Experiences of Enslavement in West Central Africa

JOSÉ C. CURTO*

From the early 1500s to 1830, enslavement emerged as a pervasive feature throughout much of West Central Africa. Millions of individuals were captured, with many destined for the Atlantic slave trade and others for internal servitude. The demands of the slave trade encouraged a proliferation of violence and insecurity as captives were obtained through warfare and raids, individual kidnapping and betrayal, and an assortment of other coercive means. All kinds of people underwent this experience, even those who theoretically could not legally be enslaved; similarly, people from numerous backgrounds were attracted to the gains to be had from enslaving others. Although some victims were eventually successful in claiming their free status, for many the only consolation lay in the fact that not a few of their captors would ultimately experience a similar fate.

Du début des années 1500 jusqu’en 1830, l’esclavage a marqué de son omniprésence la quasi-totalité de l’Afrique occidentale et centrale. Des millions de personnes ont été enlevées, beaucoup pour la filière atlantique et d’autres pour la filière intérieure de l’esclavage. La traite des esclaves a stimulé la prolifération de la violence et de l’insécurité puisque les enlèvements se faisaient au moyen de guerres, de raids, de kidnappings, de trahisons et d’une panoplie d’autres moyens coercitifs. Des personnes de toutes sortes ont vécu cette expérience, même celles qu’il était, en théorie, interdit d’asservir. Dans le même ordre d’idées, l’appât du gain suscité par l’asservissement d’autrui attirait des gens d’une foule d’horizons. Bien que certaines victimes aient réussi à regagner leur liberté, la seule consolation de nombreuses autres aura été de savoir qu’un nombre non négligeable de leurs ravisseurs allaient finir par connaître le même sort.

THE ENSLAVEMENT of Africans between 1500 and 1900 involved the lives of tens of millions of individuals. During this period, sub-Saharan Africa exported an estimated 12,408,000 captives to meet the demand for slaves in the western Atlantic and a further 5,114,000 to the Muslim world, with each of these sectors experiencing spectacular increases following the late seventeenth century. External demand, however, was

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not the only factor that led to the commodification of humanity. As sub-Saharan African societies attempted to produce ever-rising numbers of slaves for the Atlantic and Muslim worlds, they too began to draw upon slaves at unprecedented levels. The volume of this internal African slave trade remains unknown. Nevertheless, when it reached its climax in the 1800s, its victims also numbered in the millions. Understanding the process of enslavement in sub-Saharan Africa thus requires an appreciation of the volume of the Atlantic and Muslim slave trades, as well as of the unknown number who were retained to meet internal demand. While Patrick Manning estimates that the internal African trade “reached a volume of at least half that of the Occidental [Atlantic] trade, and greater than that of the Oriental [Muslim] trade,” Paul E. Lovejoy suggests that “[p]erhaps as many more [as the combined Atlantic-Muslim total] did not leave, because many slaves died in Africa and others were incorporated into local societies.” Penned by two of the foremost scholars of slavery in Africa, appraisals such as these, when added to the sufficiently impressive figures of the Atlantic and Muslim slave trades, point to the enslavement of Africans as a tragic enterprise of colossal proportions.

The large-scale production of African slaves caused a series of features to emerge whenever and wherever the commerce took root. One was the ability of sub-Saharan African societies to enslave people. To produce the millions of captives necessary to support the rising volume of slaves exported, African captors expanded existing, or developed new, mechanisms to turn otherwise free individuals into slaves. The more important of these mechanisms included the expansion of warfare between states, chiefdoms, and villages, which produced slaves as prisoners of war and booty; an increase in raids aimed at the capture of people; the rise of kidnapping by bands of thugs or unscrupulous individuals; the contortion of court proceedings to enslave both insiders and outsiders for violating trivial rules of society; a surge in witchcraft accusations designed to turn people accused of illicit supernatural activity into slaves; an intensification in tribute exactions, with subordinates forced to provide captives to higher authorities; and an upsurge in the sale of kin or even in self-enslavement, particularly during times of famine and epidemics. The significance and extent of these modes of seizure varied over both time and place. Nevertheless, given the number of captives who entered the Atlantic,
Muslim, and internal African slave trades, they all contributed to yet another important feature of the enslavement process: the proliferation of violence and, consequently, significantly higher levels of insecurity throughout much of the continent.  

The intensification in violence and higher levels of insecurity that resulted from expanding mechanisms of enslavement are not only plausible from the corresponding number of slaves who increasingly entered

Table 1: Slave Exports from Africa, 1501–1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Atlantic</th>
<th>Sahara</th>
<th>Red Sea</th>
<th>East Africa</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1501–1600</td>
<td>276,000</td>
<td>550,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>1,026,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1601–1700</td>
<td>1,848,000</td>
<td>710,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>2,758,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701–1800</td>
<td>6,457,000</td>
<td>715,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>7,772,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801–1900</td>
<td>3,827,000</td>
<td>1,205,000</td>
<td>492,000</td>
<td>442,000</td>
<td>5,996,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12,408,000</td>
<td>3,180,000</td>
<td>892,000</td>
<td>1,042,000</td>
<td>17,522,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Muslim, and internal African slave trades, they all contributed to yet another important feature of the enslavement process: the proliferation of violence and, consequently, significantly higher levels of insecurity throughout much of the continent. The intensification in violence and higher levels of insecurity that resulted from expanding mechanisms of enslavement are not only plausible from the corresponding number of slaves who increasingly entered
the Atlantic, Muslim, and internal African slave trades from 1500 onwards. Other, less indirect evidence — the testimonials of Africans who were confronted with enslavement — points to exactly the same phenomenon. Whether written by themselves or by others, these sources remain a valuable tool for understanding the process of enslavement in sub-Saharan Africa. They provide many otherwise unobtainable insights into the broad range of experiences of captives, not to mention those of their captors, and the twisted ironies that the commodification of humanity sometimes produced in the lives of both. Yet, although these sources continue to come to light, their geographical coverage remains far from uniform.7

A case in point is West Central Africa. Although this region emerged as the single largest contributor of slaves for the Atlantic world from the late 1400s to the mid-1800s, saw slavery develop into an important institution within the Portuguese colony of Angola and surrounding African polities, and experienced intensive raiding on its eastern shores to supply the nineteenth-century East African slave trade, until recently relatively few of its encounters with enslavement have been documented.


The most recent estimate of African slaves exported into the western Atlantic world shows that 44.5% of 12.4 million individuals departed from West Central Africa alone: David Eltis, “The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment Based on the Second Edition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, 2006). The known, legal Portuguese and Brazilian slave exports from the two major West Central African coastal towns amount to 1,072,763 for Luanda during 1710–1830, with no data available for 11 years; and 407,166 for Benguela during 1730–1828, with no data available for 16 years. See Table 2.


This contribution seeks to fill an important gap by focusing on experiences of enslavement in West Central Africa from the early sixteenth century through the late 1820s, the period during which the

Table 2: Known (Legal) Slave Exports from Angola, 1710–1830

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Luanda</th>
<th>Benguela</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1710–1719</td>
<td>36,736</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>36,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1720–1729</td>
<td>84,619</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>84,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730–1739</td>
<td>73,928</td>
<td>3,838</td>
<td>77,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740–1749</td>
<td>104,406</td>
<td>6,088</td>
<td>110,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750–1759</td>
<td>101,805</td>
<td>22,638</td>
<td>124,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760–1769</td>
<td>83,050</td>
<td>47,173</td>
<td>130,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770–1779</td>
<td>75,743</td>
<td>53,013</td>
<td>128,756</td>
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<tr>
<td>1780–1789</td>
<td>94,632</td>
<td>64,931</td>
<td>159,563</td>
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<tr>
<td>1790–1799</td>
<td>102,604</td>
<td>83,335</td>
<td>185,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800–1809</td>
<td>87,560</td>
<td>62,407</td>
<td>149,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810–1819</td>
<td>132,919</td>
<td>45,178</td>
<td>178,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820–1829</td>
<td>109,440</td>
<td>18,555</td>
<td>127,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>8,102</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>8,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,072,763</td>
<td>407,166</td>
<td>1,479,929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: José C. Curto, “A Quantitative Re-assessment of the Legal Portuguese Slave Trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830,” *African Economic History*, vol. 20 (1992), pp. 1–25, and “The Legal Portuguese Slave Trade from Benguela, Angola, 1730–1828: A Quantitative Re-appraisal,” *Africa* (Universidade de São Paulo), no. 16–17 (1993–1994), pp. 101–116. Since the appearance of these publications, more annual export figures have been located for Benguela: Arquivo Histórico Nacional de Angola, Código 441, “Mappa dos Generos que se exportarão... no Anno de 1799... de Benguela,” fols. 122v–123, evidencing 5,862 slaves exported in 1799; and Arquivo do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, DL82.01.18, “Demostração da qualidade, e quantidade dos generos exportados desta Cidade de Benguela, com declaração dos portos para onde forão nos annos de 1823, 1824, e 1825,” fl. 40, listing 3,046 captives shipped in 1823 and a further 2,933 in 1824. The new data have been incorporated into this table.

This contribution seeks to fill an important gap by focusing on experiences of enslavement in West Central Africa from the early sixteenth century through the late 1820s, the period during which the

Atlantic slave trade operated legally in this region. That few of these experiences have made their way into the historiography of this region justifies by itself the effort. However, the objective is not merely to add another layer of knowledge to the past of West Central Africa. Indeed, the primary sources covering this particular region and time period available in the musty archives of Angola and Portugal are both extensive and extremely rich. Drawing systematically upon this documentation allows for a deeper understanding of the complex process that was enslavement than is possible for other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, this historical record also highlights the wide range of experiences of enslavement that emerged in the context of West Central Africa. To tease out this complexity and illustrate these wide ranges, the pages that follow first deal with early experiences of kidnapping, then concentrate on large-scale encounters with enslavement during the 1600s and the 1700s, and finally focus exclusively on individual experiences of enslavement from the 1760s through the late 1820s. Such an outline does more than simply reflect the sources currently available on enslavement in West Central Africa. It is also particularly useful to show that the thousands upon thousands of individuals annually caught in this web were more than the anonymous, abstracted figures imposed by aggregate analyses of slaving and slavery: they were, first and foremost, human beings. Regardless of the ways in which one could become a slave, the proliferation of violence and insecurity associated with enslavement was such that few in West Central Africa became immune from captivity. Over time, all kinds of people, from different ethnic backgrounds, occupations, phenotypes, social conditions, gender, and age-groups, came to risk capture on a daily basis. Many of the


encounters discussed below actually involved individuals or groups of people who theoretically could not have been enslaved, clearly demonstrating this randomness. That these incidents also involved enslavers from a variety of backgrounds further shows that the gains to be realized from enslaving others tempted many people in West Central Africa down this perilous road, with not a few eventually experiencing the twisted irony of being enslaved themselves. None of these experiences is particularly unique; others displaying similar characteristics are beginning to make their way into the public domain. Enslavement was no less horrific or traumatic than the journeys endured by captives to reach the coast for shipment, the Middle Passage to the Americas, or the lives wasted on plantations, mines, and urban landscapes. It was but the starting point of a tragically enormous enterprise that devalued the human condition in West Central Africa and beyond.

From Kidnapping to Large-scale Enslavement
In West Central Africa, the insecurity and violence, not to mention the horrors, associated with enslavement were already part of daily life well before the Atlantic slave trade began to reach phenomenal proportions in the late seventeenth century. These features emerged as early as the first decades of the 1500s, after political authorities in the Kingdom of Kongo had decided to supply slave labour to the expanding sugar plantations in the Portuguese-held island of São Tomé, near the coast of present-day Gabon. In mid-1526, for example, King Afonso I of Kongo bitterly denounced the way in which the trade was already affecting his realm: “our kingdom is being lost in so many ways that we must apply the necessary remedy.” The problem, he bluntly informed


his “brother,” the King of Portugal, was that “every day the [Portuguese] merchants carry away nossos naturaes (our people), sons of our soil and sons of our nobles and vassals, and our relatives, whom thieves and people of bad conscience kidnap and sell to obtain the coveted things and trade goods of that [Portuguese] Kingdom.”16 A commerce initially involving individuals other than the Kikongo had quickly degenerated into rampant kidnapping within. Free Kikongo were now also susceptible to enslavement: not only ordinary individuals, but also the offspring of nobles and even relatives of Afonso I himself. When, a few months later, Afonso wrote again to João III of Portugal, he disclosed that the thieves and people of bad conscience in question were “nossos naturaes (our people) who kidnapped and secreted them away at night for sale to white men,” among whom they were kept in irons and branded before shipment.17 Afonso sought “to do Justice and restore the free to their liberty” by appointing three of his trusted nobles to ensure that no slaves would henceforth be sold without a proper inquest and none exported without his knowledge and consent.18 However, the lure of imported luxury items had led certain elements of Kongo society to seek indiscriminately within for the victims required to obtain goods from abroad, and the effectiveness of this measure was momentary at best. As slave exports from Kongo continued to increase, so did insecurity and violence resulting from rising levels of enslavement.19

Afonso’s testimonial of enslavement within his kingdom was but an omen of things to come in West Central Africa. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw the Portuguese relocate their base of operations further south: in 1575, they founded the port of Luanda to tap the commercial and human resources available along the Kwanza corridor, and in 1617 they founded a second port in Benguela to exploit the densely populated central highlands. Within a few years, in each case, they unleashed a wave of military campaigns against surrounding African societies to conquer mines, recover runaway slaves, punish tax defaulters, and hammer those who renounced commercial and political allegiances. Known as the Angolan Wars,20 these expeditions resulted in unprecedented

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18 Ibid.
19 As is clear from the following studies by John K. Thornton: The Kingdom of Kongo; “As guerras civis no Congo e o tráfico de escravos: a história e a demografia de 1744 a 1844 revisitadas,” Estudos Afro-Asiáticos, no. 32 (1997), pp. 55–74.
20 These campaigns are the focus of the 1680 account by António de Oliveira de Cadornega, História Geral das Guerras Angolanas, eds. Matias Delgado and Manuel Alves da Cunha (Lisbon: Agência
levels of insecurity and violence for the societies against which they were directed. As stated bluntly by a local observer, they led to “carnage on such a large scale that rivers became polluted with numerous corpses and multitudes of innocent people were captured without cause.”

This was the case of the large and complex military campaigns that the Portuguese, in alliance with the Imbangala, carried out between 1618 and 1620 against the Kingdom of Ndongo, the first major state to block their penetration inland along the Kwanza river. The thousands of individuals captured through these particular expeditions alone made up a significant proportion of the 50,000 or so slaves exported from Luanda between 1617 and 1621, some of whom were among the first “Angola” slaves landed in Virginia. Subsequent military campaigns produced no less horrific experiences of enslavement. In 1653–1654, the Portuguese directed their attention to Jaga Kabuku Kandonga, who had assisted them while the Dutch had occupied Angola from 1641 to 1648. Kabuku was then rumoured to be negotiating his transfer into the camp of Queen Nzinga of Matamba, who, at the time, was the single most important opponent of the Portuguese in Angola. His state was “consumed” by Portuguese forces and their African allies; over 4,000 people were captured, including Kabuku, who was sent to Brazil. A decade later, the Portuguese and their African allies turned to the Nbembu region in southern Kongo, where the death of the chief of Kakulu Kahenda had resulted in a succession struggle. Seeking to place their own candidate as the rightful ruler, the Portuguese forces laid to “waste” the lands of the contesting claimant and his local allies. About 2,000 Ndembu were captured in the process, while the defeated claimant was shipped off to Brazil.

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22 For their background, see the text preceding note 39.


25 Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino [hereafter AHU], Angola, Cx. 8, Doc. 8, report by Bartholemeu Paes Bulhão, *Provedor da Fazenda Real* or Inspector of the Royal Treasury in Portuguese Angola, May 16, 1664. Writing in 1680, Cadornega states that Kabuku was allowed to return to his realm and continue in the Portuguese cause (*História Geral das Guerras Angolanas*, vol. 2, pp. 75–78). At least one other contemporaneous source, Luis Mendes de Souza Cichorro, Governor of Angola, indicates that Kabuku was effectively sent to Brazil: see AHU, Conselho Ultramarino, Código 15: Livro de Registo de Consultas Mixtas, 1653–1661, Consulta of July 13, 1655, fl. 187. My thanks to Dr. Mariana P. Candido for sharing her transcription of the Bulhão report.

26 AHU, Cx. 8, Doc. 8, Bulhão report of May 16, 1664.
With the end of the 1600s, the intensity of the Angola Wars abated. The large-scale production of captives thereafter subsided, but did not end. In 1744, for example, yet another expedition in the Ndembu region yielded 62 women as the “Royal Fifth.” Since this was the proportion of all captives taken in battle who were destined for the Portuguese Crown, some 310 must have been captured. That same year saw the Portuguese and their allies do battle in the Kingdom of Matamba, an expedition that netted 305 slaves as the Royal Fifth, indicating that 1,525 individuals had been captured. Then, in 1761, a small Portuguese army was sent east of Ambaca to meet an entire people on the move, including chiefs, soldiers, women, and children. These were the Hungu, fleeing westward from the persecutions of the Mulua. Antonio de Vasconcelos, the Governor of Angola, estimated their losses at 15,000 dead and captured. Among the latter were 803 slaves allocated to the Royal Fifth. In all, some 4,015 individuals were seized during this campaign. Warfare remained far from a trivial mechanism for the production of slaves.

Over and beyond the African leaders who found themselves on the losing side, soldiers were not the only individuals susceptible to enslavement during these military campaigns. Females, who were the major components of the baggage trains behind the African armies that stood up against the Portuguese and their local allies, were also at risk. Indeed, soldiers and females forming the baggage trains constituted a sort of preselected population that slave merchants in the distance

28 Ibid., table V.
29 For the identity of the Mulua, see the text preceding note 60.
30 This estimate is provided by no other than the Governor of Angola, Antonio de Vasconcelos. See AHU, Cx. 45, Doc. 44, June 12, 1762. I am again indebted to Dr. Candido for sharing her transcription of this document.
31 To be sure, not all state-sanctioned military operations were successful. The Portuguese and their local allies were sometimes soundly defeated on the battlefield, and slaves did not generally emerge from failed military campaigns. Nevertheless, as one local observer admitted, the expectation was that every state-sanctioned military operation would result in large numbers of enslaved blacks since “they could not but produce considerable numbers of prisoners” (AHU, Código 408, Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado to Francisco Innocencio de Souza Coutinho [Governor of Angola], May 6, 1768, fls. 155–155v). For a recent statement underplaying slave production through warfare, see Roquinaldo Amaral Ferreira, “Transforming Atlantic Slaving: Trade, Warfare and Territorial Control in Angola, 1650–1800” (PhD dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 2003). However, as we are reminded by Rosa Cruz e Silva in “The Saga of Kakonda e Kilengues: Relations between Benguela and its Interior, 1791–1796,” in José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), pp. 245–259, Portuguese military aggression continued to be responsible for the capture and export of large numbers of slaves as late as the end of the eighteenth century.
waited to buy, with men predominantly destined for export overseas and women for internal “consumption.” Moreover, once African armies were defeated, the Portuguese and their local allies were then free to loot the hamlets, villages, and even cities of the losers, enslaving in the process unprotected women, children, and older men. The case of the 1773–1775 campaigns against one of the most important polities emerging on Angola’s central plateau, Mbailundu, which effectively turned the central highlands into an important source of supply for Benguela’s slave export economy, was fairly typical. The assault against the mountainous area of Kiyaka, where civilians had sought refuge, saw “more than 500 heads, [including] females, lads, and old people,” fall into the hands of two Portuguese armies and their African partners. The agonizing plight of non-combatants such as these is clear from one inventory of slaves who arrived in Benguela following the 1736 military expedition against Kakonda, an area that gave access to the densely populated central highlands. The inventory lists 77 slaves representing the Royal Fifth, which means that some 385 individuals were captured overall. Of the 77 captives listed, only 14 were males, including two boys between 4 and 8 years old, one of whom, Kangullo, was listed separately from his mother; 18 were girls between 8 and 15 years old; 32 were females, including nine with one child each, four of whom were between the ages of 8 and 15 and three between 4 and 8; finally, a small cluster was made up of one young child of unspecified gender, two girls 4 to 8 years old, and a male of an unspecified age. Overall, their valuation at Benguela totalled 901$000 réis. Excluding the nine children listed with their mothers and the last cluster, which was deemed worthless, the average value of the remaining 64 captives was but 14$078 réis, or less that half the value that an average slave then fetched at Benguela or Luanda. Of the 13 children up to 8 years old, whose value was lower still, most were dying (Kambia, Kaceyo, Ligongo, Sonbi, Sanga, Kallenbo, Katunbe, and an unnamed child), and an almost equal number were without either parent (Kaputto, Sungo, Lanta, Sonbe, Kallenbo, Katunbe, and the unnamed child). Moreover, while 10 females arrived at Benguela with one of their offspring still alive,

three others (Kuimano, Kanengo, and Kahunda) had experienced the loss of one child following their forced removal from Kakonda. None of the male partners of these or other women appears in this inventory. With a few exceptions (Kamumo, Kaita, and Kellengue), most of the adult males were deemed to be worth far less than the average value within the lot, an indication that they were probably older men. When looting unprotected villages and towns, military expeditions such as the one that netted these 77 individuals were far from discriminatory. They seized everyone who could not flee, regardless of gender, age group, physical condition, or even potential value.

The military operations of the Portuguese and their allies, however, were not the only acts of aggression through which countless West Central Africans were violently turned into slaves. The civil wars that raged throughout the Kingdom of Kongo in the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for example, were veritable slave-producing raids. According to the Italian missionary Luca da Caltanisetta, who operated throughout the kingdom between 1690 and 1701, when Kongo warlords had no slaves to sell to the merchants visiting their towns, “they improvise nightly attacks against a libata or village deemed, rightly or not, as foe; they capture everyone there [to] buy trade goods from the merchants…” Early in 1701, Caltanisetta witnessed the return of the “the Mani Lumbo [a title] with 58 slaves captured by order of the king; he had destroyed a libata of one of his vassals who, having established relations with the Duke [of the province] of Mbamba, an enemy of the king, was accused of treason; among these slaves were many free people, some inhabitants of the libata … and others who were just there on business.” A few years later, another Italian missionary, Lorenzo da Lucca, reported the situation as worsening. The continuous hostilities between the royal houses disaggregate the kingdom further still. At present there are four Kings of Kongo; two Grand-Dukes of Mbamba; three Grand-Dukes of Wandu; two Grand-Dukes of Mbata; and four Marquis of Nkusu. The authority of all is wasted [as] they destroy one another through warfare. Everyone pretends to be the leader. They make incursions into each other’s territory to steal and sell those whom they capture as if these were animals. Prince Kibenga, an enemy of Pedro IV, [recently] took fifty to sixty individuals from the opposing party within a short period of time.

37 Ibid.
Although occurring in the context of a civil war, these raids were hardly different from the government-sanctioned military operations of the Portuguese and their African allies. Raid after raid “indiscriminately” turned large numbers of otherwise free Kongo into slaves.

Moreover, the large-scale enslavement of West Central Africans through raids was not confined to civil wars such as those that engulfed the Kingdom of Kongo. The production of slaves through raids was also a particularly important feature of the central Angolan highlands. By 1600, the western parts of the central plateau had been overrun by bands of young marauders originating from the southern end of the highlands. These were the Imbangala who, despising agriculture and a settled lifestyle, emphasized military training and discipline. They lived off warfare and raiding, incorporating young male captives into their ranks and selling other captured individuals to the Portuguese on the coast. Subsequent warlords did not shy away from adopting the militaristic style of the Imbangala. Indeed, slave-raiding was at the very basis of the eighteenth-century political consolidation that later resulted in a series of important Ovimbundu polities. Prior to any individual being confirmed as the leader of an Umbundu polity, he was required to engage in raids. Moreover, these warlords periodically engaged in other raids against enemies throughout the plateau. Sometimes these backfired. Towards the end of 1755, for example, a potentate of the “Cabunda” nação or nation was carrying out raids against sovas or chiefs in the area of Caconda who had become vassals of the Portuguese Crown. Early the following year, a punitive force set out from Benguela to subdue the Cabunda potentate. More than 1,500 of his soldiers died in battle and over 500 drowned fleeing across a river, while some 660 of his subjects, mostly women and a few men, lost their freedom. In 1798, on the other hand, the sova of Kalukembe, on the


40 See, for example, the following studies by Ralph Delgado: A Famosa e Histórica Benguela: Catálogo dos Governadores (1779 a 1940) (Lisbon: Typografica Editorial, 1940); O Reino de Benguela (Do Descobrimento à Criação do Governo Subalterno) (Lisbon: Imprensa Beleza, 1945); Ralph Delgado, ed., Ao Sul do Cuanza: Ocupação e Aproveitamento do Antigo Reino de Benguela, 1483–1942 (Lisbon: Imprensa Beleza, 1944), 2 vols. See also Gladwyn M. Childs, Umbundu Kinship & Character (London: Oxford University Press, 1949); Miller, “Angola Central e Sul por Volta de 1840.”


42 AHU, Cx. 40, Doc. 71, report of Dom Antonio Alvares da Cunha, Governor of Angola, January 22, 1756. See also AHU, Cx. 40–A, Doc. 130, report of Dom Antonio Alvares da Cunha, Governor of
southwestern tip of the plateau, saw his domains razed by a “great expedition” organized by other central highlanders. More than 600 of his people were then enslaved in retribution for this sova having guided Portuguese military forces through the highlands. When raids were not carried against enemies on the plateau, Umbundu warlords then directed their attention to the surrounding social formations below the escarpment. Early in January 1803, for example, a number of chiefs from south of the Kwanza River complained bitterly to the Regent of Pungo Andongo, the presidio or Portuguese military-administrative under whose jurisdiction lay the area, about the great losses and vexation that they had experienced at the hands of the brother of the sova of Mbailundu. He “had attacked them with a large force, capturing and killing their subjects, stealing what they could find, and burning dwellings.”

African warlords were not alone in turning large numbers people into slaves through raids. West Central Africans also experienced enslavement at the hands of capitães-mores, individuals who, from the early 1600s, were given the responsibility of managing the military-administrative presídios or outposts set up by the Portuguese in the interior of Luanda and Benguela to protect the trade routes that supplied them with slaves. Usually sons of important Luso-African families in the coastal urban centres, the poorly paid capitães-mores were particularly notorious for the ways they devised to extract captives from the African social formations found within their presídios. One such mechanism involved slave raids carried out unilaterally, without formal approval from colonial authorities in Luanda or Benguela. Some of the better documented of these experiences took place during the late 1790s. In July 1796, Joaquim Vieira de Andrade left Benguela to become the new Capitão-mor or Captain-Major of Quillengues, the southern-most presidio below the western edges of the central plateau. Upon arrival, Andrade began to receive slaves and other commodities as gifts from neighbouring African chiefs, but the Capitão-mor was still unsatisfied. He soon organized a number of expeditions against the polités of those who had welcomed him. One raid against the village of the chief of Kakombo alone netted 39 captives. In Sokoval, on the other hand, villages were looted and razed, more than 200 free and enslaved individuals were captured, and the sova was himself

Angola, April 20, 1756, and the annexed details of the military operations by Domingos da Fonseca Negrão.
43 Arquivo Histórico Nacional de Angola [hereafter AHNA], Códice 441 (E–1–2), Alexandre Joze Botelho de Vasconcellos [Governor of Benguela] to Governor of Angola, May 15, 1798, fl. 59.
45 AHNA, Códice 443 (E–1–4), Alexandre Joze Botelho de Vasconcellos [Governor of Benguela] to Jeronimo Caetano de Barros Araujo e Beça [External Judge of Benguela], September 22, 1796, fl. 8.
imprisoned. When the leaders of both chiefdoms were brought under escort to Benguela, they bitterly complained to Governor Alexandre José Botelho de Vasconcelos about these events. The sova of Sokoval, in particular, even took the unprecedented step of asking Vasconcelos for safer lands where he could resettle his subjects. The Governor of Benguela persuaded the chief to go back to his land, probably by reassuring him that an investigation into the raids was pending. Andrade was soon stripped of his office late in November and, following an early 1797 inquiry into his shady activities, sent to Benguela, where he awaited transport for a court-martial in Luanda. In mid-February 1798, the Governor of Angola, Miguel Antonio de Mello, decreed the unsanctioned Andrade raids as illegal. The edital or governmental notice that followed stipulated that, of those still in Angola, the free-born were to be restored to their “natural Liberty” and the slaves returned directly to the sova of Sokoval. For those who had already been shipped to Brazil, however, the edital was far more circumspect. Only if someone petitioned for the expatriate free-born and slaves of Sokoval would the colonial administration in Benguela take the necessary steps towards repatriation. Late in August 1798, almost two years after the Andrade raids had taken place, people were still being rounded up in Benguela for restitution to Sokoval. They were the lucky ones. There is no subsequent evidence that any of those exported to Brazil, regardless of their original social condition in Sokoval, were ever repatriated.

Even the larger political formations that maintained long-standing commercial relations with Portuguese Angola periodically had their subjects raided by the greedy capitães-mores. Early in 1805, Felix Velasco Galiano, the Regent of Pungo Andongo, the last presídio parallel to the Kwanza River facing eastward, was ordered by Fernando António de Noronha, the Governor of Angola, to lead an embassy to the Kingdom of Kasanje. Some 300 kilometres inland from Luanda, immediately west of the Kwango River, Kasanje had by then long transformed itself into a middleman state controlling the flow of large numbers of slaves into the Atlantic economy. Galiano’s mission was to negotiate new terms of trade that

47 AHNA, Códice 443 (E–1–4), Alexandre Jozé Botelho de Vasconcellos [Governor of Benguela] to Joaquim Vieira de Andrade, September 22, 1796, fl. 7.
49 AHNA, Códice 443 (E–1–4), Alexandre Jozé Botelho de Vasconcellos [Governor of Benguela] to Captain Miguel Antonio Serrão [Regent of Quillengues], March 24, 1798, fl. 26.
51 AHNA, Códice 443 (E–1–4), Alexandre Jozé Botelho de Vasconcellos [Governor of Benguela] to Miguel Antonio Serrão [Regent of Quillengues], August 24, 1798, fl. 30v.
would ensure continued Portuguese access to the Kasanje slave mart. An agreement was quickly reached with Malange a Ngonga, the *Jaga* or King of Kasanje. In the process, according to Governor Noronha, Galiano “even comported [himself] as he should.”

As the leader of an embassy venturing outside of Portuguese controlled territory, Galiano was accompanied by a security force of *empacaceiros* or African soldiers. Once negotiations with *Jaga* Malange a Ngonga were completed, the embassy started the westward trek back to its base in Pungo Andongo. Not long after leaving the Kasanje slave mart, however, Galiano and company began to raid villages along their path. From western Kasanje, they carried out their raids all the way to the bend of the Kwanza River and captured “a lot of people.” Information circulating in Luanda in the middle of 1805 placed the figure at more than 200, among them Hungu common folk, people from *sova* Sabiango, including one of his daughters, and subjects of *Jaga* Malange a Ngonga, including one of his sons. The raids carried out by Galiano and his henchmen discriminated against neither African gentry nor common folk.

With *Jaga* Malange a Ngonga leading the way, the heads of the polities directly affected by Galiano’s raids lost little time in channelling their protests to Luanda. Fully understanding the ramifications of Portuguese Angola losing its single most important commercial ally, Governor Noronha ordered all of the individuals captured by Galiano to be located, wherever they might be, and returned as free people to their native lands. This operation was largely completed within the following few months, but four individuals were retained in Luanda, where the Governor declared them as “a lawful prize.” Three originated from the Kingdom of Matamba, then heavily engaged in channelling slaves to

52 AHNA, Códice 91 (A–20–1), Governor Noronha to Capitão Francisco B. I. Sardinha, June 24, 1805, fls. 9v–11.
53 AHNA, Códice 91 (A–20–1), governor Noronha to Regente de Ambaca, May 28, 1805, fl. 3v.
54 According to Jean-Luc Vellut, “Le royaume de Cassange et les réseaux luso-africains (ca. 1750–1810),” *Cahiers d’études africaines*, vol. 15 (1975), p. 125, Galiano and his men began their raids on the Kwanza islands while on their way to Kasanje. But the extant documentation clearly indicates that the raids took place on their return to Pungo Andongo, after negotiations with the *Jaga* had been completed. See note 55 below.
55 AHNA, Códice 91 (A–20–1), Governor Noronha to Capitão Francisco B. I. Sardinha, June 24, 1805, fls. 9v–11.
56 AHNA, Códice 91 (A–20–1) to Regente das Pedras [Capitão Felix Velasco Galiano], June 22, 1805, fl. 8.
57 AHNA, Códice 91 (A–20–1), Governor Noronha to Capitão Francisco B. I. Sardinha, June 24, 1805, fls. 9v–11. Sabiango’s people may well have been Mbondo, whose state between Kasanje and Matamba was also hit by Galiano and his men. See Vellut, “Le royaume de Cassange,” p. 125; Joseph C. Miller, “Kings, Lists, and History in Kasanje,” *History in Africa*, vol. 6 (1979), p. 73.
58 AHNA, Códice 91 (A–20–1), Governor Noronha to Regente das Pedras [Capitão Felix Velasco Galiano], May 30, 1805, fl. 6.
European interlopers in the rivers and bays lining the coast to the north of Luanda, an act Noronha considered seditious. The last individual was Mulua, an identity that people immediately east of the Kwango gave to commercial and military emissaries of the Mwaant Yaav, the ruler of the Lunda. Noronha and the Mwaant Yaav had been keen on establishing commercial relations, but such an alliance had not yet materialized. Consequently, the Governor did not feel bound to return the Mulua captive to the Lunda state.

Finally, over and beyond state-sanctioned military operations and raids, large numbers of West Central Africans could experience enslavement under quite unusual circumstances. One of these cases comes from the Kingdom of Ngongo in the mid-1600s. In April 1653, Ngola Ari wrote a letter to his counterpart, D. João IV, King of Portugal, in which he accused “Antonio Teixeira de Mendonça, a powerful man in Angola, who is today deceased, of having usurped my chiefs and vassals for use in his agricultural estates, numbering over 10,000 people, without ever restituting them in spite of various attempts carried out to this effect on my part.” Ngola Ari, who was installed on the Ndongo throne by the Portuguese in 1626 so as to ensure the movement of numerous slaves to Luanda for trans-Atlantic shipment, had by then loyally served this cause for nearly four decades. Mendonça, in turn, probably arrived in Luanda around 1623 to help carve out the Reino de Angola, as the Portuguese called the port town and its hinterland under their effective or nominal control. A Second Lieutenant, the young man was posted to Ambaca, the fortified outpost that overlooked the important trade route between the Lukala and Kwanza rivers channelling slaves from the far interior to Luanda. Once there, Mendonça got into the habit of periodically visiting Ngola Ari, whose court was some 10 kilometres distant from Ambaca. The young Second Lieutenant eventually fell in love with one of Ngola’s daughters, who soon moved to Ambaca. Since Ngola Ari considered Mendonça as his son-in-law, it was most likely in the context of a marital union, not to mention a political alliance between an African king and a Portuguese military official, that more than 10,000 Ndongo free subjects had followed the daughter of their king to the estates that her lover was developing between the Lukala and Kwanza rivers. The relationship lasted some 15 years, after which it came to an abrupt end. Perhaps Ngola’s daughter returned to her

59 See Miller, Way of Death, pp. 622, 631.
60 Ibid., p. 27.
62 This reconstruction of Mendonça’s career is taken from Curto, “A restituição de 10.000 súbditos ndongo,” pp. 191–194.
father’s court, or she may even have passed away. The 10,000 Ndongo subjects, however, were forced by Mendonça to continue to work on his agricultural estates *de facto*, if not *de jure*, as slaves.

The otherwise uneventful career of Second Lieutenant Mendonça subsequently took off thanks, by and large, to his role in ridding Portuguese Angola of the Dutch. Following his promotion to Captain-Major of the *Reino de Angola* in 1649, his name was placed before the Portuguese Crown as one of three candidates for the governorship of Benguela, the second highest position in the colonial administration of Angola, as well as a possible candidate for the Governorship of Angola itself. By mid-1650, Mendonça not only derived substantial revenues from his agricultural estates and owned large numbers of slaves, but had risen into one of the most important colonial officers in Angola. He had even married, this time in the Catholic tradition, *Dona* Ana de São Miguel, daughter of Roque de São Miguel, a Spanish nobleman who had arrived in Luanda at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and Maria das Neves, a local *mulatta* or perhaps black female. A Luso-African woman, *Dona* Ana was herself a person of considerable means. Although she may have inherited the agricultural estates that her father possessed along the Kwanza river, she had grown rich by accruing the wealth of two earlier husbands who had passed away. Sometime between the end of 1650 and early 1652, however, *Dona* Ana’s latest catch experienced the same fate as her earlier spouses. When Ngola Ari wrote to the King of Portugal complaining about the 10,000 or so Ndongo usurped by his former son-in-law, the agricultural estates and numerous slaves owned by Mendonça had also become part of the assets amassed by *Dona* Ana.

Once the accusation by Ngola Ari was evaluated by the Conselho Ultramarino, the consultative body of the Portuguese Crown in matters relevant to its overseas possessions, João IV concluded that no one from Ndongo had been usurped by Mendonça. Yet, since the benefits that Mendonça and his inheritors came to enjoy from such a large number of Ndongo subjects over more than a decade represented a relatively significant loss of labour and revenue for Ngola Ari, compensatory measures were justly called for. In late 1654 or early 1655, João IV ordered the Governor of Angola, Luís Martins de Sousa Chichorro, to have the past labour of the Ndongo subjects, including those who had died while working on the estates of Mendonça and his inheritors, properly evaluated and reimbursed directly to Ngola Ari, with those still alive being promptly returned to the plaintiff. The King of Ndongo was surely delighted with this decision. For *Dona* Ana, however, it meant

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63 On *Dona* Ana earlier’s life, see *ibid.*, pp. 194–197.
the loss of a significant labour force from her agricultural estates and the wealth it represented.

Evaluating the labour of more than 10,000 Ndongo labourers on the estates of Mendonça’s inheritor, including the value of those who had died there during a period of more than 15 years, and then identifying those still alive to be returned to Ngola Ari must have placed quite a strain on the administration of the colony. This gave Dona Ana time to defend her assets. Over the next few years, she and her lawyer prepared a blistering petition that was subsequently forwarded to the Portuguese Crown. Therein, she highlighted that the King of Portugal had made an “arbitrary decision at the request of an African King” through fraudulent information provided by her enemies. Arguing that she had been denied her legal right to be heard and to justify her title over Ngola Ari’s subjects, the widowed Dona further pointed out that the Crown’s decision made no reference to these individuals as slaves. The numerous slaves found on her estates and sought by Ngola Ari had actually been relinquished by him through public sale, she claimed, while the alleged Ndongo vassals were free people who had sought protection with her late husband from the “violence of tyrants.” Moreover, she disclosed, with supporting documents at hand, that the Ndongo slaves in question were the subject of legal suits pending between Ngola Ari and herself. Consequently, Dona Ana asked that the Portuguese Crown should only allow the King of Ndongo to run his case through the ordinary court. In November 1661, after this new information was evaluated by the Conselho Ultramarino, the Queen Regent of Portugal instructed the Governor of Angola, André Vidal Negreiros, to annul the royal order of 1654: the right to the surviving Ndongo vassals and slaves was to be litigated between Ngola Ari and Dona Ana before the Ouvidor Geral or Crown Judge in Luanda and two good men, of clear consciences and versed in things of the Reino de Angola.

Whether the litigation did take place is not possible to say, since the case thereafter disappears from the extant documentation. The fate of the 10,000 or so Ndongo individuals in dispute is consequently unknown. Yet, even if Dona Ana and Ngola Ari did litigate, it is doubtful that restitution would have taken place. That Dona Ana suggested this path for resolution had little to do with a sense of fair play. Rather, as a Luso-African woman of significant means, she would have known well and frequently interacted with those in Luanda assigned to hear the case. After all, they were her peers. In this context, Ngola Ari would have surely been bogged down in the court or simply have lost the decision. The dissolution

of Mendonça’s amorous relationship with the Ngola’s daughter resulted, whatever the particular circumstances, in several thousand Ndongo being enslaved on his agricultural estates, an asset that his widow was quick to protect.

**Individual Experiences of Enslavement**

If large numbers of West Central Africans from various backgrounds found themselves enslaved through state-sanctioned military expeditions and raids, not to mention the odd unusual circumstance, others from even more diverse backgrounds experienced enslavement on an individual level through different mechanisms. Sometime during the 1760s, for example, a woman and her seven- or eight-year-old daughter, subsequently known as Lucrécia, arrived at Luanda from the interior in a slave coffle owned by the *Companhia Geral do Grão Pará e Maranhão* or the *Companhia Geral de Pernambuco e Paraíba*.67 There, Lucrécia and her mother languished in grief, refusing to eat even the best of food, whether local or from their own country. Upon witnessing such obstinacy and stubbornness, Raimundo Jalamá, one of the company’s administrators, decided to investigate. He soon found out that a dearly beloved husband had treacherously pawned his wife and child to cover an unspecified debt or fine. Since the creditor received no overtures from the said husband or his lineage to redeem them, the pawns were subsequently sold into slavery. Waiting to experience the Atlantic crossing into the “hell for blacks,”68 as Brazil was known, Lucrécia’s mother wept incessantly. With her head clasped between her knees and continuing to refuse to eat, she eventually succumbed to death. Lucrécia, on the other hand, survived the ordeal: some 20 years later, letters arrived in Luanda with information that she was still alive.69

By then, pawnship was only one institution that had been contorted to turn otherwise free individuals such as Lucrécia and her mother into slaves.70 Early in 1778, Dom João Manoel Sylvestre, the nephew of the ruler of Gombe Amuquiam, a Ndembu chiefdom, was caught stealing some trifles from the nearby sova of Nambo Angongo. The punishment meted out by the offended party went beyond the petty nature of the crime. Dom Sylvestre was sold and subsequently sent to Luanda, where he was branded with the Royal Stamp. While awaiting shipment in one of the many slave barracoons that lined the bay of the port town, he did

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67 Both of these Pombaline companies were then in the business of moving relatively large numbers of captives from Angola to Brazil. See Antônio Carreira, *As Companhias Pombalinas*.
68 Part of a Brazilian proverb, first written in 1711, as found in André Joaõ Antonil, *Cultura e opulência da Brasil por suas drogas e minas* (São Paulo: Companhia Melhoramentos, 1922), pp. 92–93.
70 According to Vansina (“Ambaca Society and the Slave Trade,” pp. 14–20), pawnship emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century as an important source of slaves throughout the interior of Angola.
not, however, claim the privilege of “original freedom,” a privilege through which the Portuguese Crown sought to protect the unjustly enslaved from bondage. It sometimes resulted in inquiries into the often shady circumstances of enslavement, with those deemed to have been illegally enslaved allowed to return to the world of the free. As a result, when Dom Sylvestre’s uncle complained to the Governor of Angola about the disproportionate sentence meted out by the ruler of Nambo Angongo, it was to no avail. He was obliquely told to “use the competent means” against the person who had enslaved his nephew. In the meantime, because of a petty theft, Dom Sylvestre remained enslaved.

Others continued to lose their liberty through methods devised soon after the Atlantic slave trade began. Around 1775, a 15-year-old male was captured near the sources of the Zambezi by local countrymen. The youth was thereafter forced into a long and arduous trek that ended at the mouth of the Kikombo river, on the Atlantic Ocean, where he became the property of a European. Later baptized as Domingos, the young man worked his way up as the slave valet of João Ignacio Coelho, the captain of a vessel engaged in moving other slaves from West Central Africa to Brazil. One of the abductors, in turn, upon returning home from his westward venture, found the victim’s father anxiously waiting for retribution. Domingos’s father enslaved his son’s abductor and at least six of his relatives and associates. He and three others of the individuals seized were soon forced to experience the same westward trek as Domingos. After falling into the hands of a professional slave dealer, they eventually embarked at Benguela on a slave ship headed for the capital of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro. In this new landscape, one of the abductors reconstructed his slave life around theft and crime, but Portuguese justice soon caught up with him: he was convicted to a life of penal servitude pulling an oar in the lighters that plied the city’s harbour. Eight years later, it was precisely under these circumstances that Domingos, most likely still sailing with Captain Coelho, encountered his captor in Rio de Janeiro.

People like the men who kidnapped Domingos were not the only victimizers subsequently to experience the trauma of seizure and slavery themselves. Donas, whose wealth and offspring were at the very basis of the Portuguese enterprise in West Central Africa, also found themselves enslaved under similar circumstances, as the example of Dona Leonor de Carvalho e Fonseca and her two daughters shows. A free-born mulatta, Dona Leonor was the widow of a sertanejo or backwoodsman.

Her husband, who was most probably a Portuguese or Brazilian immigrant, had been a merchant in the interior of Benguela. As with other sertanejos, his commercial activities surely revolved around acquiring captives in the various slave marts found throughout Angola’s central highlands with credit provided by slave traders based in the port town of Benguela. Upon his death, Dona Leonor seems to have continued in the same business. Sometime in the first half of 1811, however, she found herself and her two daughters enslaved by the sova of Mbailundu. Within a short period of time, Dona Leonor and her two daughters were sold to a group of sertanejos. The family was then moved from Mbailundu to Benguela, where mother and daughters were sold yet again. The young females became the property of Antonio de Andrade Vasconcellos e Souza, the then Governor of Benguela. Dona Leonor, on the other hand, was soon placed aboard the Gra˜o Penedo, a slave vessel bound for Rio de Janeiro via Luanda, where it sought to complement its cargo. Given her association, whether indirectly or directly, with slave trading, she would have found herself among people who had little reason to like her, perhaps even individuals whom she had herself previously bought on the central plateau. Once the Gra˜o Penedo arrived in Luanda, Dona Leonor was somehow able to get word of her horrid predicament to José de Oliveira Barbosa, the Governor of Angola. As a free-born mulata, not to mention a subject of the Portuguese Crown, Dona Leonor may well have drawn upon the privilege of “original freedom” to stop her deportation to Brazil as a slave and thereby regain her liberty. Barbosa had her immediately freed. After censuring Vasconcellos e Souza for having bought Dona Leonor’s daughters without inquiring into the circumstances under which they had been enslaved, Barbosa ordered his counterpart in Benguela to give them their liberty as well.74 Whether the family was subsequently reunited and whether the temporary enslavement experienced by its members was enough for the matriarch to disengage from slaving are not known.

Even diplomats of important West Central African states lost their freedom through similarly surreptitious means. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Kings of Kongo had long become accustomed to sending their offspring and other promising noble youngsters to Luanda to acquire a western education. In August 1803, the local seminary saw the arrival of Dom Afonso, a nephew of Garcia V, precisely for that

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73 This seems to have been the first of eight slaving expeditions that the Gra˜o Penedo is known to have carried out from West Central Africa to Rio de Janeiro between 1811 and 1819. See David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, eds., The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), voyages 7037, 7080, 7114, 7149, 7174, 29, 67, and 7206.

74 AHNA, Código 4094, José de Oliveira Barbosa to Antonio de Andrade Vasconcellos e Souza, August 18, 1811, fls. 387–387v.
purpose. Some six years later, Dom Afonso was joined by one of Garcia’s sons, Dom Pedro. To cover the costs associated with their education, King Garcia annually sent three slaves under the care of one of his ambassadors for sale at Angola’s colonial capital. The sums thereby made available to Prince Pedro and his cousin do not seem to have caused undue hardship, but in 1812 Pedro appeared to have become dissatisfied with the subsidy emanating from this arrangement. To compensate, he also sold the ambassador who had delivered the slaves that year. In the blink of an eye, a member of Kongo’s diplomatic corps found himself shackled inside a slaving ship about to engage in the trans-Atlantic crossing. Upon learning of this event, Governor Barbosa sent Prince Pedro and his cousin back to São Salvador, the capital of Kongo, for Garcia V to sanction as he pleased. To avert a diplomatic incident that could perturb Portugal’s oldest alliance in West Central Africa, he also sent a number of queries to Brazil to ascertain the whereabouts of the Kongo nobleman and have him returned to Luanda.75 The endeavour was akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Of the 10,704 slaves known to have been shipped in 1812 from Angola’s colonial capital,76 those who survived the middle passage were landed in Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Salvador, and even more northerly regions such as Maranhão and Pará.77 Eventually, the enslaved ambassador was found somewhere in Brazil. After reappearing in Luanda sometime later, he headed back to his native land to enjoy life as a free person and the privileges due to a noble of Garcia’s court, all in the company of the person who had sold him into slavery.

Indeed, all kinds of individuals who directly or indirectly underpinned the Atlantic slave trade were particularly prone to enslavement themselves through kidnapping and other deceitful means. As the following examples show, Domingos’s kidnappers, Dona Leonor de Carvalho e Fonseca, and the Kongolese ambassador were far from alone in this context. Towards the end of January 1817, a coffle of slaves descending from the central Angolan highlands arrived in Benguela for sale. Among the captives were Sebastião Amado, Antonio Simão da Costa, Miguel Domingos Ferreira, and Damião José, all Luso-Africans as their Christian names indicate. Their new owners sought to export them, requiring that they be branded with the royal stamp. During the act of branding, however, they all declared to have been free. This soon led to an inquiry surrounding their enslavement. The four captives alleged that they worked for Custódio

Dias dos Santos, a Lieutenant Colonel of the Militia and merchant in Luanda. Their employer had sent them with cloth and other trade goods to buy slaves in the interior of Benguela, but local folk somewhere in the central highlands had imprisoned the four men and subsequently sold them as slaves. Amado, Costa, Ferreira, and José went through the indignity of being sold two more times before arriving in Benguela, where they had the chance to draw upon the privilege of original freedom. The extant sources provide no information as to whether these four Luso-African individuals were successful in regaining their freedom. That their enslavers lived far away from Benguela made the circumstances difficult to corroborate. When informed of the case, the Governor of Angola, Luiz da Motta Feo e Torres, could have easily had their story verified with Custodio Dias dos Santos, who, at the time, still resided in Luanda. Instead, Motta Feo merely instructed his subordinate, Manuel de Abreu de Mello e Alvim, the Governor of Benguela, that the issue of the “blacks who there proclaimed their liberty had to be adjudicated by the Juizo Privativo das Liberdades.”

Yet, during the mid-1810s, Benguela was not merely a place where some people enslaved in the interior could attempt to regain their freedom by drawing upon the privilege of original freedom. It remained a relatively important slave-exporting town where African residents and others from both its immediate vicinity and beyond were treacherously enslaved. Sometime following the rainy season of 1816, José Manuel set out alone from Benguela into the hinterland. Laden with trade goods, his objective was to exchange these for slaves. José Manuel was part of an army of black, mulatto, and white petty traders based at Benguela who, with the coming of the cacimbo, or the drier period following the heavy rains, annually left central Angola’s slave exporting town with items of exchange to acquire captives in the interior. This particular commercial venture did not go well. Somewhere in the interior, José Manuel had the misfortune of having his trade goods stolen by the local people, who also arrested and convicted him, for reasons that remain completely obscure, to pay a fine of 46 panos or small pieces of cloth. These panos, with a sale price of between 18$000 and 20$000 réis at Benguela, would have been valued at roughly twice that in the hinterland. Alone and imprisoned in the

78 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Manuel de Abreu de Mello e Alvim [Governor of Benguela] to Luiz da Motta Feo [Governor of Angola], January 31, 1817, fls. 112–113.
79 AHNA, Códice 155 (B–12–3), Luiz da Motta Feo to Manuel de Abreu de Mello e Alvim, April 30, 1817, fl. 16v.
80 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Manuel de A. de Mello e Alvim [Governor of Benguela] to Luiz da Motta Feo [Governor of Angola], November 21, 1818, fls. 32–32v.
81 In Benguela, the réis value of the 46 panos represented about 25% of the average cost of an exportable slave, which rose from 70$000 to 75$000 réis between 1815 and 1819 (AHU, Cx. 131, Doc. 45 “Mappa Comparativo das Produçõens [de Benguella, 1815]”; AHU, Cx. 137, Doc. 72,
interior, José Manuel had few possibilities to secure the indemnity required by his captors. Yet he was soon delivered from his predicament. The sova of the area, upon learning of this incident, offered to settle the fine imposed upon the culprit if the latter agreed to repay him the 46 panos. The prisoner immediately agreed to the generous terms of his unexpected saviour.82 José Manuel was thereby able to regain his freedom, after which he headed straight for Benguela.

Once back in his hometown, José Manuel wasted little time in attempting to settle his obligation. He could think of no one in a better position to help than Antônio Leal do Sacramento. Sacramento then owned at least one agricultural estate in the immediate interior of Benguela, where he also maintained a rural residence, as well as a retinue of slaves both in town and near the mouth of the Katumbela River. By 1817, he had long translated this wealth into an appointment as the Lieutenant Colonel of the Henriques regiment,83 the highest position that a local, black male could attain in the military structure of Benguela. Beyond his economic and social success, Sacramento also seems to have been a ruthless and treacherous individual. José Manuel may have been aware of this aspect of Sacramento’s character, but his need for financial assistance was pressing.

With the Lieutenant Colonel being a black man like himself, the senior military officer of his own regiment, and a person of considerable means, José Manuel probably concluded that Sacramento could effectively help a non-paid, black subordinate in dire need. The soldier-trader anxiously approached him for an advance with which to repay the debt that had secured his release in the interior. The Lieutenant Colonel, however, flatly refused. A second plea went similarly denied by the senior officer. Discouraged, José Manuel approached Sacramento a third time, though now with a proposition that could hardly be refused. To cover the pledge incurred with the African chief inland, the soldier-trader offered the Lieutenant Colonel his personal services until the value of the debt

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82 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim [Governor of Benguela] to Motta Feo [Governor of Angola], November 21, 1818, fl. 32v.
83 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, December 11, 1817, fls. 154v–155v.
was liquidated.84 This time, Sacramento found the conditions offered alluring, most likely because the debt's value was not specified. He now agreed to help his subordinate. José Manuel soon received 46 panos, as well as one coat of arms and one bottle of aguardente,85 goods that he promptly forwarded to the African chief who had secured his deliverance from incarceration in the interior.86 The debt incurred inland was thereby liquidated, but to do so, José Manuel had turned himself into the personal servant of Sacramento.

To settle his new debt, José Manuel performed all kinds of chores for his senior military officer. He even carried Sacramento on tipoia or palequin, a task usually reserved for slaves. José Manuel endured these hapless circumstances for about two years. Still the Lieutenant Colonel thought that the services rendered fell far short of the original value of the goods loaned. To make up the difference, he began to consider selling his servant into slavery. Sometime in the middle of 1818, José Manuel learned about these intentions and, much concerned, lost no time in alerting his kin.

The family quickly met with Governor Mello e Alvim, arguing that, although José Manuel had turned himself into a servant, he was nevertheless a free person and consequently could not be sold into slavery.87 Claiming the privilege of original freedom, they asked Mello e Alvim to “oppose the sale” of their blood-relative and, equally important, that he “give them enough time to gather the merchandise” which José Manuel had obtained from Lieutenant Colonel Sacramento to settle the debt with the African chief.88 Mello e Alvim acquiesced to both requests, after which the family of José Manuel absorbed themselves in accumulating the goods for which he had turned himself into a servant two years earlier. Once this was accomplished, they then set out to repay Sacramento and thereby have their relative finally released from debt bondage. The Lieutenant Colonel, however, refused reimbursement of the original debt.89 He now demanded a peça d’India, or prime male, adult slave, valued then at around 90$000 réis.90 Otherwise, he insisted, José Manuel would effectively be sold into slavery.

84 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, November 21, 1818, fl. 32v.
85 A brandy made from the must of grapes, which was rarely found in Benguela at the time. Here, as a result, the term aguardente was commonly applied to Brazilian sugar cane brandy, the alcoholic drink most voluminously available until the 1850s. See Curto, “Luso-Brazilian Alcohol and the Legal Slave Trade at Benguela.”
86 The coat of arms and the bottle of aguardente were probably included for José Manuel to cover the interest on the advance made by his benefactor.
87 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, November 21, 1818, fl. 33.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 This was the value of a peça d’India at Benguela in 1819. See AHU, Cx. 137, Doc. 72, “Mappa Comparativo das Produtoes [de Benguela, 1819].” No data seem to exist for 1818.
The kin of José Manuel desperately searched for someone who could help them meet Sacramento’s new demand. They eventually turned to José Nunes Romão, a Lieutenant of Benguela’s militia regiment, the same outfit headed by Sacramento and to which José Manuel belonged, whom they humbly asked if he could “lend them a good black female or male slave with which to satisfy” the Lieutenant Colonel. Romão loaned them a “good black molecana” or young female slave, valued at 64$000 réis, with which to secure the freedom of their relative. The molecana was immediately brought to the military headquarters in Benguela, so that Mello e Alvim could witness the payment. The Governor had Sacramento called into his office, where he instructed Sacramento to accept the young female slave in reimbursement of the debt incurred by José Manuel. The Lieutenant Colonel acquiesced, but only on the condition that he also be paid the difference between the value of the molecana and that of a pec¸a d’India, a matter of some 26$000 réis. This was totally unacceptable to the Governor, who impressed upon Sacramento that “he should consider himself well paid, release José Manuel from the irons, and thus allow him to enjoy his Freedom.”

Sacramento walked home with the molecana, an indication that he had accepted the final ruling of Mello e Alvim, but he still did not release his personal servant, whom he kept for eventual sale. The refusal of the Lieutenant Colonel to set José Manuel free, in spite of having been duly reimbursed, soon led the servant’s relatives to meet again with the Governor. They bitterly complained about this manoeuvre, requesting that the molecana given to secure José Manuel’s freedom be returned to them. Mello e Alvim agreed and soon ordered the Lieutenant Colonel not only to return the female slave to José Manuel’s kin, but also not to sell the servant. Meanwhile, however, Sacramento had already sold the molecana for 64$000 réis. Upon learning of this occurrence, the Governor immediately instructed the new owner of the molecana to give her up to the relatives of José Manuel. Without informing Mello e Alvim, however, José Manuel’s family had already paid her new owner 70$004 réis for her. The young female slave was again brought to Sacramento, who accepted her and finally released José Manuel from his personal service. A debt originally valued in Benguela at slightly over 20$000 réis had cost José Manuel two years of work and his relatives

91 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, November 21, 1818, fl. 33v.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid. This payment is written as 70,004 contos or 70,004$000 réis, which would have been an astronomical sum, representing twice the amount that the Portuguese Crown secured from the tax on 4,867 slaves exported from Benguela in 1819. See Curto, “Luso-Brazilian Alcohol and the Legal Slave Trade at Benguela.” The scribe who wrote the document thus most likely added three zeros to the actual figure.
roughly the average price of a slave.94 Sacramento, in turn, had succeeded in securing a net profit of around 300 per cent over the Benguela value of the goods he had contracted with his subordinate, on top of having had the services of José Manuel over a period that more than compensated for the value of the original loan.

Still, the Lieutenant Colonel remained unsatisfied. The plight of the trader-soldier was not yet over. Early in July of 1818, Sacramento forwarded a petition to the Governor of Angola in Luanda regarding, in part, his ex-servant. He argued that José Manuel was, in effect, his slave and that through the connivance of the latter’s family he had been forced by the Governor of Benguela to relinquish his rights over this individual. Appending no fewer than six documents supporting his claim of ownership,95 Sacramento sought the restitution of José Manuel as his rightful property. The petition led to a bitter administrative dispute between Mello e Alvim and his titular superior, Motta Feo, with the former continuing to support José Manuel and the latter championing Sacramento’s cause. When, in September 1819, the governorship of Angola was assumed by Manuel Vieira de Albuquerque Tovar, Sacramento lost little time in petitioning the new governor to have José Manuel returned as his slave. Months passed, however, before Tovar requested that Mathias Joaquim de Britto, who had replaced Mello e Alvim as Governor of Benguela, submit an official opinion regarding the contentious case.96 In early July 1820, the request had still not been met.97 Neither Britto nor Tovar tackled the case with the same zeal as their predecessors. Meanwhile, an aging Sacramento appears to have lost the strength to pursue the matter further. Four years after having had the misfortune of being arrested and incarcerated in the interior, José Manuel’s long confrontation with enslavement thus came to an end.

At the same time as José Manuel struggled against being enslaved by Sacramento, a woman was confronting a similar fate at the hands of the treacherous Lieutenant Colonel. Early one morning in May or June 1817, Nbena, a Ndombe female in the prime of her life, began the long walk from her village in the Katumbela area to Benguela, some 20 kilometres southwest.98 Nbena was accompanied by her young daughter.

94 The average price of a slave at Benguela in 1819 was 75$000 réis. See AHU, Cx. 137, Doc. 72, “Mappa Comparativo das Produções [de Benguela, 1819].”
95 AHNA, Códice 155 (B–12–3) Motta Feo to Mello e Alvim, October 6, 1818, fls. 39–39v. The said documents have yet to surface in the AHNA.
96 AHNA, Códice 278 (C–16–2), Tovar to Britto, May 18, 1820, fl. 16.
97 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Britto to Tovar, July 3, 1820, fl. 131v.
Although the reason for this journey is not clear, Ndombe women by then regularly made this trek to sell their agricultural produce in Benguela, where food shortages were a chronic reality.\(^99\) On a subsequent occasion, Nbena made the same trip for precisely this reason.\(^100\) However, the road to and from Benguela was anything but safe, as Ndombe women were often robbed and sometimes became victims of even worse transgressions.\(^101\) Not long after Nbena set out on this particular trek, she encountered an old slave woman who worked on the nearby agricultural estate of Lieutenant Colonel Sacramento, her owner. This female slave cunningly convinced Nbena to interrupt her trip and, instead, follow the slave to the estate house. Once arrived, she introduced Nbena to Sacramento’s wife. Advanced in years and grown tired of labouring as a field hand, the female slave informed her mistress that she was now too old to be useful; she had brought the much younger Nbena has her replacement.\(^102\) Nbena, along with her daughter, had been conned into slavery. The following day, she was given an axe and forced to work on the Sacramento estate. As a free-born woman, however, Nbena would have none of this imposed servile condition. She fled with her daughter the very same day that she was forced to begin work as a slave.\(^103\)

Nbena headed straight for the secure world of her village, where she could again enjoy a free life amidst her relatives and possessions, including, ironically, her own slaves.\(^104\) Her brief experience as a slave created enough concern that she does not seem to have ventured out of the village during the following five to six months. Then, in November or December 1817, this apprehension either dissipated or was perhaps overridden by economic issues, and Nbena set out again from her village to sell produce in Benguela. This time, the trip went unimpeded. Nbena, with her daughter tagging along, arrived safely in Benguela to go about her business. Someone, however, recognized her as a fugitive from the Sacramento estate. Word was quickly sent to the owner, who was in town. Suddenly, a few of his trusted slaves encircled Nbena and her daughter, kidnapped them, and forcibly brought them to their master. The Lieutenant Colonel lost little time in dealing with the recaptured runaway. Nbena

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100 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, September 26, 1818, fls. 16–17.
101 As is clear from the orders given by Governors of Benguela Joaquim Aurélio de Oliveira in January 17, 1825 and Joaquim Luiz Bastos in November 24, 1846 attempting to solve this situation (excerpted in Delgado, A Famosa e Histórica Benguela, pp. 95 and 174, respectively).
102 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, December 11, 1817, fls. 154v–155v; AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, September 26, 1818, fls. 16–17, and November 21, 1818, fls. 30v–36.
103 Ibid.
104 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, December 11, 1817, fls. 154v–155v; AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, November 21, 1818, fls. 30v–36.
was branded on the spot and then sold, along with her daughter, for 70\$000 réis to João de Oliveira Dias, captain of the Astréa, a Lisbon vessel soon to depart for Luanda. The Astréa was most certainly headed for Brazil, the destination of the majority of vessels outbound from the colonial capital of Angola. Nbena, with her daughter in tow, was poised to experience the Atlantic crossing into the “hell for blacks.”

News of Nbena’s abduction, sale to Captain Dias, and forced departure to Luanda quickly reached her village. Alarmed by this information, her relatives soon mobilized and headed for Benguela. A few hours later, a large number of people descended upon the town’s military headquarters, among them five or six Ndombe sovas, one of whom was an uncle of Nbena. They created a great uproar, clamouring in favour of Nbena, complaining about her unlawful enslavement, and demanding justice from Governor Mello e Alvim. Although such a large number of rowdy people was a “frightening” scene, Mello e Alvim believed that their cause was nothing short of disturbing. He soon decided to look into the matter and set a day for the hearing.

An even larger crowd assembled in front Benguela’s military headquarters to see how this peculiar hearing unfolded. Mello e Alvim first called for his tandalla or translator, as well as other people in Benguela who had exercised the same function. He then summoned the plaintiffs, including Nbena’s relations, the Ndombe chiefs, and a number of other witnesses. All were unanimous in their depositions: Nbena was born free and had lived as such until her recent abduction; she was no slave. Thereafter, the Governor had Sacramento answer these allegations. The Lieutenant Colonel merely responded that Nbena, having been brought some seven months before to his household by an old female slave as her replacement, had fled, after which he had ordered his slaves to recapture her and then sold her to Captain Dias. In view of such a constricted answer, Mello e Alvim concluded that the matter was “extremely scandalous” and decided in favour of the plaintiffs. He ordered Sacramento to have Nbena and her daughter returned from Luanda, without delay and at

105 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, December 11, 1817, fls. 154v–155v; AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, September 26, 1818, fls. 16–17, and October 21, 1818, fls. 21v–22; AHNA, Códice 155 (B–12–3), Motta Feo to Mello e Alvim, November 21, 1818, fl. 41v; AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, November 21, 1818, fls. 30v–36.


107 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, December 11, 1817, fls. 154v–155v; AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, November 21, 1818, fls. 30v–36.

108 Prior to this incident, according to the Governor of Angola, Mello e Alvim had never officially said anything “good or bad” about Sacramento. See Motta Feo to Conde dos Arcos, June 2, 1819, Arquivos de Angola, 2nd series, no. 71–74 (1961), p. 288.
his own expense. Informed of the decision, the crowd, including Nbena’s relatives, dispersed peacefully, surely hoping for the best.

But were Nbena and her daughter still in the colonial capital of Angola? Or were they already on the Atlantic crossing headed for Brazil? Further, would the Lieutenant Colonel keep his word? To ensure that both were returned to Benguela, Mello e Alvim soon forwarded the details surrounding this case to Motta Feo in Luanda. He also asked his superior to take “the necessary measures, so that the said Negro female returns [to Benguela] from the authority of the Captain who bought her, or from wherever she may be…” Mello e Alvim’s letter arrived in Luanda quickly. Nbena and her daughter were still the property of Captain Dias, and the Astréa had not yet sailed for Brazil. Motta Feo ordered Captain Dias to comply with the request from the Governor of Benguela. Just before Christmas of 1817, the Governor of Angola was able to inform Mello e Alvim that Nbena and her daughter had embarked for Benguela, where they arrived sometime during the next few months. The Ndombé woman and her child had barely been rescued from a lifetime of “hell for blacks.”

Once back in Benguela, Nbena and her daughter were soon brought before Mello e Alvim. During this audition, the Ndombé woman immediately proclaimed original freedom: having been born and lived her life as a free person, she could not be enslaved under the attempted circumstances. While Nbena claimed the privilege of original freedom, however, Lieutenant Colonel Sacramento petitioned the Governor of Benguela to hold her and her daughter in custody while he justified through the judiciary his legitimacy as their owner. Mello e Alvim had no choice but to grant the petition from one of Benguela’s most influential individuals. The alleged slaves were placed under the charge of a local merchant, Manuel Pereira Gonçalves. Having barely escaped deportation to Brazil as slaves, Nbena and her daughter were now denied complete liberty in their own backyard.

Nbena and her daughter languished in Gonçalves’s custody for a relatively long time without the Lieutenant Colonel initiating the promised judiciary proceedings against them. By mid-1818, Mello e Alvim had lost his patience and ordered that Sacramento explain the delay in demonstrating his proof. The Lieutenant Colonel saw fit not to answer, and instead brought the matter directly before the Governor of Angola. After Motta

109 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, December 11, 1817, fls. 154v–155v.
110 Ibid.
111 AHNA, Códice 155 (B–12–3), Motta Feo to Mello e Alvim, December 23, 1817, fls. 25v–26.
112 AHNA, Códice 446 (E–2–2), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, March 12, 1818, fls. 172v–173, places them already back in Benguela.
113 AHNA, Códice 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, September 26, 1818, fls. 16–17, and November 3, 1818, fl. 25.
114 AHNA, Códice 447 ((E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, July 17, 1818, fls. 9v–10v.
Feo had the case assessed in Luanda, he concluded that, since Nbena appeared to have been owned by Sacramento for years, the matter had to be litigated by the contentious parties in Benguela’s court of first instance. Mello e Alvim objected strenuously to the interpretation of the Governor of Angola, considering the intervention both unjust and a violation of the powers and responsibilities of his own jurisdiction in Benguela. Towards the end of September, he informed his superior, “I freed the unfortunate black female, and her daughter, who protests the extremely grave affronts and the scandalous injuries committed by the Lieutenant Colonel.”

Almost one year and a half after the old, tired female slave on the Sacramento estate had deceived Nbena into slavery, the latter was finally allowed to return as a free woman with her daughter to her home, family, friends, and slaves.

The unilateral decision of Mello e Alvim did not settle Nbena’s status. The matter, along with the case of José Manuel, became the basis of the conflict that brewed between the Governor of Benguela and Motta Feo until mid-1819. No sooner had Motta Feo’s gubernatorial term come to an end than Sacramento quickly attempted to enlist the support of his replacement to have Nbena returned as his slave. As with José Manuel, however, neither Tovar nor the new Governor of Benguela developed a strong interest in the Nbena case. Such official lack of interest perhaps dampened Sacramento’s will to pursue the matter further. In July 1820, Nbena continued to live as a free person in her village, with her daughter and among her own slaves.

The particular cases of José Manuel and Nbena were far from uncommon in Benguela, where many other people experienced the same fate. When, in November 1824, Joaquim Aurélio de Oliveira became the interim Governor of Benguela, he found the central highlands in a state of “general rebellion,” with the local populations “stealing from and killing [coastal] traders….” The primary reason behind this insurrection was the “inhumanity with which were treated the central highlanders who came to trade in Benguela.” Some of the town’s inhabitants “massacred the miserable negros who, in good faith, went to their establishments to trade, by placing them in irons and handing out severe punishment so as to subdue them into slavery and then export them.” Since the relatives of these unfortunate individuals could not go to Benguela for fear of undergoing a similar experience, they consequently began to prey on the coastal traders who roamed throughout the hinterland.

A few months before his interim position ended in November

115 AHNA, Código 447 (E–2–3), Mello e Alvim to Motta Feo, September 26, 1818, fls. 16–17.
117 AHNA, Código 449 (E–3–1), Joaquim Aurélio de Oliveira to Joaquim José Monteiro Torres, September 22, 1825, fl. 55.
1825, Oliveira confidently reported that no similar “insults” had been perpetrated along the roads of the interior. This may well indicate that he had taken the necessary measures to stop those in Benguela who, by enslaving African commercial partners who supplied the port with numerous captives, had placed the town’s only economic activity of note in jeopardy. If that was the case, however, the effect was but temporary. Within days of beginning his second appointment as interim Governor of Benguela on March 28, 1827, Oliveira found himself freeing an unspecified number of individuals who had been captured within the confines of the port town, as well as others seized in Dombe Grande da Quizamba. Among the rogues responsible for their capture were “even women [who], on the pretext of non-existing debts unpaid by their forebears, have poor black folk shackled to sell them off.”

Oliveira hoped to punish the people who had committed these actions. If he did, however, the example produced few dividends.

Benguela was then experiencing an upsurge in demand for captive labour before the importation of slaves in Brazil, its single most important market, was scheduled to become an illegal enterprise at the end of March 1830. As a result, until the very end, other individuals continued to be enslaved within the confines of the port town through devious methods. Among these were a black woman and her two daughters, all forras or freed persons, who were surreptitiously apprehended around the beginning of July 1827 by Antonio Lopes Anjo. The captor, a Captain of the Ordenancás or second-line colonial militia, had held a number of important colonial administrative positions in Benguela, including Interim Governor of the port town in late 1823, and had risen to become one of its principal slave merchants. This did not stop the local authorities from going after him. Anjo was tried and sentenced before a military court. His victims, in turn, regained their liberty. However, when appraised of the dossier, the Governor of Angola found a number of legal inconsistencies and ordered a new trial to be carried out before the Juiz de Fora, the high-ranking, independent judge appointed to Benguela. Upon receiving his orders, Joaquim Aurélio de Oliveira could not contain his thoughts. A civil suit would see one of Benguela’s leading residents quickly “canonized into sainthood by the most trustworthy of witnesses,” while the poor black woman “would have to flee every time that a ship was about to sail for fear that she and her daughters would be embarked

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118 AHNA, Códice 449 (E–3–1), Joaquim Aurélio de Oliveira to Nicolau de Abreu Castello Branco [Governor of Angola], April 4, 1827, fl. 104v.
120 AHNA, Códice 220 (C–4–3), Governor Castello Branco to Joaquim Aurélio de Oliveira [Governor of Benguela], July 22, 1827, fls. 120v–121.
clandestinely.”121 Such apprehensiveness was well-founded; within a few weeks, a *pardinha* or young mulatta had been perfidiously sold into slavery by none other than her own sister.122

**Conclusion**

From the early 1500s to 1830, enslavement emerged as a pervasive feature throughout much of West Central Africa. Millions of individuals were captured, with many destined for the Atlantic slave trade and others for internal “consumption.” All kinds of people underwent this experience: soldiers of routed African armies and those who comprised their baggage trains, simple village folk, petty criminals, the offspring and other relatives of African political leaders, Luso-Africans who one way or another underpinned the slave trading economies of Luanda and Benguela, and even *Donas* whose wealth and offspring were at the very basis of the Portuguese enterprise in West Central Africa. In the process, women lost their male partners, children were deprived of their parents and grandparents, families were torn apart, and communities disappeared from one day to the next. Similarly, people from numerous backgrounds were attracted to the gains to be had by enslaving others. These included not only the Portuguese and Brazilian male immigrants who set up shop in Angola, their mulatto and mulatta offspring, and Luso-Africans of either gender. Indeed, male and female Africans also figured prominently as victimizers: political authorities, young aristocrats, thugs and other people of bad conscience, individuals with grudges against kin members, persons defaulting on loans or unable to pay fines, and even slaves seeking an immediate way out of their predicament. Through the violence and insecurity they collectively created arose a tragically enormous enterprise that devalued the human condition in West Central Africa and beyond. The only consolation or justice for the victims lay in the fact that not a few of their enslavers would ultimately experience similar if not greater misfortunes.

121 AHNA, Códice 449 (E–3–1), Aurélio de Oliveira to Nicolau de Abreu Castello Branco [Governor of Angola], August 13, 1827, fl. 114v.