Introduction

In the 1840s, Nanga, a Kimbundu speaker from Libolo, near the coast of present-day Angola, was pawned by his mother. She used her son to free one of her brothers, who had been sold earlier for adultery, an offence in many parts of the region punishable by banishment, enslavement, or even death.[1] Africans in the region often pawned slaves or free family members as collateral, a way of securing quick credit to buy goods, pay debts, or invest in a business. The objective was to redeem the pawns within an agreed time period. In the interim, lenders could use the pawns for labor in several activities. If borrowers defaulted on their loans, pawned individuals, enslaved or free, could be further exchanged. Some clearly fell into the hands of creditors who foresaw selling them to traders rather than holding them as collateral.[2] This is what happened to Nanga. Although

[1] Details on Nanga's story come from Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana*, ed. P. E. H. Hair and David Dalby (Graz: Akademische Druck, U. Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 15. On adultery as a crime and form of enslavement in West Central Africa see Roquinaldo Ferreira, "Slaving and Resistance to Slaving in West Central Africa." In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 121–22; Roquinaldo Amaral Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 198; Mariana P. Cândido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 230–32; Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 164.

[2] Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Pawnship in Historical Perspective." In *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective*, ed. Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade." *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (1999): 333–55; Paul E. Lovejoy and

his mother redeemed her sibling, she failed to reclaim her own son. Her creditors placed Nanga in the hands of Portuguese traders at Luanda who put him on a transatlantic slaver bound for Brazil.[3]

In the nineteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade was increasingly under attack. Despite the rising European demand for goods produced in the Americas with slave labor, such as cotton and sugar, slavery and the slave trade came to be seen as something that was morally wrong and should be suppressed.[4] Great Britain was no doubt the most important power in this process. Not only did it abolish its own slave trade in 1807, it encouraged other nations to follow suit by signing a series of bilateral agreements for the gradual suppression of the traffic. Britain established courts, some of them international, to adjudicate ships accused of illegal slave trading and deployed an antislave trade squadron to patrol the coasts of Africa and the Americas.[5] Nanga's story has a neat twist. A British man of war intercepted his vessel and took it for adjudication in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The court found the ship and its crew guilty of trading slaves and released all those enslaved.[6] Nanga, a free man, adopted the name John Smart and remained in Sierra Leone with a woman from his own country. Seven years after Nanga's liberation, Sigismund Koelle, a German missionary, took down his story and made it available for posterity as part of his *Polyglotta Africana*, primarily a study in African languages.[7]

Nanga did not share the fate of the majority of Africans forced into the transatlantic slave trade. He never worked on a plantation, in a mine, or in

David Richardson, "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c.1600–1810." *Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 67–89.

[3] Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana*, 15.

[4] David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 234–38; Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 208–09; David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 23–26; James Walvin, *Crossings: Africa, the Americas, and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 169–76.

[5] Eltis, *Economic Growth*, 81–101; Walvin, *Crossings*, 176–92.

[6] The "African Origins" portal, which provides users with access to all lists of Africans rescued from slave ships adjudicated at the courts of Freetown, has records of three individuals who fit Koelle's description of Nanga. Two sailed from Cabinda and one from Ambriz between 1843 and 1845. Although Nanga told Koelle that he had been handed to Portuguese slave traders at Luanda, he may have been transported from these other two ports because the Portuguese had prohibited the traffic from Luanda in 1836 and the British established a court at that port in 1845. David Eltis and Philip Misevich, "African Origins: Portal to Africans Liberated from Transatlantic Slave Vessels," Online database (2009), African ids 53559, 54216, and 175537, www.african-origins.org/.

[7] Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana*, 15.

the streets of a city in the Americas. He never felt the pain of having the family that he rebuilt at great cost torn apart as a result of a commercial transaction. He never spent the days wondering whether he or any of his descendants would ever regain freedom. Nonetheless, his journey from enslavement to shipment follows a trajectory similar to that by which millions of other Africans traveled to the Americas. This book focuses on that journey. From where did these Africans come? How were they transported? Who captured them? Why? What was the impact of the trade on their communities? More importantly, could anybody be enslaved or were there specific criteria determining who was eligible for enslavement? These questions lie at the heart of the whole enterprise and this book will explore them in light of the West Central African experience at the peak of its involvement in the traffic.

By focusing on the journey Africans took from the interior to the coast, this book contributes significantly to our understanding of the history of Africa and the African Diaspora. It traces for the first time the inland origins of the slaves carried off as the transatlantic slave trade reached its peak. Although most slaves transported to the Americas came from West Central Africa, historians have paid less attention to this region than to others involved in the trade. The book also sheds light on African motivation to participate in the traffic as well as on the ordeals that those caught up in this huge migration experienced. Finally, thanks to the sources examined and the maps they allowed us to create, historians of the African Diaspora will be better able to explore the African contribution to the making of the New World. In addition, descendants of Africans, at least those whose ancestors arrived in the last century of the trade, will be able to narrow their search for their ancestral homelands. The longevity of the transatlantic slave trade impacted the lives of millions of people. No single study will ever provide a full accounting of what happened, but an assessment of how the traffic unfolded in the African interior is fundamental to increasing our understanding of this tragic saga.

SLAVERY AND POLITICS

Scholars have often associated the huge number of slaves sold into the trade with major political developments in the interior of Africa, notably with processes of state formation and imperial expansion. They believe that the enslavement and subsequent sale of slaves required such great resources that only individuals who commanded significant numbers of

followers could undertake such activities. J. D. Fage, for example, suggests that the slave trade tended to integrate, strengthen, and develop political authority, but to weaken or destroy more segmentary societies in Africa.[8] A. A. Boahen claims that the slave trade constituted the principal source of income for many rulers and military leaders, who had a monopoly over the sale and enslavement of individuals on the African coast.[9] Similarly, Patrick Manning argues that rulers, who succeeded in profiting and expanding at the expense of their neighbors, captured most of the slaves sold into the trade.[10] Finally, Martin Klein broadly endorses these positions by stressing that the trade required such large resources that rulers and raiding bands of professional warriors dominated the enslavement and sale of slaves across the Atlantic.[11]

In West Central Africa, the origins of slaves sold into the trade are frequently associated with the expansion of the Lunda Empire and the formation of the Imbangala Kingdom of Kasanje. On the basis of oral traditions collected in the mid-nineteenth century, in addition to Portuguese documentary evidence, Jan Vansina, David Birmingham, and Joseph Miller argue that the Lunda expansion began long before the eighteenth century. In addition, they claim Lunda dissidents, led by a man named Kinguri acting in accordance with Imbangala traditions, left their country after Luba hunters assumed control over the government. En route to a new environment, they encountered Portuguese soldiers, who were themselves at war with their neighbors on the coast of present-day Angola. Since the Portuguese were short of manpower, they welcomed the arrival of and recruited the newcomers, who proved to be great warriors. Further, these newcomers offered to exchange their prisoners of war for rare commodities imported from Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The Lunda expatriates saw this exchange as an opportunity to amass wealth and power. As a consequence, they continued to provide military support for the Portuguese. Over time, these Lunda named themselves Imbangala and founded a new state, the Kingdom of Kasanje, at the confluence of the Lucala and Kwango rivers. The Portuguese regarded

[8] J. D. Fage, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History." *Journal of African History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 402.

[9] A. A. Boahen, "New Trends and Processes in Africa in the Nineteenth Century." In *General History of Africa*, ed. J. F. A. Ajayi, vol. 6 (London: Heinemann, 1989), 61.

[10] Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 132.

[11] Martin A. Klein, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the Societies of the Western Sudan." *Social Science History* 14, no. 2 (1990): 237.

this newly formed kingdom as the principal supplier of slaves shipped from West Central Africa.[12]

However, recent research suggests that the supply of slaves sold on the coast did not necessarily depend on processes of state formation and imperial expansion within Africa. David Northrup notes that the sale of slaves in the Bight of Biafra, a major source of slaves for the transatlantic trade, was conducted mostly without the participation of African rulers. He writes that decentralized societies such as the Efik, Igbo, and Ibibio dominated the slave trade in that region.[13] These societies were generally organized in clans or lineages headed by one or more individuals who had a vote in decisions affecting the entire society. Ugo Nwokeji argues that the Aro in particular, a subgroup of the Igbo, organized themselves as a "trade diaspora," which allowed them to maintain their own identity through festivals, homages, and patronage while at the same time facilitating their political and economic hegemony in the Bight of Biafra.[14] Walter Hawthorne and Andrew Hubbell also question the emphasis scholars have traditionally placed on the role of state formation and imperial expansion in the slave trade. In their view, scholars have underestimated the ability of decentralized societies to organize and participate actively in the supply of slaves from Africa as well as defend themselves from enslavers.[15] Hawthorne, whose work focuses specifically on the transatlantic trade, notes that, although decentralized, the rice-growing Balanta of present-day Guinea Bissau, supplied many slaves to the Americas, especially to northern Brazil. Similarly, David Eltis, observing

[12] This broadly summarizes a major debate Jan Vansina, David Birmingham, and Joseph Miller had in the pages of the *Journal of African History*. The principal references to this debate include Jan Vansina, "The Foundation of the Kingdom of Kasanje." *Journal of African History* 4, no. 3 (1963): 355–74; David Birmingham, "The Date and Significance of the Imbangala Invasion of Angola." *Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (1965): 143–52; Jan Vansina, "More on the Invasions of Kongo and Angola by the Jaga and the Lunda." *Journal of African History* 7, no. 3 (1966): 421–29; Joseph C. Miller, "The Imbangala and the Chronology of Early Central African History." *Journal of African History* 13, no. 4 (1972): 549–74.

[13] David Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 89–100.

[14] G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17–21.

[15] Walter Hawthorne, "The Production of Slaves Where There Was No State: The Guinea-Bissau Region, 1450–1815." *Slavery and Abolition* 20, no. 2 (1999): 97–98; Andrew Hubbell, "A View of the Slave Trade from the Margin: Souroudougou in the Late Nineteenth-Century Slave Trade of the Niger Bend." *Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 28. See also Martin A. Klein, "The Slave Trade and Decentralized Societies." *Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 49.

a marked decline in the traffic from the Bight of Benin immediately after the Dahomean annexation of Allada and Ouidah in 1724 and 1727, suggests that processes of state formation and imperial expansion did not necessarily result in more slaves being sold into the trade.[16] Finally, Rebecca Shumway and Randy Sparks have argued more recently that the tendency of historians to focus on centralized states to the neglect of other populations has been detrimental to our knowledge of the history of the traffic from the Gold Coast.[17] As Shumway notes, "the coastal population was an essential component on how the Atlantic slave trade operated on the Gold Coast."[18]

Studies focused on the Lunda expansion itself cast doubt on the role of the slave trade in processes of state formation and imperial expansion in West Central Africa. They show that the Lunda expansion began much later than previously thought and may not have been responsible for the large number of slaves sold into the Atlantic. Based on an extensive study of kings' lists, Jean Luc Vellut claims that the Lunda expansion began in the late seventeenth century or at the beginning of the eighteenth century.[19] John Thornton dates the Lunda expansion from the same period, but he believes that it reached its maximum size, both geographically and demographically, only in 1852 with the death of Mwant Yav Nawej II, the first event recorded in Lunda history in contemporary documents.[20] Jeffrey Hoover, using linguistic data, argues that Imbangala traders introduced the figure of Kinguri into Lunda traditions, probably in the nineteenth century, to elevate the status of their own founding ancestors, who were not originally Lunda.[21] In other words, the frequently mentioned Lunda expansion, said to have begun long before the eighteenth century, may not have unfolded as previously believed. Jan Vansina, after revising his original position, went even further. Although he believes that the Lunda spread north of Angola,

[16] David Eltis, "The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment." *William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001): 34.

[17] Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 8; Randy J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[18] Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 8.

[19] Jean-Luc Vellut, "Notes sur le Lunda et la Frontière Luso-Africaine (1700–1900)." *Études d'Histoire Africaine* 3 (1972): 68.

[20] John K. Thornton, "The Chronology and Causes of Lunda Expansion to the West, c.1700–1852." *Zambia Journal of History* 1 (1981): 1.

[21] Jeffrey J. Hoover, "The Seduction of Ruweej: Reconstructing Ruund History (The Nuclear Lunda: Zaire, Angola, Zambia)" (Ph.D., Yale University, 1978), vol. 1, 213–14.

he claims that until 1846 there are no records of Lunda conquest to the south in what is now eastern Angola.[22] As a result, the slave trade would have offered little stimulus for Lunda expansion or the formation of other states in West Central Africa, including the Kingdom of Kasanje. As Vansina reflected upon the implications of this finding, "if the Kinguri story had only been subjected to critical appraisal from the outset, we historians would now be much more advanced than we are today."[23]

Recent studies on the history of slavery and the slave trade, however, are prompting some historians to reconsider the origins of the captives transported from West Central Africa. Instead of tracing these to places beyond the Kwango River, where the Lunda Empire was located, they are now increasingly indicating that these slaves came from regions much closer to the coast. José Curto, for instance, analyzing records of runaway slaves published in the *Boletim Oficial de Angola* between 1850 and 1876, shows that slaves living under Portuguese rule in Luanda and who were previously sold into the Atlantic hailed from a wide range of places, with the majority coming from the neighboring regions of Luanda and the Kwanza River.[24] Mariana Cândido, in an analysis of the slave trade from Benguela, in southern Angola, argues that the populations living near the coast were not immune to raids, kidnappings, and other forms of enslavement. "In contrast to a gradual movement inland," she writes, "the process of enslavement did not move only to the east, but also to the south, to the north, and finally bounced back to the west, towards the populations on the coast who lacked protection."[25] Similarly, Roquinaldo Ferreira, examining court records from eighteenth and nineteenth-century Luanda, observes that slaves who filed for freedom were generally individuals who had been captured in regions close to the coast, including areas under Portuguese influence. "African control over sources of slaves in the east," he argues, "exposed freeborn Africans living in the Luanda hinterland to enslavement."[26]

[22] Jan Vansina, "It Never Happened: Kinguri's Exodus and Its Consequences." *History in Africa* 25 (1998): 401.
[23] Ibid., 403. Vansina himself started this process. See Jan Vansina, *How Societies Are Born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004).
[24] José C. Curto, *"The Origin of Slaves in Angola: The Case of Runaways, 1850–1876"* (Seventh European Social Science and History Conference, Lisbon, 2008), 6–9.
[25] Mariana P. Cândido, *Fronteras de Esclavización: Esclavitud, Comercio e Identidad en Benguela, 1780–1850*, trans. María Capetillo Lozano (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2011), 157–58.
[26] Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange*, 16.

Despite the work of these scholars, a detailed study of the origins of slaves leaving West Central Africa in the nineteenth century is still lacking, perpetuating the view that the Lunda were the region's main suppliers of slaves to the Americas. Joseph Miller, for instance, in his widely cited *Way of Death*, argues that in the nineteenth century the source of slaves shipped from Angola moved further east, as successive Lunda kings raided and plundered the populations living near the borders of their territories.[27] Achim von Oppen claims that the search for slaves to export was the principal motivation behind the eastward movement of the trading frontier.[28] Paul Lovejoy, in his well-known *Transformations of Slavery*, argues that the center of Lunda trade was the royal capital, "from where Lunda armies raided outwards, capturing slaves."[29] Jan Vansina, in spite of his revision, believes that the Lunda expansion north and the spreading of the Lunda influence in eastern Angola were undoubtedly linked to the slave trade.[30] Finally, John Thornton in his more recent volume, *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World*, argues "it is possible to see the expansion of the Lunda Empire from its base deep in central Africa (Shaba Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo) nearly 1,000 kilometers from the coast as a response to the development of the slave trade farther east."[31]

QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE

This book uses new evidence and a fresh approach to revisit the debates over how people became enslaved and the location of their homelands. It examines a variety of sources, ranging from archival material, to published primary sources, and digital resources. Since the book focuses on a huge wave of migration, it draws significantly on quantitative methods to analyze the number of slaves transported, their demographic characteristics, and their geographic distribution. These methods were used less in the belief in their intrinsic superiority to qualitative methods of analysis,

[27] Miller, *Way of Death*, 146–47.
[28] Achim von Oppen, *Terms of Trade and Terms of Trust: The History and Contexts of Pre-Colonial Market Production around the Upper Zambezi and Kasai* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1994), 59–61.
[29] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd edn. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 78 and 98.
[30] Vansina, "It Never Happened," 403.
[31] John K. Thornton, *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250–1820* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 85.

but rather because they were more adequate in view of the book's objectives, the types of sources examined, and the volume of information available. The latter, in fact, imposed a great barrier to earlier interpretations of the trade from West Central Africa. This approach, however, does not exclude qualitative methods. Indeed, in the following discussions of African motivation in participating in the trade, eligibility for enslavement, and especially the experiences of those captured and sold overseas, the qualitative approach takes precedence.

It is unfortunate that these two approaches have been set up in opposition to each other, as if they were somehow mutually exclusive. Cliometrics, or quantitative history, made a huge impact on the larger field following the publication of Philip Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade* and Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross*.[32] Cliometricians contributed significantly to our knowledge of the history of slavery and the slave trade by providing us with an idea of how many people were transported from Africa, the ratio of slave to free in the Americas, and other details about the Middle Passage, family life, and labor routines in the New World. Such information is very helpful in contextualizing the experience of enslaved Africans and their descendants, but it does not reveal other aspects of their lives. Qualitative history has been around for a long time and often provides a rich account of the experiences of an individual, social group, or nation. Although it was partially eclipsed by the rise of cliometrics, qualitative history is now leading the field again thanks to the work of microhistorians such as Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis. These authors have renewed academic interest in individual stories and how they can help us understand broader patterns of behavior and historical change.[33]

Some recent contributions to the field have echoed a remark Joseph Miller made long ago that numbers "have no meaning either in human terms or in perceiving the operational complexity and diversity of the trade."[34] Toby Green argues that "a quantitative emphasis distracts

[32] Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974).

[33] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. Anne Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[34] Joseph C. Miller, "The Slave Trade in Congo and Angola." In *The African Diaspora: Interpretative Essays*, ed. Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 76.

attention from seeing how the advent of Atlantic slavery affected African societies, and from thinking through what the cultural, political and social consequences of this phenomenon were."[35] Mariana Cândido believes that "quantitative studies that analyze population exports, natural reproduction, and food production tend to neglect social transformations, such as the dependence of societies on slave labor."[36] Silke Strickrodt, while acknowledging that the quantitative approach "helps us to deal with broad trends and wide regions," argues "it is less useful for detailed analysis of minor ports."[37] Finally, Alice Bellagamba, Sandra Greene, and Martin Klein maintain that quantitative studies, whether they focus on Africa or the Americas, "are based on European and American shipping and customs records," and that "we need to hear how Africans understood and now remember that part of their own past associated with slavery and the slave trade." They claim "we need to listen to African voices."[38]

Although these are valid arguments, they often miss the point. Quantitative and qualitative methods are not mutually exclusive. In their attempts to reconstruct the past, historians must use both to develop their narratives. This book draws on quantitative sources such as shipping records, slave registers, and lists of liberated Africans to review broader patterns of the trade, while at the same time examining travel accounts, official correspondence, and testimonies of slave and freed individuals to shed light on the experiences of Africans pulled into the transatlantic traffic. A quarter century ago, Ginzburg argued for using both quantitative and qualitative tools with the latter "opening out into a series of case studies but never excluding, as we have said, serial [quantitative] research."[39] This project constitutes an application of that advice to the history of the later slave trade from West Central Africa.

[35] Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4–5.
[36] Cândido, *An African Slaving Port*, 14.
[37] Silke Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World: The Western Slave Coast, c.1550-c.1885* (James Currey, 2015), 5.
[38] Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin A. Klein, "Finding the African Voice." In *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade*, ed. Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin A. Klein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2.
[39] Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace." In *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Eren Branch (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 7.