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Introduction

IN SEPTEMBER 1856, an African man named Inbundo ran away from a caravan transporting forty enslaved Africans to the Congo River. There, a ship that had sailed from New York City was set to take him to Cuba, where a sugar boom based on enslaved labor had fueled significant economic growth. After a harrowing escape, Inbundo had a fateful encounter with a group of more than two thousand soldiers (an African ruler allied to the Portuguese colonial regime led about six hundred soldiers) making their way toward copper mines in the Bembe region, some two hundred kilometers from the coast and near the capital city of the Kingdom of Kongo. Dispatched by the city's Portuguese government, these soldiers had departed Luanda with a singular objective: to secure control over mines critical for a lucrative copper trade with British and American nationals along the coast.

Commanding the expedition was Francisco Salles Ferreira, a former slave trade sympathizer who viewed abolition as key to Portugal's geopolitical interests in the Congo region.* He interviewed Inbundo. With the help of a translator, the Kikongo-speaking man shared his ordeal and offered valuable intelligence on shipments of enslaved Africans near the Congo River. According to Inbundo, he and his fellow captives "had all been caught and would be taken to the Zaire River to be forced onto a ship then loading slaves." Antonio Jose da Costa Lima, a Portuguese man and local agent for a far-reaching slave-trading consortium based in New York City, was both the owner of the enslaved Africans and the leader of the slave caravan. Inbundo disclosed that "the remainder of Africans [those who did not manage to escape the caravan] had been escorted in shackles to the Zaire River with [. . .] Costa Lima," and other "shipments of slaves had already been organized several times by said person [Costa Lima]."[1]

* For background on Salles Ferreira, see Tracy Lopes, "Continuities between the Slave Trade, "Legitimate" Commerce, and the Serviçal Trade: a Look at Four Families in Angola in the Mid- to Late Nineteenth Century," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 58, 3, 2024, p. 567.

After Inbundo asked not to be returned to Costa Lima, the Portuguese took him inland to Bembe, where the African man was likely put to work in the recently occupied mines. For Portugal, the mines represented an opportunity to create a brand-new economy to replace the then-waning slave trade. Yet controversy soon emerged. African miners earned eight cowrie shells a day, with younger workers making half that, while those with monthly contracts received 30 cowrie shells a day, plus a piece of cloth.[2] The Portuguese authorities candidly admitted that these shells were essentially worthless.[3] Seizing upon such reports, British officials were quick to denounce conditions in the copper mines as a thinly disguised form of slavery.[4]

Inbundo's story provides an entry point into the broader themes and arguments in *Worlds of Unfreedom*. First, his capture highlights how the slave trade to Cuba fueled massive enslavement in West Central Africa, exacting a heavy toll on local populations. Second, the intelligence that the African man shared with the Portuguese expedition provides a rare example of enslaved Africans' participation in the suppression of the transatlantic slave trade—one of the most inscrutable themes in African history due to the scarcity of primary sources on subaltern groups' anti-slave trade politics. Third, the Portuguese military expedition to Bembe, ostensibly motivated to take over the mines but part of a broader effort to end the slave trade, reveals the strategic use of anti-slave trade efforts to promote territorial expansion in West Central Africa. Fourth, Inbundo's fate in the Bembe mines shows a direct link between efforts to end the slave trade and the emergence of new forms of labor exploitation in West Central Africa.

In theory, the campaign to end the transatlantic trade in human beings was a matter of laws and geopolitical calculations. In practice, however, it was also a gut-wrenching story of human lives lost, staggering in its scale and cruelty, or entrapped under ruthless exploitation under emerging colonialism. To grasp its human dimensions, *Worlds of Unfreedom* develops a minutely detailed approach invested in recovering the lives of individuals like Inbundo, who are usually left out of the usual historical narrative; "to retrieve from a recalcitrant archive that has until now either ignored them, drowned them in figure of trade or read them as socially dead."[5] In so doing, the book seeks to factor subaltern politics into the broader narrative of anti-slavery, thus furthering comprehension of its multiple and sometimes organically grounded forces.[6]

While emphasizing contingency, complexity, and humanity, *Worlds of Unfreedom* singles out particular situations, everyday interactions, and personal trajectories, which are then deployed as microcosms to explicate complex global phenomena. "A close analysis of a single case study may pave the way to a much larger (indeed, global) hypotheses."[7] By blending portraits of individuals' lives with large structural processes, the book seeks to break down "frontiers between social, cultural, economic and political histories."[8] A pointillistic approach teases out specific circumstances of individuals, providing greater levels of granularity and texture to webs of cultural, economic, and

social networks.[9] The result is an Africa-centered global history that toggles between dense individual trajectories and the broader narrative of abolition, all while centering human agency.

By centering the narrative on the lived experiences and agency of enslaved Africans like Inbundo, *Worlds of Unfreedom* seeks to decenter Eurocentric perspectives that have tended to erase or marginalize African participation in the struggle against the slave trade. This approach aligns with historian Benedetta Rossi's emphasis on recovering the voices and actions of subaltern actors, particularly those who had directly experienced the horrors of enslavement, as vital forces in the fight for abolition. According to Rossi, "African enslaved persons and their descendants, acting within African or European institutions, were the most committed to abolition."[10] By foregrounding such acts, *Worlds of Unfreedom* contributes to a broader project of recasting enslaved Africans as central protagonists in the complex global story of slave trading and slavery's demise, thereby challenging triumphalist narratives that, as scholar Michelle Liebst notes, have tended to glorify European abolitionists while obscuring the multifaceted ways in which Africans shaped the course of abolition.[11]

The theme of African resistance to slavery and the slave trade has not been neglected by Africanist scholars in recent years. In West Africa, Sandra Greene notes that "dissenting voices" against slavery and the slave trade emerged "as a result of British antislavery efforts in the region."[12] In Senegal, Becca de Los Santos argues that "the authors of the many liberations that took place over the two decades after abolition were the enslaved and not the French colonial administration."[13] In Sierra Leone and Liberia, Bronwen Everill and Lisa Lindsay reveal that local authorities took significant military actions against shipments of captives and, in Liberia's case, prevented British attempts to ship "free" migrants to the Americas.[14] Paul Lovejoy argues that the Sokoto Caliphate withdrew from the slave trade of its own accord, not due to British pressure.[15] Philip Misevich has demonstrated how Africans rebelled against captivity in Sierra Leone following news of the end of the British slave trade.[16]

Nor have scholars of Angola failed to scrutinize the long history of resistance to slavery in the Portuguese colony. By the mid-nineteenth century, as noted by historian Aida Freudenthal, African resistance to slavery was so entrenched as to force colonial authorities to negotiate coexistence with runaway communities.[17] Mariana Candido points out that "enslaved individuals often escaped and moved inland by following the paths of long-distance trade routes, which may have led them back to their homeland or to inland markets to look for help or follow a trail."[18] As argued by José Curto, slave revolts formed the cornerstone of a veritable culture of resistance in the Portuguese colony.[19] Yet, while significantly advancing our understanding of African resistance to slavery and the slave trade, these studies leave out the specific role of enslaved Africans in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

Worlds of Unfreedom seeks to address this gap by examining how enslaved Africans actively challenged the system that oppressed them, shedding light

on the agency and resilience of these individuals in the face of unimaginable hardship. The book illuminates the ways in which their actions, often overlooked in traditional narratives, played a crucial role in undermining the foundations of the slave trade and hastening its demise. Drawing on the most comprehensive research ever conducted in Angolan archives, as well as extensive research in Brazil, Cuba, France, Portugal, and the United Kingdom, it centers the narrative on the lived experiences and resistance of the enslaved, contributing to a more balanced understanding of the complex forces that shaped the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

Worlds of Unfreedom pushes back on the notion that Africa played little, if any, meaningful role in the suppression of the trade in human beings. Robin Law states that "the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade was effected through the closing down of markets in the Americas, rather than the shutting off of supplies of slaves from Africa."[20] By contrast, this book situates West Central Africa's experience within wider circuits of ideas, people, and goods, highlighting the region's vital role in the story of slavery's global demise and living legacy. Following Adiele E. Afigbo's prescription, I view African contexts and peoples as essential to understanding how the transatlantic slave trade—one of the most painful chapters in the history of humankind—came to an end.[21]

From the outset, it is vital to stress that the campaign against the transatlantic slave trade, while successful in eliminating the transportation of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic, constituted a key tool for the creation of new forms of labor exploitation in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Several scholars have already highlighted the shortcomings of liberal abolition and its failure to deliver freedom to former slaves.[22] Yet a comprehensive understanding of how abolition enabled unfreedom is still lacking. Chapter 7 fills this gap by tracing connections between the legislation of abolition and the emergence of systems of forced labor and forced migration that plagued West Central Africa well into the colonial era of the twentieth century. While ostensibly aimed at ending the slave trade and slavery, Portugal's anti-slavery laws and decrees, such as those enacted in 1842, 1854, and 1858, were often crafted in ways that served the economic interests of colonial powers at the expense of freedom promised to Africans.

To understand this complex phenomenon and its far-reaching consequences, *Worlds of Unfreedom* offers a sprawling, densely plotted, people-focused global history that weaves together multiple historical threads spanning the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Embedding West Central Africa within expansive networks of capital, people, and labor then spanning the globe, the book adheres to Antoinette Burton's recommendation to regard "marginal people as subjects rather than objects of global history."[23] It illuminates trans-imperial dialogues that shaped global labor regimes, demonstrating how ideas and practices tested across British, French, and Portuguese empires culminated in strategies that transformed abolitionist measures into tools for perpetuating labor exploitation. Moving beyond national and imperial boundaries as primary units of

analysis, this approach reveals how the legal architecture of abolition, shaped by the exchange of ideas and strategies among colonial powers, perpetuated exploitative labor practices in the twilight of the slave trade era.

In conceptualizing a global history of abolition and its aftermath, *Worlds of Unfreedom* challenges the traditional divide between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. By tracing the circulation of ideas, practices, and peoples across these vast oceanic spaces, the book reveals the complex interplay of local and global forces that shaped the uneven and often contradictory processes of abolition and the rise of new forms of unfreedom. It examines how Britain's assertive anti-slave trade policies extended across the Southwest Indian Ocean, challenging Portugal's territorial claims in East Africa and beyond. Simultaneously, it situates West Central Africa within the broader context of Atlantic Africa, drawing connections between the impact of European interventions in regions such as Lagos, the Bight of Benin, and the Kingdom of Kongo. Recognizing interconnections across oceanic regions is essential for situating the transformations in Angola's labor systems within a global fabric of shifting imperial ambitions and evolving forms of unfree labor, where abolition—particularly its gradual iteration—redefined labor systems without fundamentally altering the underlying dynamics of exploitation.

Worlds of Unfreedom is anchored in West Central Africa, a pivotal battleground in the fight against the transatlantic slave trade. From Loango to Mossamedes, this region—culturally rich and geographically diverse—shouldered the heaviest burden of the slave trade from 1850 to 1867. A staggering 70% of the nearly 200,000 enslaved individuals deported from the continent during these years originated from West Central Africa.[24] The region's experience was shaped by complex dynamics, such as the fracturing of African sovereignty in the Kingdom of Kongo amidst intensifying European imperial competition and the rise of new forms of unfree labor under the guise of abolition. To unpack these developments, the book deploys a global history perspective that situates West Central Africa's abolition story (see Map 5) within a broader tapestry of interconnected processes spanning multiple continents and oceanic spaces.

We will never know how exactly Inbundo felt when he came across the Luanda military expedition, nor can we fully recover his feelings as the world he knew unraveled due to violence unleashed by the slave trade. Yet, by piecing together elements of his layered identity, we can restore his place in the narrative of African History. In his village, Inbundo would have abided by clearly defined cultural practices (how to cut one's hair, file one's teeth, and scarify one's body) that carried explicit social meanings: the number of sharpened teeth and their position in the mouth silently bespoke different levels of in-group status and belonging. As one observer noted, "in this custom (filing teeth) as well as tattooing, the various tribes [*sic*] are regulated by fixed principles, and the place of their nativity may be determined by it."[25]

Similarly, practices like scarification and body marking played a crucial role in defining ethnic identity, nurturing spiritual connections, and marking significant

life milestones. These cultural expressions also provide insights into the devastating impact of the transatlantic slave trade on local communities. For instance, in Benguela, scarification was adopted by Africans to symbolize their altered status as enslaved individuals, with reports noting that "it is not uncommon to see negroes who have been robbed of their freedom sacrificing at their shrine of vanity [*sic*] by endeavoring to make some additional ornament to their bleeding wounds."[26] The practice of tooth filing also carried significant social meanings. As observed by Francisco Antonio Pinto, an extensive traveler and colonial official in Angola during the 1870s: "In Ginga, no one who appears without this distinction [having their incisor teeth filed] will be considered a free man."[27]

These markers of identity assumed additional layers of meaning in the diaspora. On the British-controlled island of St. Helena, individuals torn from West Central Africa would adopt the body marks of their peers, either as a gesture of solidarity, a source of comfort, or a mark of defiance. As a British doctor stationed on the British island explained, "they did [it] either as a compliment to their new associates, as a source of amusement or as an object of admiration."[28] Similar dynamics played out in West Africa, where Kru people would tattoo their foreheads to indicate their free status, "which the Portuguese respected even at the height of the slave trade."[29] For Inbundo and others like him, these cultural imprints were thus not just remnants of a past life; they were emblems of a shared heritage that could be deployed against the dehumanizing horrors of Atlantic slavery.

Inbundo and his fellow fugitives would also have relied on commonalities such as the Kikongo language, spoken across large swaths of West Central Africa. An early observer noted, "all these [people] speak a somewhat similar language."[30] William Bentley, a British missionary who traveled extensively in the lower and upper Congo, observed variations but noted that the Kikongo language was uniform enough to enable relatively easy communication in regions stretching from Loango to Angola. "From Loango to the border of Angola, and from the coast to within 15 miles west of Stanley Pool, I had little difficulty understanding and being understood when I spoke the pure Kongo of the capital."[31]

A direct consequence of the transatlantic slave trade, the extent of the violence inflicted on individuals like Inbundo is heartbreaking and difficult to process. Forced to journey from Africa's interior to the coast, they often did so "without any cloth, completely naked, tortured by hunger and thirst."[32] To reduce their perceived value in the eyes of slave dealers, mothers injured their own children.[33] Children born in barracoons (slave depots) were killed, adding a layer of tragedy to the already unimaginable suffering that Africans endured.[34] Upon reaching the coast, victims faced further acts of violence, such as having a hot iron applied to their ribs, hips, or chest. British physicians on the island of St. Helena, where thousands of Africans released from slave vessels were taken, referred to this dehumanizing act of violence as "aitchrimbo," a rendition of the Kimbundo language word kirimbu (meaning mark).[35]

In the same year Inbundo was enslaved, a man named Zau was given as *caução* (loan collateral) by his uncle, who had received goods from a coastal trading outpost in exchange for a loan. These loans or goods were used in various ways, including payment for dowries to consummate marriages and religious ceremonies (*entambes*) when someone passed away.[36] The creditor openly "boasted over the good deal that he had done, for he planned to sell the miserable black once the deadline for the loan to be paid was over." Overcome with fear, Zau took his own life to avoid life under slavery in the Americas.[37] For women, time on the coast was marked by sexual violence, often leading to despair as they were forced to bear the children of their assailants. "Some, after being forced to satisfy the bloodthirsty lust of their masters, were to be sold, and the anguish of an impending pregnancy further aggravated the agony of their fate."[38]

Life was no better for those taken by the British to St. Helena after being released from slave ships. Many were so devastated by their experiences in the slave trade that they would not have the strength to live. "They will reject all medicines, refuse even food, and their only wish seems to lie down undisturbed, and die." This decision often came after the painful realization of "the loss of relations and friends, and perhaps their own affliction by disease, far from their country and those who could speak and administer comfort to them."[39] In their grief, some would gather together at night, "with looks fixed on the far-moving waters, recall the memory of their distant lands, and raise a mournful and clamorous song in tribute of respect to their parents, and as an expression of their sorrows for the loss of their country and kindred, and all that was dear to them." In their songs, they would express their sorrow.[40] Yet very few expressed a desire to return to their home country, replying that "mammy was no more, and bapa (father) no more, and Portuguese catchy me again."[41]

To make sense of the devastation brought about by the slave trade, Inbundo would have relied on a cosmological belief system that divided the universe into the realm of the living (nza yayi) and the realm of the dead (nsi a bafwa).[42] Within this belief system, the capitalist motivations behind the slave trade became entwined with cosmological understanding. Africans believed slave dealers took their victims to an under-ocean world to produce goods for the consumption of white people. "People have been brought up in the belief that away under the sea, their relatives make cloth, etc., for us white folk."[43] Yet many were fully cognizant of underlying motivations behind the atrocities they suffered. "Every man I have conversed with indeed acknowledges [that] if white men did not come for slaves, the practice of kidnapping would no longer exist."[44] Most importantly, the notion that the trade must be stopped was not without support. "The [African] people at large most assuredly desire the cessation of the trade."[45]

In this context of extreme violence and desolation, the enslaved found ways to express resistance to their captors, some channeling their feelings into songs and chants that directly confronted their oppressors: "You have sent me

to the sea coast, but my yoke is off in death. Back I will come to haunt and kill you."[46] Chapter 3 of this book details how escapes and revolts on slave vessels or onshore threatened a nascent post-slave trade economy in Benguela, pushing the Portuguese administration to take action against shipments of African people abroad. A decree that offered freedom to enslaved individuals who reported plans to transport captives across the Atlantic recasts the narrative of abolition, in a testament to enslaved people's crucial role in the fight against oppressive forces that sought to commodify their lives.

A crucial element of this story is Inbundo's status before being captured in the slave caravan. David Richardson states, "The vast majority of those entering the export slave trade were born free and were forced into it against their will."[47] In Inbundo's case, there are two possible scenarios. First, he may have been a free worker on one of the coastal trading outposts, known as feitorias, that facilitated the slave trade. He knew, after all, that his enslaver Costa Lima had already organized other shipments of enslaved people in Ambriz. This suggests that Inbundo may have been familiar with the workings of the slave trade before he was enslaved. His enslavement would then have mirrored that of Zau, the African man referred to above who made the dramatic decision of taking his own life instead of being taken across the Atlantic in the slave trade.[48]

It is also possible that Inbundo was born into slavery, as his name seems to suggest. As recorded by British missionary William Bentley: ondioyo Inbundo a Makitu (that man is a slave of Makitu).[49] Scholars have characterized African slavery as defined more by kinship and social dependence than labor extraction. Individuals like Inbundo would have come from a social milieu where "slavery" was primarily "a form of social dependence, not of forced or dependent labor."[50] This understanding is supported by the observations of British traveler John Monteiro, who spent almost two decades in Angola and Congo. According to Monteiro, the difference between an enslaver and an enslaved person was not always apparent, and someone who was not familiar with the institution of slavery might not even recognize it as such.[51]

Yet, while African slavery was characterized by complex dynamics of social dependence and kinship, the emergence of the transatlantic slave trade had a profound impact on these traditional practices. The trade ushered in a new, commerce-oriented form of slavery that significantly blurred the traditional distinctions between indigenous African slavery and emerging forms of commercial captivity.[52] Previously, Quisikos, or domestic slaves typically born into households, enjoyed certain protections and could even seek refuge with local authorities if wrongfully sold. In stark contrast, Mobikas, usually war captives, were viewed as absolute property without any rights. As the transatlantic slave trade intensified, however, established distinctions collapsed, subjecting individuals like Inbundo to an uncertain and often cruel fate.[53]

This transformation was intrinsically linked to shifts in the political landscape that empowered coastal lords at the expense of traditional monarchs.

In the interior, chiefs of the principal towns and villages profited from the transit of slaves through their territories by removing them to the sea coast. This practice led to a pronounced fragmentation of power. "Each locality has its separate government, and each village, however small, constitutes a sort of patriarchal monarchy, which is continually at variance and enmity with every petty state in its neighborhood."[54] In coastal kingdoms such as Ngoyo, increased trade activities led to the emergence of trading families as the traditional authority waned. According to anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey, "the last invested king of Ngoyo died in 1830."[55]

While placing human agency at the center of anti-slave trade politics, *Worlds of Unfreedom* situates West Central Africa within larger trade circuits and imperial geopolitics then enveloping the world. Instead of being static, I argue, locality was embedded in, molded by, and interlocked with global dynamics.[56] As Inbundo remarked, his captor had been a slave dealer named Costa Lima, whose brother was then living in New York—the sanctuary city of the illegal slave trade in the 1850s—as a key member of an intercontinental network of traders with multiple centers in Rio de Janeiro, Lisbon, Cádiz, Havana, Luanda, and Benguela. In this deeply interconnected world, several cities, even those no longer directly receiving enslaved Africans, such as Rio de Janeiro, or where large-scale shipments of enslaved people no longer took place, such as Luanda, remained connected to the broader networks of the slave trade through a myriad of business, legal, social, and personal ties.

Inbundo's story thus only makes sense if set on an Atlantic canvas or, indeed, on a global playing field. By the time the runaway escaped the transatlantic slave trade, shipments of enslaved Africans from West Central Africa had undergone significant transformations due to the end of imports of enslaved people to Brazil, the largest market for African captives in the Americas until 1850. The widespread belief was that the transatlantic slave trade would end. Yet, with Cuban production of sugar escalating to global dominance, primarily driven by high demand in the United States and Europe as well as technological breakthroughs that transformed the means of transportation and integrated the island's economy, shipments of enslaved people in West Central Africa continued through the late 1860s.[57]

One of *Worlds of Unfreedom*'s key contributions is its in-depth exploration of the often-overlooked connections between West Central Africa and Cuba in the final decades of the transatlantic slave trade. Scholars such as María del Carmen Barcia, Jorge Felipe Gonzalez, Martín Rodrigo y Alharilla, and Lizbeth Chaviano Pérez have made key contributions to the study of Cuba's ties to the Upper Guinea coast.[58] Yet the same is not true about the Spanish island's key ties to West Central African regions such as the Congo River, Ambriz, and Cabinda, which supplied the vast majority of enslaved Africans to the Spanish island by the 1850s.[59] By delving into the partnerships between Cuban and Brazilian slave traders that facilitated Cuba's emergence

as a major player in West Central Africa, the book reveals the intricate web of economic, social, and political connections that bound these regions together. Moreover, it demonstrates how these partnerships not only integrated West Central Africa into the global capitalist economy but also had far-reaching consequences for African societies, contributing to the intensification of internal enslavement.

Aspirations of Empire

The military expedition that "rescued" Inbundo from the slave trade in 1856 was just one of several interventions by the Portuguese government aimed at solidifying territorial claims in the lower Kongo during that period. In 1855, Portuguese soldiers were sent to seize Ambriz, a pivotal center of the slave trade and a focal point of contention with British, US, and French naval forces. The following year, the same expedition that liberated Inbundo proceeded to Bembe amidst a period of pronounced instability within the Kingdom of Kongo. This action secured Portugal a decisive role in the kingdom's political affairs during a succession crisis. Then, in 1860, in an act of support for a new ruler aligned with their interests, Portugal launched another expedition, this time to take control of Kongo's capital city.

These military actions highlight how abolition was deeply intertwined with Portugal's broader imperial goals in the South Atlantic. After losing Brazil in 1822, Lisbon policymakers saw Africa as essential to producing colonial goods for European markets, thereby boosting their domestic economy and reducing dependence on foreign powers.[60] In this context, Angola—primarily consisting of the coastal enclaves of Luanda and Benguela—soon emerged as a significant player in imperial geopolitics. "Of all Portuguese possessions that we still possess, the vast and richest territory of Angola is the one that offers us most advantages," an 1840 government report declared, "which is why the government has promoted its prosperity and development."[61]

Portugal's significant challenges in developing a cohesive empire-building strategy cannot be understated. After the end of a civil war in 1834, the country faced significant political instability, which was so high as to make "impossible the construction of long-lasting consensus about fundamental rules of social coexistence (there were three constitutions in a short time) and fueled political violence—with unrest, social revolts, military pronouncement and another civil war (1846–47)."[62] Further compounding Portuguese travails were its underperforming economy and precarious infrastructure.[63] By the 1850s, however, the country's restored political stability had paved the way for an "overhaul of administration, both domestic and ultramarine."[64]

Particularly significant here was the role played by Lisbon's *Associação Marítima e Colonial* in shaping imperial policies, including the recognition that abolishing the transatlantic slave trade would be key to transforming

Angola into a fully fledged colony. Historian Gabriel Paquette reminds us that the associação was part of a shift toward producing ideas about empires across Europe.[65] Tellingly, four of Associação's members would become governors of Angola between 1840 and 1848, pivotal years in eradicating shipments of enslaved Africans in Luanda and Benguela, Portugal's main hubs in West Central Africa. Among these was Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha, a seasoned naval commander who would take firm measures against the slave trade and strongly advocate for agricultural expansion in Angola based on slavery.[66]

Yet such goals could not be achieved without the crucial role played by colonial elites and local dynamics in Angola. A case in point is Luanda's businesswoman Ana Joaquina dos Santos Silva. As discussed in Chapter 5, her investments in sugar production, ownership of multiple ships, and extensive network of agents positioned her as a pivotal figure in shaping Angola's economic landscape. Ana Joaquina's strategic engagement with Nawej II, the ruler of the expansive Lunda Empire, established direct ties between Angola and this powerful African state, bolstering Portugal's broader ambitions to create a new economy in its African colony. Nawej II's decision to engage with the Portuguese was driven by complex political dynamics within the Lunda Empire, as the rise of independent trade routes by Chokwe and Ambakista traders destabilized traditional power structures. By accepting Ana Joaquina's invitation to send emissaries to Luanda, the African ruler sought to counteract these destabilizing forces and bolster his own power.

Ana Joaquina's bold trade diplomacy reveals how colonial settings like Angola served as incubators of colonial policies. Portuguese empire-making would not have been possible without individuals like her, whose actions aligned with and furthered the vision of Lisbon officials for a post-slave trade economy in Angola. Exemplifying the complex dynamics at play is the extraordinary journey of Ana Joaquina's enslaved emissary, Eufrazina, to the court of the Lunda ruler. The enslaved woman's experience complicates traditional notions of slavery and agency. While highlighting intricate intersections of gender, status, and power within both the Lunda kingdom and Portuguese Angola, it also reveals the multifaceted nature of empire-building in the colonial context.

While local actors like Ana Joaquina played a crucial role in shaping Angola's economic landscape, the impetus for change also came from the highest levels of Portuguese administration. As early as 1838, Lisbon officials had already issued instructions to newly appointed Governor Antonio Manoel de Noronha to combat the slave trade, declaring it "infamous and shameful to humanity," beyond being harmful to the country where it occurred. Lisbon officials then outlined a vision for economic development that positioned Angola as a competitor to their former colony in South America, Brazil. They argued that because labor costs were lower in Angola, crops grown there could be sold in Europe at a lower price than agricultural commodities from Brazil. The former colony of Brazil held such significance in the minds of Lisbon

officials that they even proposed incentivizing Brazilian agricultural laborers to migrate to Angola. In their view, this migration should also involve Brazilian "capitalists" who could provide investment funds beyond the transatlantic slave trade.[67]

Yet Brazil also increasingly emerged as a rival in the eyes of the Portuguese, particularly due to Angola's attachment to the former Portuguese colony via the slave trade. Lisbon lamented the existing dynamics where Angola was seen merely as a source of enslaved labor for Brazil's booming sugar and coffee sectors. "We persuaded ourselves that we could profit from Angola without developing it, crudely uprooting its inhabitants to serve as slaves in foreign lands like Brazil."[68] With Brazil's independence, this resentment deepened. Officials noted the irony in importing sugar from Brazil, produced with labor taken from Portuguese colonies. They pointed out, "all the sugar we import comes from Brazil, but the labor used to cultivate that sugar originates from our colonies."[69]

Lisbon officials believed that abolishing the slave trade was crucial not only for Angola's agricultural and economic development but also for severing the deep-rooted ties that bound Angola to Brazil's slavery-based economy. Since the seventeenth century, these ties had transcended mere economic interests, forming a complex web of familial, religious, legal, and cultural bonds that spanned the Atlantic.[70] However, to Portugal's growing alarm, these connections had now acquired a political dimension following Brazil's independence in 1822. As Brazil's political landscape grew increasingly volatile in the wake of independence, the resulting shockwaves rippled across the Atlantic, stimulating identity formation among local elites in Luanda and Benguela and deeply unsettling Portuguese officials. As explored in Chapter 1, the specter of secessionist movements, inspired by events in Brazil and fueled by the dense network of transatlantic ties, cast a looming shadow over Portugal's efforts to end the slave trade and tighten its grip on Angola.

While Portugal faced the unique challenge of competing with its former colony, Brazil, for influence in Africa—a situation unparalleled by any other European power—it was not alone in leveraging the abolition of the slave trade as a tool for empire-building. This dynamic was also evident in the British Empire's parallel expansionist approaches leveraging anti-slave trade measures. This nexus has spurred debate among scholars; some, like Tom C. McCaskie, argue that British territorial expansion remained geographically restricted, while Martin Lynn casts doubts on Britain's capacity to foster imperialism in West Africa.[71] Rebecca Shumway describes British policy toward Africa as "ambivalent."[72] Seymour Drescher suggests that while anti-slave trade politics were imperialistic in methods, a definitive link between abolition and empire-building remains elusive.[73] John Darwin further complicates this debate, arguing that British imperial expansion was often driven less by a coherent strategic vision than by the interplay of private and official interests in regional hubs and in the metropole.[74]

In contrast, other scholars argue for a more direct link between abolition and European empire-building in Africa. Robin Law, for instance, states that efforts to end the slave trade led to European encroachment on African sovereignty and subsequent European rule.[75] Bronwen Everill echoes this perspective, stating that the British felt compelled to expand into Africa as a result of their stand against the slave trade.[76] Richard Huzzey states that the use of naval force against the slave trade in the 1840s "foreshadowed the following fifty years of colonial advance."[77] Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford see the anti-slave trade legal framework as a form of "legal imperialism," while Maeve Ryan contends that it justified "violence, legal destruction, and dispossession of property" by Britain, which accounted for the "accumulating power" on a global scale.[78]

Importantly, the strategic use of abolition for imperial ambitions occurred beyond the Atlantic. In the Indian Ocean, scholars such as Sujit Sivasundaram and Fahad Bishara illustrate how Britain skillfully used the struggle against the slave trade to craft relationships with local societies.[79] In Mauritius, Richard Allen adds, Britain's anti-slave trade stances allowed for political interventions, tweaking local dynamics.[80] Edward Alpers identifies analogous strategies in East Africa and the broader Indian Ocean from the 1840s, foundational to later British dominance.[81] Guillemette Crouzet and Behnaz Mirzai spotlight the Persian Gulf, where the campaign against the slave trade signified the ascendancy of British power.[82] Further, in the Western Indian Ocean, the British leveraged treaties and military victories to project their naval power and establish territorial control.[83]

Yet, while the strategic use of abolition for imperial ambitions was evident across various regions, it was in the Atlantic Ocean where Britain's empire-building impulse, often cloaked in anti-slave trade rhetoric, manifested most prominently. This imperial drive, which included but was not limited to military interventions, had far-reaching consequences, particularly in West Central Africa. Scholars have traced a turning point to the 1840s. Scholar Tamis Parron asserts that Britain's interactions with Brazil and Cuba primarily spurred this shift.[84] Yet Bronwen Everill associates this shift with the end of slavery in the British Empire in 1838, which enabled Britain to focus resources on curbing the slave trade.[85] Another inflection point was an anti-slave trade treaty that Britain imposed on the Portuguese in 1842, which followed a unilateral decision by the British government to seize Portuguese vessels suspected of engaging in the slave trade in 1839. These measures transformed West Central Africa into a key battleground for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

To fully grasp this complex landscape, it is vital to recognize France's often-overlooked endeavors to gain a stronghold in West Central Africa from the 1840s onward. Historian Denise Bouche notes that while post-restoration France harbored territorial ambitions primarily in Algeria, there was a concurrent aspiration to extend its influence across the Pacific Ocean, Southeast

Asia, and West Africa.[86] According to David Todd, this effort predominantly employed a strategy of informal empire, favoring influence and economic dominance over the direct annexation of territory.[87] In Senegal, however, historian Joseph-Pierre Diouf highlights the early development of structures that would herald the onset of "total colonialism," marking a transition in French imperial tactics in Africa.[88]

By the 1840s, echoing sentiments of Lisbon's *Associação Marítima e Colonial*, France's Institute d'Afrique had emerged as a key proponent of abolishing the slave trade, promoting free trade, and advocating for European colonization across Africa.[89] These pursuits were initially marked by an inconsistent blend of state and private support, notably with Marseille's Régis house being a central player in the formulation of France's policy toward Africa. Yet as Britain's anti-slave trade activities along the African coast intensified, France stepped up its efforts, taking concrete actions such as establishing settlements for Africans liberated from slave ships and sending trade and missionary expeditions to regions like Gabon, seeking to replicate "the same power which they have in Senegal."[90]

It is against this dense fabric of geopolitical competition, further explored in Chapter 6 of *Worlds of Unfreedom*, that Portugal's reorientation of imperial focus toward Africa must be understood. As early as 1842, Portuguese officials declared that "Europeans' attention is no longer limited to its borders and has recently turned to Africa."[91] They recognized that the threats to their imperial aspirations stemmed not only from Britain and France but also from the United States, adding another layer of complexity to the already intricate geopolitical chessboard. This recognition, combined with the aspiration to harness Africa's economic potential and rekindle Portugal's former imperial glory by cultivating a "new Brazil" in West Central Africa, fueled Portugal's motivations to oppose the transatlantic slave trade.

However, as discussed in Chapter 1, Portugal's aspirations of empire unfolded in a deeply convulsed South Atlantic world, where Portugal found itself locked in a struggle for influence in Angola with Brazil, its erstwhile colony. This struggle transcended mere economic opportunities, territorial influence, and geopolitical goals, unfolding within a dense web of social, cultural, economic, and political connections tying Angola to Brazil across the South Atlantic. These networks fed into a political awakening among the elites of Luanda and Benguela, resentful of Portugal's increasingly intrusive presence in Angola's affairs—including its attempts to abolish the slave trade—and deeply attached to the newly independent Brazil, itself undergoing a deeply fractious nation-building process marked by political unrest with racial and anti-Portuguese undertones. The 1845 Benguela revolt, which will be explored in detail in Chapter 1, stands as a powerful manifestation of these complex dynamics.

In the context of Portugal's ambitions in Africa, the struggle was thus not merely against external powers but also against its history and imperial

legacy, especially in relation to Brazil. The Atlantic world, particularly the South Atlantic sphere connecting Angola to Brazil, was not just a space for economic exchanges but also a nexus of political contestation and intellectual and cultural circulations. Ideological constructs concerning race, identity, and governance echoed back and forth across this oceanic conduit, creating a nuanced, dynamic backdrop against which Portugal's imperial aspirations in Africa unfolded. Far from being a one-dimensional quest for territorial expansion or economic exploitation, Portugal's imperial endeavor in Africa thus played out amid a broad array of local and global variables.

The Structure of the Book

Chapter 1 examines identity formation and political contestation in the nineteenth-century South Atlantic world through the life of José Ferreira Gomes, an influential African slave trader arrested in 1846 in Benguela for allegedly inciting racial war against Portuguese rule. The chapter frames the South Atlantic as a fluid space marked by the circulation of people, unstable racial constructs, and political ideologies derived from feedback loops across permeable imperial boundaries. It portrays Ferreira Gomes as emblematic of unstable circuits of power across the South Atlantic—born in Angola, educated in Brazil, with a lineage spanning slave trading ties on both sides. For anxious Portuguese officials, his political activism stemmed from reverberations of Brazilian political turmoil and anti-Lusitanism amid growing nativist consciousness among coastal elites in Luanda and Benguela. By emphasizing racialized perceptions and political loyalties as relationally forged and transient, the chapter underscores identity and race as globally constituted through intricate Atlantic entanglements.

Chapter 2 provides an immersive exploration of gender, culture, and politics in 1840s Luanda, Angola, a critical juncture in the city's history as the most important slave port in the transatlantic trade. By centering the narrative on Dona Francisca Joaquina do Amaral, a woman ensnared in a web of patriarchal violence due to accusations of infidelity, the chapter seeks to evince fracture points and power relations concealed under imperial modes of record-keeping. The narrative delves into the microcosm of her experience against the larger backdrop of Luanda's struggle to end the slave trade, offering a rich tapestry of ethnographic detail to reconstruct the social, cultural, and economic fabrics of the city. Focusing on details, such as the culturally loaded gift of kola nuts (makèzú) sent to her lover, the chapter challenges archival erasures by portraying Dona Amaral as a complex figure navigating and shaping her circumstances. The chapter interweaves personal stories, political machinations, cultural traditions, and the institution of slavery to create a vivid portrayal of life in multicultural Luanda, where African languages, beliefs, and customs prevailed over Portuguese influences. It not only reconstructs the layered life

of Dona Amaral but also seeks to give voice to the city's enslaved residents and the influential role of African women, particularly the street vendors known as quitandeiras, in shaping the city's vibrant markets and cultural fabric.

Chapter 3 centers the narrative of abolition on the main victims of the slave trade: enslaved Africans themselves. Through original archival research, the chapter illuminates the overlooked but pivotal role of enslaved Africans as active agents in dismantling the transatlantic slave trade networks in Benguela, Angola's second slave port. It tells the story of Tabião, an enslaved man who escaped and alerted authorities about an impending shipment of 194 captives from a feitoria in Equimina in 1854. His bold actions led to a raid that liberated these enslaved people and resulted in new anti-slave trade measures, including a decree granting freedom to any enslaved person who assisted in reporting slave trading activities. The chapter shows how attempts to revive large-scale shipments of enslaved people posed a threat to Benguela's emerging post-slave trade economy, which relied on natural resource extraction through African slavery. In this context, enslaved people leveraged their value as workers to disrupt slave trading attempts and shape anti-slave trade laws. This revisionist narrative provides a more complex understanding of abolition by recasting enslaved people as agents of abolition and not merely as victims of the slave trade.

Chapter 4 offers a new transnational perspective on the complex dynamics of abolishing the transatlantic slave trade in the mid-nineteenth century, while also assessing its impact on African political fabrics. By tracing the intricate networks linking West Central Africa, Brazil, the United States, and Cuba, the chapter positions West Central Africa as a critical hub within the capitalist structures sustaining the illegal trade's twilight years. Focusing on the story of slave trader Augusto Garrido's acquisition of U.S. citizenship to bypass anti-slavery laws, the chapter illuminates how slave dealers adapted by exploiting tensions between intensifying global abolition efforts and national economic interests. Additionally, the chapter highlights the often-overlooked ties between Cuba and West Central Africa, underscoring the Spanish colony's significant influence as the transatlantic slave trade neared its end. Through a multi-sited analysis, the chapter develops a nuanced understanding of the concerted, transnational efforts to halt human trafficking across the Atlantic world, while also examining the trade's profound ramifications for African societies and politics during this period.

Chapter 5 probes the complex trade diplomacy between Luanda native Dona Ana Joaquina dos Santos Silva and Nawej II, the ruler of the expansive Lunda empire, set against the backdrop of the declining transatlantic slave trade. It examines the Lunda ruler's strategic initiatives to establish direct commercial links with Luanda to bolster political power and respond to a shifting economic landscape, while also highlighting how these initiatives aligned with the Luanda government's interests in expanding its influence and

securing new economic opportunities. The chapter also illuminates the role of Eufrazina, an enslaved woman whose pivotal involvement as an emissary disrupts conventional narratives of servitude, revealing the intricate intersections of gender, status, and power within the Lunda kingdom and the broader context of West Central Africa. Furthermore, it explores the ongoing agricultural efforts near Luanda, where the continuation of slavery and the internal slave trade underpinned a nascent plantation economy, reflecting the enduring and adaptive nature of exploitative labor systems.

Chapter 6 shifts focus to the regions north of Luanda, from Ambriz to Cabinda—the epicenters of the illegal slave trade in the 1850s—to investigate how efforts to end the trade intersected with European empire-building in Africa. It argues that Portugal's actions to suppress the slave trade in the lower Congo were intrinsically linked to its territorial ambitions, as exemplified by the Ambriz takeover and the occupation of Mbanza Kongo. The chapter situates Portugal's endeavors within the broader context of European powers leveraging anti-slave trade campaigns to expand their influence, drawing parallels to British interventions in Lagos and French naval patrols in the Bight of Benin. Crucially, it highlights the French role in Kongo's succession crisis, with the Maison Régis firm backing one of the contenders for the throne as part of a forced migration scheme in the lower Congo. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates how Portuguese troops, initially deployed to combat the slave trade, were subsequently used to intervene in Kongo's succession crisis, underscoring the complex interplay between abolition efforts, imperial ambitions, and local political dynamics in the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter 7 investigates the global dynamics of labor exploitation in the age of abolition, tracing the circulation of ideas and practices across the British, French, and Portuguese empires. The chapter reveals how legal efforts to end the slave trade and slavery gave rise to new forms of unfree labor through mechanisms like apprenticeship and the engagé system. These systems perpetuated coercion and exploitation, facilitating the forced migration of Africans to various colonies, including the British Caribbean and French-controlled Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean, and from Angola to São Tomé and Príncipe. By situating Angola's experience within a broader global context, the chapter highlights the interconnectedness of labor practices across vast geographies and demonstrates how abolition laws were manipulated to serve colonial economic interests, ultimately shaping the development of labor legislation in the post-slavery era.

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