

INTRODUCTION

Histories of Mobility, Histories of Labor, Histories of Africa

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Migrant labor is one of the most extensively studied subjects of Africa's colonial history, helping to inaugurate the professional study of Africa in multiple academic disciplines. Anthropologists in the 1940s, working to outline the impact of colonial rule, used migrant labor to demonstrate the changes occurring within African societies previously considered immunized by "tradition" against major social change. Economists in the 1950s and 1960s, seeking to gauge the prospects of economic transformation in Africa, examined migrant labor between the "traditional" and "modern" sectors of the economy in order to divine what future changes in the balance between these two putatively separate economic spheres might follow from increased investment under colonial and then post-colonial development schemes. Scholars of African politics and society in the era of independence used migrant labor to examine the relationship between states and citizens in newly independent countries, as well as to forecast how this relationship would continue to evolve following the end of colonial rule.

Migrant labor was also an important subject for the first professional historians of Africa. Just as the anthropologists who inaugurated the professional study of Africa used migrant labor as an indisputable marker of

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cultural dynamism, so too could historians use migrant labor as an indisputable marker of diachronic change. The historical study of migrant labor took some time to develop, as the first wave of historians of Africa were predominantly interested in researching precolonial Africa, so as to establish an authentically African past for the emerging postcolonial future. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, increased historical interest in studying colonial rule brought a rapid proliferation of migrant labor histories, diffused through a confluence of closely related historiographical strands.¹ One was the focus on African workers as key actors in challenging and ultimately overcoming colonial rule, and a potential force for ushering postcolonial Africa further along the path toward modernity.² Another was the animated debates, inspired by underdevelopment theory, over Africa's historical relationship with global capitalism.³ Still another was the equally animated debates over the role of material relations in shaping African societies, as well as the proper analytical framework (or mode of production) through which these relations ought to be categorized and understood.⁴ Hovering over these historiographical nodes was the reigning paradigm of social history, in which economic relationships were understood to be the primary driver of historical change, and to offer the most perceptive lens into the broader arc of history's march toward the present.

Migrant labor was well-positioned to feature prominently in all of these historiographies. For labor historians, migrant workers presented a discrete group of individuals whose actions—protests, evasion, strikes, and so on—could be clearly catalogued as an example of the interlocking dynamics of structure and agency as workers confronted the onset of colonial rule.⁵ For economic historians, migrant laborers instantiated the changes wrought by colonial rule in a particularly vivid way, as the dramatic rise of migrant wage labor—especially in eastern and southern Africa—made clear the scale of the transformations inaugurated by colonial capitalism.⁶ For historians participating in debates over African modes of production, migrant laborers' movement between work and home made it possible to extend critical analyses of capitalist transformation and its attendant models into regions that had not been previously subjected to rigorous materialist analysis, having instead been considered largely unaffected by such transformations, owing to the fact that capitalist enterprises in many parts of colonial Africa were limited in number and geographically concentrated into a few limited areas.⁷

In the late 1980s and 1990s, however, the previously vibrant historiography of migrant labor entered into significant decline. One reason for this was the global turn toward neoliberalism, which decimated labor movements around the globe and robbed labor of its vitality as an agent

of social change.⁸ Another was the profound shift in the methodology of historical inquiry, particularly in North America and Great Britain, as Clio's theoretical oracle moved from Marx to Foucault.⁹ As part of this shift, a number of scholars began critiquing social history as an ahistorical and narrowly Eurocentric teleology masquerading as a universally applicable method of analysis.¹⁰ Scholars increasingly favored cultural dynamics as an object of study and as a lens into historical change, moving away from the materialist approaches that had previously dominated academic discourse. Historians of Africa, reflecting these changes, began to increasingly examine colonial rule in the registers of identity and culture, rather than class, and the themes of African resistance and colonial domination gradually became a less favored field of study.¹¹ Instead, historians of Africa grew more attentive to social dynamics outside of the colonial encounter, while the subsequent turn toward transnational history brought a renewed interest in the workings of empires.¹² As historians shifted to focus on global and local spaces, their studies no longer mapped onto the colonial interactions brokered by migrant labor.

Put more plainly, historians working in the 1990s were asking questions for which migrant labor was less likely to provide the answer. Those histories of migrant labor which were written after the shift away from social history embodied the changing historiographical trends of their time. Perhaps the most influential, Frederick Cooper's *Decolonization and African Society*, examined labor against the backdrop of European empires, reflecting the turn toward more global histories of Africa. Other histories of migrant labor paid far more attention to questions of identity—especially gender and race—than had their predecessors, showing how cultural markers joined with class divisions to shape African labor history.¹³ Some authors staked stronger claims, making clear arguments for the preeminence of culture over class in driving historical change, and inverting the logic of their materialist predecessors by embedding migrant labor's rise within the sociocultural logic of African workers. Thus, rather than assuming that African cultural dynamics had been subsumed into a more "objective" identity among workers who came to form part of a defined class, they showed how the dynamics of colonial capitalism were dependent upon, and responded to, the cultural imperatives of African workers.¹⁴

The wave of cultural histories of migrant labor which appeared in the first half of the 1990s represented the final spurts of migrant labor historiography, as the subject largely disappeared from African history thereafter. Recently, however, African labor history has shown signs of a revival. In part, this is attributable to broader shifts within the discipline. Historians have shown a renewed interest in economic history, at the same time

that economists have shown a renewed interest in the history of economics, producing new calls for historians to reconsider questions that have lay dormant for the past couple decades.¹⁵ Much of the new interest in economic history has taken the form of histories of capitalism, a subfield whose practitioners have been celebrated in popular media as providing important historical insight into present-day socioeconomic dilemmas.¹⁶ At the same time, the leading exemplars of the “new economic history” have not restricted themselves to economic questions. Instead, they have pushed beyond conventional definitions of “economic history” to address a wide swath of social and cultural life, from the impact of actuarial calculations upon the discourse of individuality to the imbrication of religious life with big business.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the newfound interest of economic historians in examining subjects beyond economics has rarely extended to labor, as authors have instead looked at other facets of economic life to investigate the history of capitalism.

This is a curious omission, which deserves to be addressed. The articles in this special issue move in that direction, helping to bridge the gap between labor history and economic history more broadly, showing how workers interacted with the economic systems in which they were embedded. They also contribute to the emerging focus on global labor history, a recently growing field which has helped reinvigorate interest in labor as a subject of historical study, outside of the exhaustive theoretical debates of previous decades.¹⁸ More prosaically, the new interest in global labor history has helped reconnect historians of labor working in the United States with their counterparts working in Europe and the Global South, where the decline of labor history within academia was never quite as sharp nor as steep as it was in North America.¹⁹ Over the last few years, a trickle of books has begun to reappear on African labor history, alongside an important special issue of *International Journal of Labor and Working-Class History* on the same subject, providing innovative theoretical approaches to what was previously considered well-covered ground.²⁰

This special issue of *African Economic History* contributes toward this rediscovery of African labor history, and especially the history of migrant labor, by reexamining the subject through the emerging historical paradigm of mobility.²¹ In uniting around the framework of mobility, the articles in this special edition implicitly interrogate some of the assumptions attached to the term “migration,” and with it seek to recover some of the possibilities foreclosed by previous histories of migrant labor.²² In particular, mobility speaks to a sense of possibility that previous histories of migrant labor have not generally emphasized. Most histories of migrant labor have focused upon excavating migrant labor’s specific examples, and with

good reason, as this makes it easier to more clearly delineate the history of labor itself and its changes over time. Nonetheless, migrant labor was never a foreordained outcome, nor a singular path between fixed points, as workers navigated plural possibilities of wage labor across a broad spatial arena. Migrant workers never relinquished their capacity to move into and out of migrant labor, to move between different types of migrant labor, or to move between different industries and different destinations. Examining how workers used their mobility to engage migrant labor's possibilities opens up a new dimension through which to utilize and query labor's role in shaping the history of Africa.

The articles in this special issue take up these avenues of scholarly inquiry, using mobility to push forward the field of migrant labor history, both historically and historiographically. Historically, they use the mobility of migrant workers to answer a wide range of historical questions, from the affective ties that linked workers across borders and across continents to the tactics used by state and non-state actors to channel otherwise mobile workers to particular destinations. Conceptually, they use migrant workers' physical movement to cross the disciplinary borders that continue to surround histories of migrant labor. Histories of migrant labor, particularly during the heyday of the discipline, tended to examine labor as a subject in itself, since the vitality of labor history made it possible for historians to analyze workers and work as a closed system, and to direct their analysis toward other historians interested in the same questions. In contrast, the articles in this edition use mobility to question migrant labor's links to the economy and society in which it took place; as with the new paradigms of economic history, which use the economy as a lens into broader historical processes, so too do the articles in this special issue use labor to illuminate broader social, cultural, and political changes.

The first of the articles, Ireen Mudeka's history of female migrants from Nyasaland to Southern Rhodesia, seeks to move beyond the enduring analytical boundary between male migrant workers and female migrants. For many decades, historians focused entirely on the first of these categories, accepting and utilizing colonial gender norms which defined migrant wage labor as an inherently male activity. Under this explanatory framework, women who migrated were placed into an array of hazily undefined categories—as non-economic migrants, or as wives accompanying their husbands, or as informal workers who were only partially incorporated in the wage labor economy, or finally as unusual exceptions to the generalized rule.²³ A strong counter-current of historical work has interrogated these assumptions, demonstrating that gender boundaries were never as clear as colonial rulers envisioned or as subsequent historians

imagined.²⁴ Mudeka's article further contributes to this reevaluation, showing the extent and the historical importance of women's migration, even despite colonial legislation that blocked such migration from legally taking place. Mudeka's richly textured exploration of the methods through which women used their mobility to improve their working and living conditions feeds into a broader historiography of the links between gender and migrant labor in colonial Africa. It also shows the importance of joining social and cultural mobility alongside physical migration in historical analyses of migrant labor.

Along those same lines, Paul Ocobock's article on young migrant workers in Kenya, and Isaie Dougnon's article on young migrant workers moving from Mali to Ghana, provide an important picture of the multiple registers in which migrant workers utilized their mobility. Migrant workers were, of course, using their physical mobility as a tool for economic advancement, as they sought out more highly paid and more highly skilled jobs—the motivation traditionally highlighted by historians and economists studying migrant labor. But they were also using their physical mobility to advance their social and cultural mobility, as their newfound status as migrants who had successfully traveled significant distances and earned significant incomes made it possible for them to radically enhance their social and cultural standing.²⁵ Dougnon's article shows how Dogon migrants used their mobility to acquire both material goods (particularly clothing) and specialized skills (particularly new languages); the act of having gone to Ghana to acquire these goods gave them enormous cultural cachet, forging an otherwise disparate group of migrants into an identifiable social and cultural bloc—what Dougnon aptly terms “cultural heroes.” Mobility was also important in propelling the social advancement of young male workers, an important dynamic highlighted by Ocobock's article, which offers an especially insightful look into the ways that labor mobility provided young men with new tools for debating socially recognized markers of maturity and masculinity with their elders, as well as new ways of attaining markers of adulthood and belonging. This process of social ascension is equally highlighted by Dougnon, who persuasively argues that labor was so important within the social maturation of migrant workers that it became recognized as a type of initiation rite, a process that ushered young men into the status of full members of Dogon society.

At the same time, Dougnon and Ocobock use the history of migrants and the consumer goods they purchased (especially clothing) to link labor studies to the rapidly growing field of commodity studies. This is an essential contribution to the revitalization of labor history, since it explicitly connects the history of labor with the history of capitalism, the latter of

which has frequently taken the form of histories of commodity flows. The history of capitalism is a rapidly growing subfield, attracting glowing attention from mass media, and producing a slew of new books; the history of labor has not received nearly as much attention. Yet the distinction between the two seems somewhat artificial—perhaps a product of a bygone era, when writing the history of labor implied very different political commitments than writing the history of business (the narrower ancestor of today's histories of capitalism). Historians of capitalism have successfully avoided the exclusive concern with executives and balance sheets that animated historians of business, and have insightfully investigated the social and cultural dimensions of economic history. They have also successfully used the history of capitalism, and especially the history of commodities, to link together economic and political changes from different corners of the globe, facilitating a more spatially informed analysis of global history. Nonetheless, it is not possible to write a history of capitalism without paying close attention to the workers who produced the things that made capitalism function. As Dougnon and Ocobock show, the movements of capital and commodities were accompanied by, and dependent on, movements of workers, providing an excellent model for bringing together histories of capitalism, commodities, and migrant labor.

Enrique Martino is similarly focused upon using mobility and labor to investigate the economic history of Africa, showing how the labor system on the ostensibly capitalist cocoa plantations of Fernando Pó perpetuated many of the practices of slavery well into the middle of the twentieth century, and showing how this system changed across both space and time. In examining the evolution of labor in West Africa from the era of the slave trade into the era of plantation agriculture, Martino shows how Fernando Pó placed the seemingly abandoned economic relationships forged by the slave trade into new imperial templates, thus producing a hybrid social and economic system.²⁶ At the same time, Martino shows how this diachronic evolution depended upon new forms of spatialized control, as Fernando Po's plantations depended upon the forcible transport of putatively voluntary "recruits" to plantations from which they had little contact with the outside world and little hope of ameliorating their plight. Martino's article thus offers a key contribution to the growing historiography on the importance of mobility in defining forced labor and slavery.²⁷

While the first four articles use migrant labor to reexamine the economic history of colonial Africa, Héctor Guerra Hernandez orients his history of migrant labor in southern Mozambique in a different direction, using it to examine the political history of colonial rule, a subject of fundamental importance which has recently come under critical scrutiny in

a number of exciting new histories.²⁸ Like Martino, Hernandez examines state control over mobility, but he does so to analyze both the operations of the colonial state and its conceptualization within the cosmology of the ordinary colonial subjects who were victimized by its predations. Migrant labor offers a particularly fruitful opportunity for this endeavor; labor migration predated the establishment of colonial rule, and the mobility of Africans was aggressively targeted by colonial authorities seeking to impose their authority upon newly colonized subjects. As a result, examining labor mobility allows Hernandez to undertake a historiographical review from the “margins” of the colonial state, so as to better contextualize the colonial state’s operations, as well as how these operations were perceived by colonial subjects.

Moreover, by examining forced labor and mobility in southern Mozambique during the establishment of colonial rule during the first decades of the twentieth century, Hernandez is able to follow workers moving between different political and economic systems, providing a uniquely situated vantage point into the operation of colonial rule. This expands the purchase of histories of migrant labor both conceptually and literally. In the literal sense, workers moving across colonial boundaries can provide a unique perspective on the “repertoires of power” (to borrow Hernandez’s phrase) used by colonial rulers, as their simultaneous location inside and outside of colonial rule makes clear the reach and the limitations of those repertoires. More broadly, however, this same perspective upon the colonial state, from both its interior and its margins, makes it possible to “provincialize” colonial rule and more precisely define its impact on indigenous society.²⁹

Alexander Keese’s article, on forced migrant labor in Congo-Brazzaville, follows Martino in pursuing forced labor across space and time, while sharing Hernandez’s interest in using labor to investigate the political history of Africa, crossing significant conceptual boundaries in both directions. Spatially, his article builds upon his earlier work in forging important comparative connections across imperial boundaries in Africa—connections that have too often been overlooked or assumed by scholars working within pre-defined colonial borders.³⁰ Along the way, it offers an important methodological insight into the potential utility of administrative records in understanding the history of forced labor—particularly in contexts, such as Congo-Brazzaville, where oral research and other forms of local fieldwork are difficult or impossible.

Finally, Keese’s article crosses important temporal boundaries, interrogating the assumed historical shifts in labor practices across different eras of colonial and postcolonial history in order to address broad questions

of African political history. Scholars of migrant labor have frequently restricted themselves to comparatively narrow time periods, almost exclusively during the colonial era, especially the rise of migrant labor alongside the establishment of colonial rule and the era of imperial reform between World War II and decolonization. Keese's article bridges these historiographical divisions, in a *longue durée* history of forced labor in Congo-Brazzaville, tracing forced labor's continuities and changes as the territory evolved from a notoriously harsh playground for concessionary companies, to a test case for the possibilities of colonial reform, to an independent nation-state attempting to chart a newly socialist future. In showing what changed, and what did not change, across these historical eras, Keese shows the utility of questioning conventional historical periodizations—especially into the post-colonial era.

In discussing the historical continuities between colonial and post-colonial Congo, Keese is helping to break new historiographical ground, as historians of Africa have rarely ventured into the post-colonial era, instead leaving its study to political scientists and anthropologists. At first, this disciplinary division made sense, since post-independence Africa was a contemporary, rather than historical, object of study. By now, more than 50 years after the first wave of African independence, the reluctance of historians to enter postcolonial waters is less easily explained. There are, to be certain, numerous obstacles to writing the history of postcolonial Africa: difficulties in gaining access to archival materials, which complicates the historian's craft; a shortage of conceptual models among historians more accustomed to engaging with the dynamics of precolonial and colonial Africa; and, perhaps, the political and ideological complexities of studying postcolonial regimes whose realities have rarely matched their initial aspirations.³¹ Nonetheless, given the importance of labor in producing path-breaking studies of colonial rule, it makes sense that historians of labor should take the lead in studying the changes and continuities that accompanied independence. By using postcolonial archives located in France, and taking seriously the question of colonial inheritances in postcolonial regime, Keese helps breach this temporal barrier.

Marcia Schenck's article offers a similarly innovative piercing of the postcolonial wall. Schenck surmounts the difficulties of finding usable official records for the postcolonial era through a combination of private archives and, especially, an extensive number of oral histories. Through these methods, she is able to provide a fascinating look at the experiences of migrant workers from Mozambique and Angola who went to East Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. Schenck's extensive interviews with former workers shows how they understood the worlds being opened to them by

their intercontinental migrations—both the political commitments they made in constructing a socialist world between Mozambique, Angola, and East Germany, and the cultural and social opportunities that flowed from membership in that world. As with the migrant workers studied by Mudeka, Dougnon, and Ocobock, it shows how the possibilities attached to labor migration went beyond the boundaries of labor itself, encompassing escape from the simultaneous risks of civil war and rural stagnation, as well as the promise of otherwise unattainable opportunities for education, travel, and adventure. Schenck's analysis also extends the temporal boundaries of this migration beyond the years in which it occurred. First, it places this migration into the longer history of labor migration in colonial southern Africa, complementing Keese's work in showing the continuities and ruptures in workers' lives between colonialism and independence. At the same time, it examines workers' present-day recollections of their labor as a politically and intellectually charged process, shot through with both nostalgia and resentment, and indicative of the many ways that migrant labor reverberates far beyond the worksite.

Similarly, Jennifer Hart's article, on the successful attempt of Ghana's postcolonial government to reorient the country's road system to drive on the right side of the road, offers an important contribution toward extending labor and economic history past the end of colonial rule. As with Schenck's work, Hart circumvents the absence of available archives on the postcolonial era by consulting alternative sources, in this case marshalling oral history alongside a wide-ranging reading of contemporary periodicals. This allows Hart to make a convincing argument regarding the need to produce more detailed economic histories of postcolonial African nations in order to fully understand their political valences. In the case of the Acheampong era in Ghana, most existing analyses have adopted a state-centered focus, examining the failed techno-politics pursued by the military regime. In contrast, Hart's article takes up the history of mobile workers, particularly commercial motorists, within state-sponsored economic change. This approach allows Hart to make several important contributions. One is to note that even ultimately unsuccessful regimes, such as that of Col. Acheampong, were nonetheless successful in bringing about important social and economic changes, and that their initiatives thus merit more nuanced scrutiny than overly broad narratives of African state failure. Another is to show that the postcolonial economies of African states cannot solely be examined from a top-down perspective, as previous analyses have tended to do, since workers played central roles in shaping how state policies were implemented and experienced. By examining the specific role of mobile workers within postcolonial Ghana, Hart is able to offer a complex

evaluation of the histories that produced (to use her phrase) an “economy of survival and accumulation on multiple scales,” from the local to the global, and consequently to show the importance of so-called “informal” labor in brokering large-scale national and regional changes. Taken together, these arguments point the way toward important new questions and methods through which historians can more thoroughly investigate the economic and social history of postcolonial African nations, and thus more effectively chart the course of African history across the colonial and postcolonial eras.

The final article, a concluding review by Kathryn de Luna, further reinforces the utility of using economic history to challenge existing temporal divisions within African history. Instead of following Keese and Schenck in pulling migrant labor history towards the present, she instead traces the themes examined by the authors into pre-colonial African history. De Luna’s review article suggests many avenues for fruitful exchange between historians of Africa’s more recent and more distant pasts. At the thematic level, de Luna shows how historians of labor can utilize some of the sub-themes prioritized by historians of precolonial Africa, in order to expand their conceptions of labor and mobility in more recent eras. Spirit mediums, for example, have been well-studied by scholars of cultural and religious life in Africa in both the precolonial and the colonial eras—a powerful cultural force that thrived in the spatial circuits forged and reshaped by migrant labor networks. Nonetheless, few scholars have placed the cosmological mobility of spirit mediums into the same framework as migrant labor, leaving the many connections between them largely unexamined. Meanwhile, at the methodological level, de Luna shows how the primary tool of precolonial historians—linguistic analysis—can buttress historians’ capacity to understand changes and continuities in ideas about labor, movement, and society under the shifting labor regimes of the twentieth century. Historians of migration and mobility in modern Africa, for example, are quick to take spatial boundaries as a given, without asking important questions about the ways that these boundaries—and the sense of movement that they implied—were grafted onto precolonial conceptualizations of proximity and distance; these are questions that might be addressed through a more careful study of the language which African workers used to describe their migrations.

Finally, at the conceptual level, de Luna offers a series of valuable suggestions for interrogating labor itself as a historical category. By taking the question of mobility seriously, she notes, historians of labor and migration in Africa make it possible to complicate European assumptions about the meaning of both migration and labor. Thus, by closely examining how

migrants moved, historians can bring depth to existing portrayals of migration as a narrowly economic action, showing how the worlds of affect, cosmopolitanism, and belonging made working across vast distances such a meaningful action in a person's life. At the same time, historians of migrant labor in Africa have a particular opportunity to reevaluate what the term "work" meant to those who undertook it, as well as its role in structuring their social relationships, moving the term beyond its Eurocentric conception as a narrowly defined spectrum of human activity, and recovering the many ways in which Africans understood and utilized their labor.

This special edition of *African Economic History* thus contributes not only to the field of African economic history, but also to the field of economic history more broadly, by suggesting the ways that labor history can push its theoretical assumptions and expand its conceptual boundaries. By offering new histories of labor that take a broad perspective upon its role within economic history, these articles show how even a subject as well-studied as migrant labor can continue to address essential questions about the economic, social, and cultural history of Africa, demonstrating both the importance and the possibility of revitalizing labor history as a tool for studying the African past. There is a reason that labor history once held such a prominent position within scholarship on Africa. Few other subjects could unite such a broad range of insightful articles; few other subjects could bring together contributions from scholars based on four continents; few other subjects can comment on so many different facets of African history. By building upon the foundations laid by previous generations of scholars, and incorporating the insights from more recent scholarship, the articles in this special edition show how the labor historians of the future might continue the work of illuminating Africa's past.

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Notes

1. The study of African responses to colonial rule is closely associated with the rise of the "Dar school" of African historiography, a response to the previous "Ibadan school," which focused more on precolonial Africa. For debates about the existence and importance of the "Dar school," see Donald Denoon and Adam Kuper, "National Historians in Search of a Nation: The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam," *African Affairs* 69, 277 (1970): 329–349, and Terence Ranger, "The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam: An Answer," *African Affairs* 70, 278 (1971),

50–61. For an overview, see Frederick Cooper, “Africa’s Pasts and Africa’s Historians,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, 2 (2000): 297–336.

2. For example, see Robin Cohen, Peter Gutkind, and Jean Copans, “Introduction,” in *African Labor History* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978), cited in Franco Barchiesi and Stefano Belluci, “Introduction,” *International Journal of Labor and Working Class History* 86 (2014): 5.

3. Samir Amin, “Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Historical Origin,” *Journal of Peace Research* 9 (1972): 105–119; for works inspired by the approach, see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1974); Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Patterns of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Late Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

4. These debates were initially inspired by French anthropologists, themselves influenced by structural Marxist approaches, but they went on for quite a long time after their initial appearance, and featured many different participants, probing the applicability and utility of concepts like the lineage mode of production, the African mode of production, and the articulation of the mode of production; in 1985, for example, the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* published a special issue devoted entirely to the question of “Modes of Production” in African history.

5. This was particularly important for historians, influenced by EP Thompson, who sought to recover the lived experiences of workers facing the capitalist onslaught; for particularly influential examples, see Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976); William Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860–1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1896–1914* (New York: Longman, 1982); Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

6. For general critiques, see Giovanni Arrighi, “The Political Economy of Rhodesia,” *New Left Review* 39 (1966); Harold Wolpe, “Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid,” *Economy and Society* 1 (1972): 425–456; Frederick Johnstone, *Class, Race, and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1976); for more focused case studies, see Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa: Industrial Strategies and the Evolution of an African Proletariat in the Copperbelt, 1911–1941* (New York: Africana, 1979); Bill Freund, *Capital and Labour in the Nigerian Tin Mines* (London: Longman, 1981); Ruth First, *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian, and Peasant* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983); Robert Turrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1871–1890* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); William Worger, *South Africa’s City of Diamonds: Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley, 1867–1895* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

7. Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, eds., *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London: Longman, 1980); Philip Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and*

Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Jeff Guy, "Analyzing Pre-Capitalist Societies in Southern Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14 (1987): 18–37.

8. This point is expertly made by Belluci and Barchesi, "Introduction," 6–8.

9. For a thoughtful take on this split, see Harvey Amani Whitfield and Bonny Ibowoh, "Problems, Perspectives, and Paradigms: Colonial Africanist Historiography and the Question of Audience," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 39, 3 (2005): 582–600.

10. Dipesh Chakrabarty's work, although on Indian history, nonetheless serves as a useful primer for postcolonial engagements with colonial labor historiography: see "Conditions of Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions: Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890–1940," in *Subaltern Studies II*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 259–310; "Trade Unions in a Hierarchical Culture: The Jute Workers of Calcutta," in *Subaltern Studies III*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), 116–152; *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

11. For some leading examples, see Leroy Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Clifton Crais, *White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape, 1770–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

12. For seminal interventions in these directions from one of the leading historians of Africa, see Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1516–1545, and Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

13. For examples, see Jeanne Penvenne, *African Workers and Colonial Racism: Mozambican Strategies and Struggles in Lourenço Marques, 1877–1962* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995); Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890–1940* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002); Carolyn Brown, *We Were All Slaves: African Miners, Culture and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003); Lisa Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).

14. For leading examples, see Keletso Atkins, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993); Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860–1910* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994); François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997). See also Stephen Rockel, *Carriers of Culture: Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006).

15. From the historical angle, see Jeremy Adelman and Jonathan Levy, “The Fall and Rise of Economic History,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1 December 2014; from the economic angle, see the work of Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, most notably *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Business, 2012). For examples from African historiography, see A.G. Hopkins, “The New Economic History of Africa,” *Journal of African History* 50, 2 (2009): 155–177; Morten Jerven, *Africa: Why Economists Get It Wrong* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

16. This field is currently producing many new books, but for those that have received broad public attention, see in particular Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014), and Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

17. For the first, see Jon Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), and Dan Bouk, *How Our Days Became Numbered: Risk and the Rise of the Statistical Individual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); for the second, Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), and Darren Grem, *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

18. See especially Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

19. In particular, the International Research Center on Work and Life Cycle in Human History, based at Humboldt University Berlin (and better known as re:work), has provided an important new institutional home to connect scholars from around the world conducting research on global labor history.

20. Marie Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal: 1900–1946* (Paris: Karthala, 2009); Eric Allina, *Slavery by Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012); Catherine Higgs, *Chocolate Islands: Cocoa, Slavery, and Colonial Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013); Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014); Todd Cleveland, *Diamonds in the Rough: Corporate Paternalism and African Professionalism on the Mines of Colonial Angola, 1917–1975* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015); Benedetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid: Politics,*

Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800–2000 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). The special issue of *International Journal of Labor and Working Class History* was edited by Stefano Belluci and Franco Barchiese, and came out in 2014 (number 86).

21. While the study of mobility is being taken up by a growing number of historians of Africa, the approach is not entirely new; as Joshua Grace has observed, early histories of Africa also examined mobility as proof of African social evolution. See “Saharan Garages, Paper Economies and Migrant Laborers: New Perspectives on Mobility in African History,” *Mobility in History* 5 (2014): 143–149. More recent histories of mobility have focused on transportation: see Jan-Bart Gewald, “Missionaries, Hereros, and Motorcars: Mobility and the Impact of Motor Vehicles in Namibia Before 1940,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35 (2002): 257–285; Joshua Grace, “Heroes of the Road: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Mobility in Twentieth Century Tanzania,” *Africa* 83 (2013): 403–425; Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Transportation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016). As Grace notes, the paradigm of mobility is more frequently applied to the Sahel and Saharan regions than sub-Saharan Africa: see Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid*; the special edition of the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* on “Nomadism and Mobility in the Sahara-Sahel,” edited by Elisabeth Boesen, Laurence Marfaing and Mirjam de Bruijn; and Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

22. Many scholars have used mobility to counter the embedded assumptions attached to “migration,” particularly the privileging of specific types of migration and the assumption that it necessarily constitutes a rupture that demands explanation. See Mirjam de Bruijn, Rijk van Dijk, and Dick Foeken, eds., *Mobile Africa: Changing Patterns of Movement in Africa and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), and Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran, eds., *Mobility Makes States: Migration and Power in Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). Benjamin Lawrance, similarly, uses the term mobility to draw upon local conceptions of space and movement in his study of Eweland in *Locality, Mobility, and “Nation”: Periurban Colonialism in Togo’s Eweland, 1900–1960* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007).

23. For a particularly trenchant critique, see Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées*.

24. Important analyses of women’s labor in colonial Africa include Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotswe, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900–1983* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991); Teresa Barnes, “We Women Worked So Hard”: *Gender, Urbanization and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999); Jeanne Penvenne, *Women, Migration and the Cashew Economy in Southern Mozambique, 1945–1975* (Rochester: James Currey, 2015).

25. On this point, see also Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity*, as well as Manuelle, *Willing Migrants*, and Rockel, *Carriers of Culture*.

26. For leading examples of other scholarship on the fluid and non-linear path between forced labor and free labor, see Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Wayne Dooling, *Slavery, Emancipation and Colonial Rule in South Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008).

27. Stephen Rockel, “Slavery and Freedom in Nineteenth Century East Africa: The Case of Waungwana Caravan Porters,” *African Studies* 68 (2009): 87–109; Benedetta Rossi, “Migration and Emancipation in West Africa’s Labour History: The Missing Links,” *Slavery and Abolition* 35 (2014): 23–46; Catherine Higgs, “Happiness and Work: Portuguese Peasants, British Laborers, African Contract Workers, and the Case of Sao Tome and Principe, 1901–1909,” *International Journal of Labor and Working Class History* 86 (2014): 55–71; Eric Allina, “‘Captive to Civilization’: Law, Labor Mobility, and Violence in Colonial Mozambique,” in *Mobility Makes States*, eds. Quirk and Vignarawan, 59–78; Zachary Kagan Guthrie, “Forced Volunteers: The Contradictions of Coercion in Central Mozambique,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 49, 2 (2016): 195–212.

28. Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Emily Lynn Osborn, *Our New Husbands Are Here: Households, Gender, and Politics in a West African State from the Slave Trade to Colonial Rule* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011); Moses Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014); Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*; Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

29. This was one of the founding objectives of the Subaltern Studies collective, which had an important historiographical influence on studies of colonial rule. See Veena Das, “Subaltern as Perspective,” in *Subaltern Studies IV*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 310–325; for examples from the collective, see Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,” in *Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 1–8, and “Dominance Without Hegemony and Its Historiography,” in *Subaltern Studies VI*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 210–309; Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 383–408, and “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1475–1490.

30. Alexander Keese, *Living with Ambiguity: Integrating an African Elite in French and Portuguese Africa, 1930–61* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007).

31. For an important article that engages with these questions, see Stephen Ellis, “Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa,” *Journal of African History* 43, 1 (2002): 1–26.