

AFRICAN POLITICAL ETHICS AND THE SLAVE TRADE: CENTRAL  
AFRICAN DIMENSIONS

John Thornton, Millersville University

Most attention on the ethnical dimensions of the slave trade has focused on Europe. Why did Europeans support the slave trade? Why was opposition to it so limited and late in coming? What were the roots of the Abolitionist movement? These questions have usually been based on the assumption that Africans had little say in the development of the slave trade, that the initiative for it came mostly from Europe. To the degree that scholarship has noted that relatively few people were enslaved by direct capture by European marines, the African elite's attitude has still not been examined much, and then it has been singularly uncomplimentary. African rulers who cooperated with the Europeans are often characterized sell\_outs, greedy, and cynically exploitative, or alternatively, as so overwhelmed by European superiority in commerce, production, or technology as to have little choice but to go along with the slave traders from abroad.

Yet these positions are probably not true. African leaders were not necessarily forced into the slave trade through their inabilities, or the inability of their country to prevent it,(1) and neither were they necessarily simply cruel dupes of foreign traders who sold their own people out for short term gains. African leaders clearly participated voluntarily in the slave trade, but this does not mean that they did so without recognizing the ethical problems that the trade presented. As a way of exploring the ethical attitudes of the African elites, I have chosen to study the correspondence of three central African leaders, King Afonso I (1509\_42) of Kongo, Queen Njinga Mbande (1624\_63) of Ndongo and Matamba, and King Garcia II (1641\_61) of Kongo. This exercise is especially appropriate because, unlike leaders in so many other parts of Africa, West Central African elites left a substantial written record of their own. Their letters and inquests can tell us a great deal about their thoughts, and can allow us to see their ethical concerns at first hand. Furthermore, scholars have used this body of material already to explore African reactions to the slave trade. The correspondence of Afonso I, for example, is often cited as an example of an African monarch confronting the slave trade. Likewise, Queen Njinga has occasionally been held up as a leader who opposed the slave trade, perhaps in reaction to this, she is often backhandedly vilified as nothing more than a slave trader.

This examination reveals that all the African rulers led societies that recognized an institution of slavery, and they accepted the legal possibility that an individual could have a bundle of rights over another person that surpassed those of any other community or the state. These rights moreover could be alienated to any other person by sale. This institutional framework made the slave trade possible, and smoothed its way along. Recognizing these features of African social structure certainly can explain why African leaders did not actively resist the sale of people as slaves, and it must be invoked in their defense when they are accused of being European dupes for doing so. But simply recognizing that the making, holding, use, and sale of slaves was legally permissible did not mean that the slave trade did not pose ethical problems for African leaders. They felt strongly that there were legal limits to who could be enslaved and when. In many cases they felt that the Portuguese and other Europeans violated these limits, and moreover that these violations were a manifestation of greed and pride, two serious political sins. The question was not with the institution of slavery itself,

but in establishing a proper order of enslavement and an orderly slave trade.  
King Afonso and the Slave Trade

Afonso's reign is critical because it represents the situation of African rulers at the very start of the Atlantic slave trade. Afonso is best known for being an African ruler who opened his country to European religion and culture, and is sometimes held as having been undermined by the slave trade.(2)

Most important, however, is that the Afonso story has been used to suggest that the legal framework of Kongo, and by extension other African societies, changed as a result of European demands for slaves. Under the stress of overseas demands, African slavery changed from a less intensive or non-existent slave system to a more exploitative one aimed at foreign commerce. In her reworking of this story with careful attention to primary sources, Anne Hilton has stressed the relatively underdeveloped state of slavery in Kongo at the time of the European arrival. Afonso, she contends, was only forced to enter the slave trade through his desire to obtain European goods and services, for which he produced no suitable alternative products. Although he ultimately realized the error of this, he was too late to be able to prevent major reshaping of Kongo into a slave raiding and producing state, with serious negative consequences.(3) J. E. Inikori has subsequently taken Hilton's data in support of arguing that Kongo fit into a general case in which slavery was transformed by European contact into a more virulent and negative system.(4) In this way, he has reworked and renewed Walter Rodney's celebrated thesis of the 1960s that placed responsibility for the extension and intensification of slavery in Africa in the hands of the European slave traders.(5)

The case of Afonso is particularly arresting, because a significant portion of what we know about early Kongo in general, as well as the actions of the slave trade, come from his lengthy correspondence with Portugal. Indeed, until 1550, Kongo shares with Songhai, the unusual situation in western African history of being known to scholarship primarily through its own internal sources and not the writings of travelers or outsiders.(6)

What a close examination of Afonso's letters reveals, however, is that Kongo probably did have a well developed legal system of slavery at the time of its first contact with Portugal, and the trade in slaves was always acceptable under Kongolese law. However, it must be clearly stated that our knowledge of Kongo's institutions in the roughly twenty years between contact and Afonso's first letters is very limited. Although the Portuguese first visited Kongo in 1483, the early exchanges were purely diplomatic and exploratory. As late as 1490, Kongo was so poorly known in Portugal that the king ordered his officers in São Tomé to send a condemned prisoner to Kongo to spy it out.(7) Presumably, if there were some regular commerce before that, such extreme measures would be unnecessary. The spy was needed to provide intelligence for the main mission to Kongo, in 1491. From that point onwards, it is probably safe to say that there was regular interchange between the two countries.

It is not clear exactly when Kongo began exporting slaves; certainly European merchants based in São Tomé were buying them "for things of little value" before 1502, when this trade is mentioned in a legend on the Cantino Atlas.(8) The numbers of purchased slaves may not have been great, Duarte Pacheco Pereira's account of Kongo, describing the situation before 1506 mentions the trade in slaves, but characterizes it as being of "little quantity."(9) One way in which Portuguese acquired slaves, perhaps the most

important, was through mercenary service in Kongo's wars. Instructions given to Gonçalo Rodrigues, sent by the Portuguese king Manuel I to Kongo in 1509 at the head of a royal mission, tell him to accept any gifts that the king might give him for his military services, "from captives that the said Manicomgo makes in this war or in whatever service God gives you." (10) It is quite possible that the earlier royal mission of 1491 also obtained slaves in this way and its experience shaped the language of the later instructions. (11) Certainly the 1491 mission fought in a war, but in his letter to the king of Portugal of October 1491, the Kongo king João I Nzinga a Nkuwu, specifically states that he had "nothing to give in exchange for the ships and people" from Portugal who served him in war. Furthermore, the taking of slaves is not mentioned in the account. (12)

It is possible that somehow, the Portuguese managed to introduce a new form of slavery in this period, along with the practice of selling slaves in markets. But it seems unlikely\_\_Portuguese residents in Kongo were very few in the period, and there does not seem to be any way they could introduce major changes in Kongos's laws and institutions. Rather, it seems much more likely that the situation described in Afonso's letters reflects the situation at the time of contact. Afonso's letters frequently deal with slavery, and contain moreover a number of commentaries on the slave trade as it developed. It is quite clear that Afonso, and probably Kongo law in general, had little problem with either the holding of slaves, their alienation by sale or gift, or their export from the country. In his earliest extant letter, written on 5 October 1514, Afonso provides important information about these legal matters in the course of complaining to the King Manuel about the behavior of some Portuguese in Kongo. (13) The letter is of crucial importance, it is one of the earliest documents we have that comments on slavery, and certainly it is the earliest we have that supplies information of this sort from a Kongolese source. It also clearly contradicts those scholars, like Anne Hilton, who maintained that Kongo's constitution and legal system forbade either the making or export of slaves. (14)

The letter regularly refers to gifts of slaves. Around 1509, for example, Afonso gave Gonçalo Rodrigues 50 slaves, and subsequently sent another 50 slaves to Fernão de Mello, donatory of São Tomé, and to his wife, perhaps a year later, he sent "many slaves" to the King and Queen of Portugal, later still he made another gift of slaves to them and to de Mello, all before 1512. He even gave 20 slaves to Estevão Jusarte simply for being de Mello's cousin. (15) But these gifts were matters of state, perhaps, and might be viewed as special circumstances.

More significantly, Afonso also noted the possibility of slaves being purchased in Kongo, implying the existence of a local market for such purchases. For example, some of the priests who came in 1508 disappointed Afonso when "they buy some pieces which are slaves" by ignoring his plea that they not buy females. Father Pero Fernandez even made one of these women pregnant, creating a scandal. (16) Afonso also gave Christovão d'Aguiar enough money to buy 27 slaves around 1510 or 11, which apparently he was able to obtain on local markets. Masons who came in 1509 were soon taking money wages that Afonso paid them and buying slaves on the market, each one took the money they received and bought "15 or 20 pieces." (17) Similarly, most of the officers sent with the mission of 1512 to Kongo began to "buy pieces", even though Afonso had ordered, in accordance with an agreement he had made with the king of Portugal, that only a royal factor would be allowed to do so. (18) In short, it was perfectly possible for private persons from Portugal

to purchase slaves in Kongo, and presumably to export them, as the implications of Afonso's use of the term "pieces" suggests. Afonso was certainly prepared to export slaves on his own behalf, for he gave João Fernandes 20 slaves to buy cloth for him in Portugal around 1510. Soon after, he gave more to one of his cousins, Pedro Afonso, both for his support as a student in Portugal and to buy clothes for Afonso while he was there. When, around 1512 or 1513 he sent some 22 of his young relatives to Europe to study, he included slaves for their support, including extras in case the some of the slaves should die.(19) In about 1512 Diogo Bello and Manuel Cão carelessly allowed "a hundred and some" slaves to escape while being exported to the coast, the escapees went on a rampage, making the country look "as if there had been the great destruction of a war", but Manuel Bello was unconcerned because, Afonso said, "he had bought them with our money," and thus on Afonso's account.(20) Three years later he would ask permission to purchase a ship of his own, which he certainly intended to use to transport slaves, since he requested that if it were impossible to purchase a ship, he wanted to "be able to load a certain number of pieces without paying customs."(21) Afonso's letter is a letter of complaint, yet his grief is not about the purchasing or disposing of slaves, it is that he was cheated, work was paid for but not done, or priests neglected their vows. Furthermore, nothing in this letter suggests that the custom of buying or exporting slaves was new, certainly not that it was something introduced by the Portuguese, as if the presence of a handful of European merchants could somehow change Kongo law in 15 or 20 years.

Afonso did, however, provide important insights on the function of slavery in Kongo and its early relationship to the export trade, in describing a war he conducted against Munza, known only as a nobleman of the Mbundu region, around 1512 or perhaps 1513.(22) Afonso's primary complaint about the conduct of the war was that Portuguese served him poorly in it. Many were reluctant to join him in the campaign, against an opponent, who Afonso maintains, had started the war by attacking the Kongo province of Mbamba. Afonso's account makes it clear that he intended to be served by the people he captured as slaves, both at home, and to meet overseas expenses. Some he sent out to Portugal on his own account, some as gifts to the king or others, and some he retained in Kongo, presumably for local service.

In sum, this letter suggests that at the time of its contact with Portugal, Kongo already had an institution of slavery. Not only did the Kongo elite themselves use slaves as part of their labor force (though they surely had other means to an income as well), but they were prepared to buy and sell them on the market. By the early sixteenth century and probably from before then, they were also prepared to allow these people to be exported. We have no reason to believe that people were the only exports Kongo had, or that its kings controlled, and thus, as Hilton maintains, that Afonso was forced by economic necessity to export slaves. (23) Pacheco Pereira mentioned copper, ivory and cloth as commodities that were being exported by 1506, and Afonso's letter of 1514 pairs many of his gifts with "manilhas" of copper, sometimes in the thousands. Later, in 1526, Afonso mentions sending ivory to meet the expenses of students.(24) Indeed, as we have seen, Afonso usually paid the Portuguese who served him or were resident in the country in money, with which they could and did purchase whatever they would on local markets, including slaves. That the money in question was indeed the local shell currency, called «nzimbu»,(25) is proved by the units Afonso mentions: in 1516 he gave Álvaro Lopes four «kofus» to purchase slaves for the king of Portugal, after buying 25 people, he remained with 6 «lufukus» in change.(26)

Afonso did however, have reason to complain about the slave trade, and in approaching this complaint we begin to understand where African rulers would draw the line between legitimate business and unacceptable behavior. In 1526 Afonso sent two letters of complaint to Portugal, this time quite explicitly hostile to the way the slave trade was affecting his country. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, he complained that "our kingdom is being lost in such a way that we must apply the necessary remedy". The problem was the unregulated activities of Portuguese merchants in the country, who dealt in "prohibited items" and whose shops were set up "all throughout our Kingdom and Lordship in great abundance." This had caused, Afonso contended, some of his vassals to rise up, as they had things in greater abundance than he did. Not only this, but "every day the merchants carry away our people «nossos naturales», sons of our soil and children of our nobles and vassals and our relatives" who were being kidnapped, secreted away and stolen by "thieves and people of low condition" driven by the desire to have "your things". Fearing that the country would be "depopulated" he proposed to King João III that he send no more merchants or merchandize to Kongo, but only support the Church with priests and bread and wine for the Sacraments. This is because it was "our will that there be no trade in slaves in our kingdoms."(27)

Afonso returned to this theme on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October. After repeating many of the earlier complaints about the stealing of free people (including nobles), Afonso noted that they were hidden, branded and kept in irons. The thieves were "our people", who took them away at night and sold them to Portuguese merchants, without Afonso's own guards knowing about it, not Portuguese, who were only guilty of not asking enough questions about who was free and who was not. However, Afonso proposed a completely new solution to the problem in order, "to do Justice, restore the free to their liberty." Instead of demanding that Portugal stop the slave trade, as he had proposed three months earlier, Afonso now announced that henceforth, no slaves would be sold without an inquest of his officials, and none would be exported without his knowledge and consent. Anyone who failed to account for the enslavement of those they sought to export stood to have their cargo confiscated.(28)

The problem that Afonso was addressing was twofold. On the one hand, he was concerned about his noble subjects having wealth, rising against him, and even being wealthier than he was because of their dealings with the Portuguese. It is likely that he was specifically concerned about the Mbundu lands to the south, whose territory he had claimed since the very beginning in his royal titles, even though he had constantly fought wars there (at least in 1512 or 13, 1515, 1517). Portugal had sent a mission to Ndongo, the leading state of the Mbundu area in 1520, no doubt with the goal of establishing a trade in slaves. The mission had failed, but Afonso had managed to rescue the ambassadors and brought them to Kongo just as these letters were being written.(29) In the currently extant documentation this episode is mysterious, but one logical interpretation is that Afonso had played a role in causing the mission to fail and was reasserting his authority over Ndongo's trade. If there were other rebellions, they are unknown to us.

The second problem was that of private persons, of "low condition" engaging in robbery and carrying off free people, and on occasion, even nobles, secretly in the dead of night. Clearly this could be a local security issue, or it might refer to those poorly integrated territories like Mpanzalumbu, located on the banks of the Congo River just inland from the

coastal province of Soyo. In 1516 Afonso complained that a ship captained by Cristovão de Coimbra had bought some 400 slaves from the Mpanzulumbu region (probably just inland from the mouth of the Congo River).(30) The region was regarded as an enemy one, and Afonso saw this as a hostile act. In 1517, Mpazulumbu raiders had captured gifts that the king of Portugal had sent him, and such raiding might easily have also netted slaves for sale from Kongo.(31)

Finally, Afonso's complaints might have simply been to justify fiscal reform, even if he had evidence that occasional rebellion or kidnapping had taken place. By forcing the Portuguese merchants in Kongo to go through this inspection process, he could centralize them and prevent smuggling and tax evasion. The complaint that people were being stolen could be simply a pretext to dress a fiscal reform in the cloth of justice. Certainly the effect of his proclamation would be to place fuller jurisdiction over everything the Portuguese did in Kongo, and undoubtedly to tax and control them more fully. Precisely how the Portuguese community in Kongo would be governed was an important issue. Would they be centralized under a captain appointed in Portugal as Portuguese kings generally preferred, or would they be allowed to go freely anywhere they pleased, as many of them preferred, or finally, would they be controlled, but by Afonso, as he clearly preferred?(32)

In any case, the letters of 1526 necessarily reflect on Afonso's attitude towards the slave trade. Did Afonso, clearly a supporter and participant in the export of slaves in 1514, change his mind about the trade after a further dozen years experience with it? And did he then change his mind back three months later? Was this because he was now so dependent on the foreign trade and the slave trade in particular that he could not escape from it, and realized this in the three months between his July and October letters? What seems likely, on whole, is that Afonso never opposed either the idea of the slave trade or slavery, but was concerned when it seemed to fall out of his control and that of his state, either through the activities of rebels or of bandits. As long as it was his army, conducting his wars that captured slaves, or that those enslaved people who were available on royally supervised markets were being sold, he was content with the institution. If these conditions were not met, he was prepared to ban it, or at least to reestablish his control over it.

One matter is quite clear, however: the dire consequences that Afonso predicted for Kongo did not come to pass, at least not in the immediately following years. Afonso died leaving Kongo intact and united. Indeed, Kongo's centralized power, at least over its central districts, grew in the following years, reaching their peak in the mid-seventeenth century. However, the issue of the slave trade reemerged in full force after the establishment of a Portuguese colony in Angola after 1575.

#### Queen Njinga and the Slave Trade, 1624\_56

Whatever strains there had been in Kongo's relation with Portugal in the sixteenth century, it was the decision to colonize Angola that ultimately set the two states at odds. At first, Kongo had supported the Portuguese effort, at least formally, probably because they were beholden to Portugal for assisting them in expelling the "Jagas" in the 1570s. However, the decisive break came in the early 1620s. In 1618 the newly arrived governor of Angola, Luis Mendes de Vasconcellos, made an alliance with the Imbangala, dreaded cannibal mercenaries from the south, and used their assistance to crush the Kingdom of Ndongo.(33) Flushed with these victories, Portuguese governors subsequently picked wars with a variety of the smaller states that lay between Kongo and Angola, and then, in November 1621 a large Angolan

force invaded southern Kongo and defeated the local army at Mbumbi. Alvaro III, king of Kongo at the time, protested vigorously, actually getting the king of Spain (then Portugal's overlord) to remit some of the captives of this campaign back to Kongo.

Njinga came to power in the terror and confusion of the aftermath of Governor Mendes de Vasconcellos' alliance with the Imbangala and his war on Ndongo. In the years immediately following the storming of Ndongo's capital by Portuguese troops in 1619, the rulers of Ndongo had had to flee to the islands of the Kwanza River to make their new capital. There, amid the ruins of his country, her despondent brother, King Ngola Mbandi committed suicide, leaving only a child as an heir. Njinga had stepped into the gap, and with the support of many in the royal court had at first declared herself regent of the kingdom and then ruler in her own right. The Portuguese, sensing a further weakness in this irregular succession, placed their full support behind one of her rivals, Hari a Ngola, who claimed that female succession was illegal in the Ndongo constitution and that Njinga had murdered her brother's son.(34) The action precipitated a civil war, which the Portuguese entered in support of Hari a Ngola. The fighting went on intermittently until settled by a treaty in 1656.

Njinga's correspondence also shows her relationship to this essentially slave\_capturing Portuguese administration. It reveals, as Afonso's correspondence also does, that she was accustomed to a slave trade, that it was licit under her laws, as under Kongo's, and she both held and sold slaves as a matter of course. But like her Kongolese antecedent, she also felt that there were definite limits and rules about who could and could not be enslaved.

Njinga's initial letter, written within weeks after she assumed power and addressed to the governor of Angola, Fernão de Sousa, in 1624 is no longer extant, but it is clear from his summaries of it, that Njinga was prepared to deal in slaves. In his summary, de Sousa noted that she told him that he should withdraw Portuguese forces from Embaca, a town founded by Mendes de Vasconcellos as a forward base for his illegal wars of the 1618\_20 period, as had been promised. If he consented to this, she would, "make markets at Quicala where they are customarily made, and that she will order her [followers] to go to them and to carry pieces."(35) In the same letter, Njinga asked that the Portuguese return her subjects who had been taken away by Mendes de Vasconcellos' campaigns, some were sobas, or local rulers whose lands were not under Portuguese authority, others were "quijicos" «kijiku», the serf\_like dependents sometimes called slaves in contemporary documents. (36) Not only did Njinga hold slaves and other dependent groups, but she also sold slaves herself. In 1626, she wrote to Bento Banha Cardoso, the Portuguese commander at Embaca, informing him that , "I was sending some pieces to the market of Bumba Aquiçanzo, Aire [Ngola Hari, a Portuguese\_supported rival ruler of Ndongo] came out with his army, and robbed me of thirty pieces of those I had sent."(37) She demanded an immediate restitution, as well as announcing the capture of some Portuguese soldiers.

Much later in her life, Njinga did not hesitate to continue in the slave trade, although in this case her cause was not simply economic gain. She was anxious to redeem her sister Barbara from captivity in Luanda, and to that end had to pay a ransom of slaves to the Portuguese for it. In a letter of 1655, she complained that this ransom was a high one, she had already paid "infinite pieces" and was yet to get satisfaction.(38) These slaves were war captives, for in a dramatic speech announcing her treaty of peace with

Portugal in 1657, Njinga thanked her soldiers for "all the labor that you have suffered in the wars, and now in making slaves to ransom my sister."(39)

Njinga may not have had a philosophical difficulty with holding slaves or selling them, she clearly did have a desire to set limits to the exploitation of both forms of labor. This is clearly demonstrated in their willingness to harbor runaway slaves from the Portuguese, a telling point that often troubled relations between Portuguese Angola and its African neighbors. Njinga's propensity to harbor runaways was the immediate cause of the first war between her and Portugal in 1625\_6.

Such concepts are fairly clear in a letter that Njinga wrote to António de Oliveria de Cadornega, the Portuguese settler and historian in 1660. Her letter was in response to one of his whose exact contents are unknown, but which complained that slaves which he had purchased through travelling commercial agents, called «pumbeiros», had run away (or been stolen) in Njinga's territory and she had not recovered them. She responded to his query by her own compliant, that the «pumbeiros» had not sufficiently inquired as to who was free and slave, and many people who had been wrongly enslaved were now being harbored by her.(40)

#### Garcia II's Denunciation of the Slave Trade, 1643

In 1641 a Dutch fleet of the West India Company under Admiral "Peg\_leg" Jol captured Luanda, forcing the Portuguese colonists to withdraw from the city, first to their farms along the Bengo River, and finally to their interior city of Masangano. A number of African powers took this reversal of Portuguese fortunes as an opportunity to reopen issues of control of Angola, among them Garcia II, who quickly sought an alliance with the new Dutch presence against the Portuguese, chiding them for not moving directly against the Portuguese.(41) In February 1643, Garcia wrote to the Rector of the Jesuit order in Luanda, whom he generally regarded as a friendly figure among the Portuguese regarding the situation in Angola. After noting that the rebellions that had plagued the Portuguese and hindered their war against the Dutch he continued, "therefore there can never be peace with this Kingdom [Angola]." This was "because in place of gold, silver and other things which serve as money in other places, the trade and money are pieces [slaves], which are not gold nor cloth, but creatures." His particular problem with the trade in slaves was apparently ultimately political. "Our disgrace," Garcia observed, "and that of my ancestors is that in our simplicity we gave place to that which grows all the evils in our kingdoms, and above all that there are people who affirm that we were never lords of Angola and Matamba. The inequality of arms has caused us to lose all, as where there is force, right is lost."(42)

Like Afonso, Garcia was not necessarily opposed to slavery or the slave trade. Just three days earlier, Garcia spontaneously sent some slaves to the Dutch governor of Brazil as a gift, without any complaint.(43) Moreover, Garcia was certainly not dependent on the slave trade. Dutch sources noted that Kongo was not a particularly big supplier of slaves, and those that were exported from Kongo ports were enslaved further in the interior.(44)

Garcia's understanding of the slave trade was that it had caused people to affirm that he was never lord of Angola or Matamba, and moreover, that the application of force had made this so. In writing this, Garcia was placing the Portuguese colonization of Angola in the context of the slave trade.



The battle of Mbumbi in 1621, in which Portuguese and Imbangala forces had first invaded Kongo after their victories in Ndongo had fixed in the minds of Kongo leaders a particular image of the rulers of Angola, that they were solely interested in war and the slave trade, and in defeating Kongo to take its wealth. Garcia reflected this attitude well when he wrote the Dutch governor of Brazil, "as the nature of the Portuguese in unquiet and given to sowing discord, and they seek all means to put us head over heels and in revolution, and they do all this for their own ends."(45) In later justifying his actions on this occasion to the Jesuit rector some years later, Garcia argued that at the time the Dutch took Luanda, the Portuguese governor was in the process of preparing to invade Kongo. In addition, many of the lesser Angolan nobles, who had been forced by the Portuguese to serve them, and alienated from their natural lord (the King of Kongo), were rebelling against them because of their injustice. Garcia linked these tyrannical actions to Portuguese greed. "before the fall of Luanda to the Dutch the Governors and residents always had perpetual hatred towards this kingdom [of Kongo], tyrannizing and unjustly capturing Souas, [local rulers] demanding every year from them tribute of a quantity of people, who came to give up their own children and wives; with the only end being to enrich themselves."(46)

Likewise, Kongo harbored runaways for years. In 1659, for example, the Municipal Council of Luanda complained that Garcia II had been harboring so many runaway slaves that the country was ruined, not only from the loss of service of those who had fled, but also because the masters could not be sure of the service of the others. The Portuguese authorities feared that Garcia was building an army with them, many were apparently skilled soldiers.

Garcia's attitude towards runaways probably reflected the larger claim that Portugal's colony of Angola existed for war and slavery, and thus represented an upsetting of the normal process of enslavement. To return to a more normal situation, Garcia, like Afonso before him, placed a demand in a proposed treaty with Portugal in 1649 that "there be maintained in various parts of the Kingdoms of Congo and Angola impartial judges to examine if the pieces [peças] which are sold are free or stolen or are truly slaves [escrauos]." (47) He linked the evil of the slave trade as conducted by the Portuguese to their greed and avarice rather than any intrinsic nature of the trade. In fact, he prefaced his remarks on the evils of the slave trade by noting, "Nothing is more condemning to people than ambition and pride." (48) This greed and pride had put things out of order, and it was its motivations and excessiveness to which Garcia objected.

Central African rulers controlled states typical of their era throughout the world. Such states were often based on assumptions of power and authority which are no longer fashionable in the modern world. Among these assumptions were the rights of governments to tax and take tribute without necessarily delivering any services, judicial systems which unashamedly protected the interests of the rich and powerful, and little government responsibility to the governed. Holding of people as slaves, as well as selling these rights were part and parcel of this larger system of government. Today many of these ideas are repugnant, but it does not then mean that all these rulers were simply cynical manipulators of politics. They had their principles and ethics, even if these were not those of today. Understanding this system of ethics can help us unravel the explanation of African elites' participation in the slave trade.

## NOTES

1. A case argued in general in John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400\_1800* (2d ed., Cambridge, 1998), pp. 43\_128.
2. For historiography up to the early 1980s, and a critique, see John Thornton, "Early Kongo\_Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation," *History in Africa* (1981)
3. Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 21\_3; 57\_85.
4. Joseph E. Inikori, "Slavery in Africa and the Transatlantic Slave Trade," in Alusine Jalloh and Stephen E. Maizlish, (Eds.) *The African Diaspora* (Arlington, TX, 1996), pp. 61\_4.  
(all the evidence cited comes from Hilton).
5. A convenient statement of the "Rodney Debate" is in Joseph E. Inikori (ed.) *Forced Migration: The Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies* (London and New York, 1982) pp. 74\_99 (the original debate between Rodney and J. D. Fage appeared between 1966 and 1969), other contributions followed as well.
6. Some scholars, notably Georges Balandier, questioned the authenticity of Afonso's letters, maintaining that he was not literate and they were the work of Portuguese scribes who may have shaped his words and thoughts to their, or Portugal's ends, see *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Trans. Helen Weaver, New York, 1968 [original French, 1965]), pp. 52\_55. Even if one denies the explicit references in contemporary sources to Afonso reading and studying texts, the crucial letters were certainly the work of his secretary João Teixeira, a Kongolese who was chosen for the position because of his loyalty.
7. Commutation of Manuel de Vila Maior, 9 August 1490, in Maria Luísa Oliveira Esteves (Ed.), *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana* (2 vols. Lisbon, in progress, 1995\_) 2: 56.
8. Armando Cortesão and Avelino Teixeira da Mota (Eds.), *Portugalliae Monumenta Cartographica* (6 vols. Lisbon, 1960) 1:12 (plates 4\_5).
9. Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis* (Ed. Epiphânio da Silva Dias, Lisbon, 1905 [reprinted 1975]), Book 3, cap. 2, p.134.
10. Despacho de Gonçalo Roiz à 1509, Brásio, Monumenta 4: 61.
11. The instructions for the 1491 mission are no longer extant.
12. Italian translation of an untitled Portuguese chronicle of Rui de Pina, c. 1492, written from the ship's book and six witnesses shortly after the return of the mission. It is published with Portuguese translation in Carmen Radulet (Ed. and Trans.), *O cronista Rui de Pina e a "Relação do Reino do Congo"*. *Manuscrito inédito do "Códice Riccardiano 1910"* (Lisbon, 1992) fol. 98rb, 99rb (foliation of original MS). The author of the letter, probably dictated by João, was undoubtedly the "black who knew the two languages and equally, was experienced in writing both, a black who was beginning to teach the nobles and their children, and many other good and virtuous men", that the ship left there, fol. 98vb. Radulet also published the relevant chapters

of the better known version of Pina's Cronica delRei D. Joham Segundo of 1515 which was based on this text, in the appendix, see p. 152, which does not contain João's letter and other details.

13. Afonso I to Manuel I, 5 October 1514, in António Brásio (Ed.) Monumenta Missionaria Africana (1<SUP>st</SUP> series, 15 volumes, Lisbon, 1952\_88) 1: 294\_323. Afonso wrote an earlier letter shortly after becoming king, explaining his accession (see p. 295), this in turn provided the text for three other letters of 1512 (to the Pope, the King of Portugal, and his people) that were written in Portugal for him, see Monumenta 1: 266\_73. These letters do not deal with either slavery or the slave trade.

14. Hilton, Kingdom of Kongo, p. 21. She cites as evidence, Afonso's letter to João III, 18 October 1526, Monumenta 1: 489\_90 as her only support. Unfortunately that letter only makes it clear that Afonso opposed the export of free people who had been illegally captured through robbery. Raphael Batsíkama ba Mampuya ma Ndwâla, proposes that tradition opposed the export of people and offers the proverb as support. Such evidence, however, does not seem to outweigh the contemporary practice of Afonso's correspondence.

15. Afonso to Manuel, 5 October 1514, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 295, 297, 301, 303

16. Afonso to Manuel, 5 October 1514, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 300\_301. "Pieces", peças in Portuguese, was a term used to indicate the value of a healthy adult slave. As a unit of account it was useful in the external slave trade, as other slaves were valued more or less against this standard. Afonso's use of the term here suggests that purchasing slaves for export was possible around 1510.

17. Afonso to Manuel, 5 October 1514, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 304\_305, 306. Afonso complained that this was their regular practice, his complaint against them was that they worked slow, not that they bought slaves\_\_they had done very little, he thought in the past five years (i.e. 1509\_14).

18. Afonso to Manuel, 5 October 1514, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 317.

19. Afonso to Manuel, 5 October 1514, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 303, 305, 312.

20. Afonso to Manuel, 5 October 1514, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 313. Eventually Alvaro Lopes, a Portuguese official who Afonso had appointed to guard his palace and the Queen of Kongo had to round up the runaways, punishing those who had fled with beating, and those who had killed Manuel Cão with death.

21. Afonso to João III, 26 May 1517, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 404.

22. Afonso to Manuel, 5 October 1514, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 312\_15.

23. There is, I think, no reason to credit Hilton's pessimistic view of Kongo's economic weakness driving Afonso to export slaves, see her position in Kingdom of Kongo, pp. 55\_65. In the same section, she reads, in my opinion, far too much into the sources on the role of the control of trade as the main means of fiscalization of the state.

24. Afonso to King João III, 25 August 1526, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 484.

25. This money is described in the earliest sources: de Pina, chronicle, ed. Radulet, Cronista, fol. 93rb and Pacheco Pereira, Esmeraldo, Bk 3, cap 2, p.

- 134 (which gives the name).
26. Afonso to Manuel, 4 March 1516, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 357.
27. Afonso to King João III, 6 July 1526, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 470\_71.
28. Afonso to King João III, 18 October 1526, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 489\_90.
29. Baltasar de Castro to João III, 15 October 1526, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 485\_7.
30. Afonso to António Carneiro, 5 March 1516, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 359.
31. Act of Inquisition of Afonso I, 22 April 1517, Brásio, Monumenta 1: 393\_7.
32. On the complexities of the government of Portuguese in Kongo see Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations."
33. For details, see John Thornton, "The African Experience of the '20 and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia in 1619," *William and Mary Quarterly* 55 (1998): 524\_31.
34. A full overview of the period, splendidly documented, is Beatrix Heintze, "Das ende des Unabhangigen Staats Ndongo (Angola): Neue Chronologie und Reinterpretation (1617\_1630)," *Paideuma* 27 (1981): 197\_273, reprinted with revisions, but less apparatus in *Studien zur Geschichte Angolas im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Ein Lesebuch* (Cologne, 1996), pp. 111\_68.
35. Queen Njinga to Fernão de Sousa, c. dry season, 1624 in de Sousa to Government, 15 August 1624, in Beatrix Heintze (ed), *Fontes para a história de Angola do século XVII*. (2 vols., Wiesbaden, 1985\_88) 2: 85\_6 (also in Brásio, Monumenta 7: 249\_50).
36. Summaries of same letter in de Sousa to Government, 28 September 1624, Brásio, Monumenta 7: 256; and de Sousa to Government, 10 December 1624, Heintze, *Fontes* 2: 117.
37. Queen Njinga to Bento Banha Cardoso, 3 March 1625 [ed. 1626], quoted in Fernão de Sousa to Gonçalo de Sousa and his brothers, c. 1630, Heintze, *Fontes* 1: 244\_5
38. Queen Njinga to Governor General of Angola, 13 December 1655, Brásio, Monumenta 11: 524.
39. Fr. Serafino da Cortona to Governor General of Angola, 20 March 1657, Brásio, Monumenta 12: 108.
40. Queen Njinga to António de Oliveira de Cadornega, 15 June 1660 in Cadornega, *História geral das guerras angolanas (1680\_81)* (ed. José Matias Delgado and Manuel Alves da Cunha, 3 vols., Lisbon, 1940\_42, reprinted 1972) 2: 172\_3 (also provides context of the letter).
41. Garcia II to Jan Maurtis van Nassau, 12 May 1642, Brásio, Monumenta 8: 584\_87.
42. Garcia II to Jesuit Rector, 23 February 1643, Brásio, Monumenta 9: 18.

43. Garcia II to Dutch Governor of Brazil, 20 February 1643, Brásio, Monumenta 9: 15.

44. Hilton, pointing out this fact, argues that Kongo had come to depend on cloth production from its eastern provinces to pay for imports, Kingdom of Kongo, pp. 105\_44. Much of her larger argument seems to me to place too much attention on control of trade as the source of Kongo's revenues, and on the autonomy of provinces within the larger kingdom.

45. Garcia II to Governor of Brazil, 20 February 1643, Brásio, Monumenta 9: 15.

46. Garcia Afonso II to Fr. António do Couto, 28 July 1649, Brásio, Monumenta 10: 372.

47. Conditions of Peace, 19 February 1649, Brásio, Monumenta 10: 327

48. Garcia II to Jesuit Rector, 23 February 1643, Brásio, Monumenta 9: 17.