabaço, *Moçambique*, 29–78.