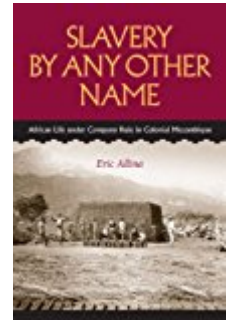


Eric Allina. *Slavery by Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. xiii + 255 pp. \$49.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-3272-9.



Reviewed by Chau J. Kelly

Published on H-Empire (May, 2014)

Commissioned by Charles V. Reed (Elizabeth City State University)

The general narrative of slave labor and economic systems in the Atlantic world wraps up with a neat conclusion by the late nineteenth century with the claim that the world found slavery economically and socially untenable. A significant problem with this perspective is what such a narrative ignores, as European empires expanded into new territories across the African continent. The story of slavery and brutal work practices did not end with the transatlantic slave trade. Forced labor came to take the place of the direct capture, sale, and purchase of African bodies, whose agricultural knowledge and productivity enriched their masters in the New World. Under the guise of a civilizing mission, European powers partitioned Africa, claiming to end slavery by putting Africans to work on company and settler-owned plantations. Forced labor systems contributed to the wealth of every empire, but the subtleties in the rhetoric and methods of extracting work from those who received little or no pay vary widely.

Assembling a comprehensive history of labor within the colonial empires in African spaces has

moved steadily apace as new archival repositories become available. As the first published book to employ a trove of documents accidentally stashed at Beira by the Mozambique Company, Eric Allina's *Slavery by Any Other Name* fills a significant gap in our knowledge of Mozambique's colonial history. He gives us a meticulously detailed narrative history of the company's labor system, which employed a variety of rhetorical and legal measures to obscure its brutal practices for fifty years, from 1892 to 1942. As a narrative history of empire, Allina's text places Portuguese and the Mozambique Company's labor practices as the focus of larger imperial processes in the region. The reader is frequently reminded that conscripted labor was not unique to the Portuguese. Neighboring empires (such as King Leopold's Congo Free State), British East Africa, and French colonial practices prove that slavery in Mozambique was far from exceptional. The legal strictures around slavery, however, required company officials, Portuguese settlers, and other officials to employ descriptive, if illusory language for the workers they

engaged. For those versed in labor history, it is not a far stretch to see how elisions, such as “recruitment,” covered the crude mass seizure of workers who became “*contrato*” (contract): workers who “never saw ... a written contract” (p. 41). Hut taxes forced most into the labor pool; while some managed to “volunteer” for labor migration to the mines of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, most men worked until they were dismissed or indebted to their employers.

Allina’s book is nicely situated between other histories of work, coercion, and empires of economic extraction. Allina’s text adds to Allan Isaacman’s *Cotton Is the Mother of Poverty* (1996), by covering the history of Mozambique prior to forced cotton cultivation. In addition, Allina expands on Jean Marie Penvenne’s *African Workers and Colonial Racism* (1995) by examining a nonurban, agricultural district’s attitudes toward African labor. Unlike Landeg White and Leroy Vail’s projects on African workers’ perspectives on forced labor, Allina’s study tells us more about the administrators and their imperial logic.[1] *Slavery by Any Other Name* takes the reader into the Manica District of central Mozambique, which shares a long border with Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). As a borderlands region, the district administrators faced twin problems of African outmigration to the better paying labor zones of Zimbabwe and South Africa and the need for conscript workers for settler farmers who persistently sought ways to “reduce their labor costs” without simultaneously reducing their labor pool (p. 44). The contradictions between agendas are clear throughout the text.

Unlike other narrative histories, Allina’s book is organized topically, around big ideas that underpin his work and the broader historiography on labor. Broken into eight chapters, plus an introduction, the book moves from the end of slavery to the myth of “upward mobility” as framed in the Portuguese system of *assimilado* (assimilation). These are conceptual chapters rather than

chronological, which allows Allina to follow a particular problem through its various phases. For example, chapter 3, “Critiques and Defenses of Modern Slavery,” takes the reader from David Livingstone’s criticism of Portugal’s failure to end its “murderous traffic in man” to a series of cases, during 1928, when African men were imprisoned for “slandorous propaganda” that maligned company labor practices (pp. 72, 89). Chapter 4, “Mobility and Tactical Flight,” returns the reader to the nineteenth century for a brief discussion of the Gaza Empire, whose dispersal into the interior connects the narrative to a broader regional history of the communal scattering triggered by the Zulu and Afrikaner wars in South Africa.

While this movement through thematic stories creates one form of coherence, the lack of dates in the chapter titles makes for some unexpected chronological leaps and a tendency toward repetition of certain concepts. The other issue with this approach, which Allina admits is a problem, is the lack of detail about key company agents. Two important administrators, Joaquim Carlos Paiva de Andrada and João Pery de Lind, come and go from the analysis in such a way that the continuity of their actions from one part of the text to another is lost. The limits of a central character, however, is common in imperial histories, filled with an ever-changing cast of colonial officials. Finally, while oral interviews are a requisite part of the fieldwork for many African histories, the few examples presented here are jarring rather than helpful in making the case for historical memory of violence.

Perhaps the strongest element of Allina’s text is his ability to connect events in one district to broader historical dynamics on the African continent, showing how the cruelty and abuses of one empire created pathways for another to attract workers. Allina employs a light hand in explicating how farmers abused their workers they understood the men would abscond before their contracts were up, thereby precluding the need to

render payment. He shows how preferential treatment of incompetent settler farmers, whose reliance on African labor, made it possible for administrators to both complain about labor abuses and collude to coerce Africans to work without compensation. As a valuable contribution, *Slavery by Any Other Name* takes the history of labor into the rhetorical methods used by colonial officials. As such it is best suited to scholars interested in a longitudinal study of how forced labor, slavery, is reinvented through history.

Note

[1]. Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Plantation Protest: The History of a Mozambican Song," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 5, no. 1 (1978): 1-25; Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "'Tawani, Machambero!' Forced Cotton and Rice Growing in the Zambezi," *Journal of African History* 19, no. 2 (1978): 239-263; and Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Forms of Resistance: Songs and Perceptions of Power in Colonial Mozambique," *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (1983): 883-919.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-empire>

Citation: Chau J. Kelly. Review of Allina, Eric. *Slavery by Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique*. H-Empire, H-Net Reviews. May, 2014.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=41933>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.