

## PORTUGUESE SLAVE TRADING IN NORTHERN ZIMBABWE AND THE MIDDLE ZAMBEZI VALLEY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By

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### **Abstract**

*The depredations caused by Portuguese slaving in Northern Zimbabwe and the Middle Zambezi valley remain one of the lesser written about episodes in Zimbabwean history, and there has been a tendency, even among our foremost authors on Afro-Portuguese relations in Zimbabwe, to think that Portuguese slaving only affected areas north of the Zambezi. This traditional assumption needs to be challenged in light of abundant evidence, especially from the large corpus of published primary sources written by contemporary European observers in the nineteenth century, detailing the impact of the slave trade on the northern regions of Zimbabwe bordering the Zambezi. Other traditional assumptions regarding the nature and extent of Portuguese slave trafficking along the Zambezi, and the market for slave exports from Mozambique, also need to be modified in light of more recent, contrary evidence. To begin with, the conventional picture of the complete isolation of the peoples of the Middle Zambezi valley from the outside world, prior to their first contact with Portuguese traders from the East Coast in 1860, needs modification because, it is now clear that there was direct and indirect contact with West Coast Portuguese traders from Angola that preceded them. Secondly, more evidence has come to light showing that the people of the Middle Zambezi had, through their own efforts, been in contact with the East Coast trade for at least 200 years before 1860. Thirdly, it has now been shown by other scholars that the traditional assumption that the demand for Mozambique slaves was generated predominantly by Brazilian demand needs modification, because new evidence now shows that the French islands of the western Indian Ocean rivaled, and might even have replaced, Brazil as the major export market for Mozambique slaves by 1830. Finally, the internal slave trade of Mozambique, comprising the resale of slaves into the interior, i.e. from Mozambique 'up' the Zambezi, in the 1860s and 1870s, needs more scholarly attention because it marked a significant change both in the direction and nature of the Portuguese slave trade with the Middle Zambezi and Northern Zimbabwe*

### **Introduction**

Much of what is known about Afro-Portuguese trade relations in the Middle Zambezi is associated with the East Coast Portuguese trade that commenced in the 1860s through its Chikunda agents. Consequently, the conventional picture of the trading relations of the societies of the Middle Zambezi has been that of complete isolation from the outside world prior to the arrival of the first Portuguese trading party from the East Coast in the upper river section of the Middle Zambezi in 1860 in the wake of David Livingstone's second expedition.<sup>1</sup> However, this picture needs to be modified in light of evidence that by the time the earliest Portuguese

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trading party from the East Coast, about which there is any written evidence, reached the upper river in 1860, the upper river area of the Gwembe had been in direct and indirect contact with the West Coast Portuguese trade through its Ovimbundu agents well before it came to be regularly visited by Portuguese traders connected with the East Coast system.<sup>2</sup> There are also indications that the Nambya and Tonga had, through their own initiative, been in contact with the East Coast trade for at least 200 years before the first Portuguese trading party reached the Middle Zambezi in 1862. Available evidence showing that traders from Zumbo had penetrated the interior as far as Chireya's village in the 1780s using overland routes, and further evidence of overland trade between Sena and the Ndebele state in the mid-nineteenth century, seems to support the view that the Nambya state was in direct contact with the East Coast trade long before that trade ever penetrated directly into the upper and middle river sections of the Gwembe.<sup>3</sup>

It has also been traditionally assumed of the nineteenth century East Coast slave trade from Mozambique, that the demand for Mozambique slaves was generated predominantly by Brazilian and Cuban demand, with the French islands of the Western Indian Ocean constituting a secondary market. However, new evidence has come to light that challenges this orthodox interpretation by showing that Mozambique was also the major supplier of slaves for the French islands of the Western Indian Ocean or the Mascarenes. There are indications that, contrary to traditional assumptions, the French islands were rivaling and might even have replaced Brazil as the major export market for Mozambique slaves by 1830. Following the abrupt closure of the Brazilian market in the 1850s, Mozambique slave exports were sustained predominantly by demand from the French plantation islands, which imported up to 11,000 slaves per annum, and from Madagascar where the number of East Coast slave imports rose after a lull in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>4</sup>

Another aspect of the nineteenth century slave trade along the Zambezi that has not received any scholarly attention to date is the phenomenon of the resale of slaves into the interior from Mozambique. Following the fall in the external demand for slaves in the 1870s and 1880s, the Portuguese found it increasingly more profitable to sell slaves back into the interior, for ivory, to the Tonga, Nambya and other groups, where there was a growing local demand for replenishing numbers, following decades of demographic losses to slavers in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, and the loss of large numbers to Ndebele raiders from the 1860s onwards. Reselling slaves into the interior does not seem to have commenced in the 1870s, but appears to have been regularly practiced at different times in the past. For example, when Livingstone reached Mozambique in 1856 after his great trans-Africa journey, he found that the Portuguese regularly sold slaves to the Transvaal Boers in exchange for ivory.<sup>5</sup> Again, when he visited Tete in 1862, he saw some slaves being sent 'up the Zambesi' for resale.<sup>6</sup>

### **The West Coast Portuguese Trading Network with Zambesia**

The Portuguese had been active on the west coast of Africa long before they established themselves in Mozambique. Their influence and the international trading network it represented spread from Angola into the interior of southern Central Africa through their main agents the Ovimbundu, widely known in nineteenth century literature as the 'Mambari'.<sup>7</sup> The main quest

of the Ovimbundu was for ivory and slaves, which they traded for cloth and firearms. By the early nineteenth century the Ovimbundu traders had reached the Lozi kingdom, selling firearms for slaves. There is also some evidence that they had reached the Upper River area and the Nambya state by the early nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Evidence of the Nambya state's involvement in trading iron with the Upper River suggests that its iron trade was related to its involvement in international trade. Even as late as 1875, the Nambya state was still subject to occasional Ovimbundu visits.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Baines observed that Ovimbundu traders came from Angola to Hwange Chilisa's village on the north bank of the Zambezi in the 1860s when the Hwange was a refugee from the Ndebele.<sup>10</sup>

The expansion of the Lozi state to the south under Kololo rule gave the Ovimbundu a wider sphere of operation when they renewed trading relations in 1850, after an intermission during the period of Kololo conquest. From 1850 onwards, the Ovimbundu were mostly trading firearms and so great was the Kololo need for them that Sebetwane was prepared to offer slaves in exchange, despite his apparently genuine dislike of the traffic.<sup>11</sup> Livingstone first encountered the slave trade in 1851-2 when he penetrated north into the territory of the Kololo chief Sebetwane and found the Portuguese from Angola there. The Kololo told him that until the coming of the Portuguese, the idea of buying and selling human beings had never occurred to them.<sup>12</sup> During Livingstone's travels among the Kololo and the groups they had subjugated on the upper Zambezi in the 1850s, he noted that, in order to satisfy their desire for guns, the Kololo had sold slaves to the Ovimbundu; to Silva Porto, a Portuguese trader from the west coast; and to some Arabs from Zanzibar.<sup>13</sup> Livingstone noted that these slaves were captured from the east, certainly from the Nambya and Tonga areas because there is evidence that the Kololo raided the Nambya and Tonga in the 1840s and 1850s during their struggle with the Ndebele for control of the Middle Zambezi.<sup>14</sup>

Following the resumption of their trade with the Middle Zambezi in the 1850s after the Kololo conquest, the Ovimbundu began to penetrate the Tonga areas and buy slaves in exchange for hoes which were very scarce there in the nineteenth century after the decline of the Nambya iron trade with the upper and middle river areas of the Gwembe in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> This was the reason why the Ovimbundu had little difficulty in obtaining slaves from the Tonga for hoes, which they purchased around Sesheke. Livingstone maintained that the valley Tonga 'would not part with children for clothing, or beads, but agriculture with wooden hoes [was] so laborious that the sight of the [Ovimbundu] hoes prevailed'.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that the reason for the decline of the Ovimbundu slave trade with the Middle Zambezi was the southward spread of the Totela or 'Bunduwe' iron trade from the Lozi state to the upper and middle river sections of the Gwembe in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The Totela iron trade seems to have been initiated by a deliberate political decision by the rulers of the Lozi state, which appears to have been a positive response to the pressures of the Ovimbundu slave trade. Livingstone had suggested to the Kololo, who had an iron industry around the Njoko river, that they should sell hoes to the Tonga in exchange for ivory, which they could then resell to Benguela or Luanda, and thus cut out the Ovimbundu who were beginning to penetrate the Middle Zambezi valley to buy slaves from the Tonga and Nambya in exchange

for hoes.<sup>18</sup> This may explain why the Totela iron, which was clearly good and abundant, only began to be traded outside the sphere of the Lozi state in the mid-nineteenth century. On his return to the Kololo in 1860, Livingstone noted that soon after the Kololo began selling hoes to the Tonga in exchange for ivory, the extensive Ovimbundu slave mart had been closed.<sup>19</sup> Where the Ovimbundu had been able to demand slaves for hoes before the Totela trade began, the most common items exchanged for Totela hoes were goats, chickens and tobacco, although when the hoes were first introduced they were more expensive than this, as ivory used to be demanded.<sup>20</sup>

Because of its good quality and comparative cheapness, the Totela ivory trade became the most commonly known source of iron for the Middle Zambezi valley in the nineteenth century. Although the iron trade from the Nambya state and the Victoria Falls region continued for some time simultaneously with the Totela trade, it was never able to satisfy the full demand for hoes in the Gwembe and was eventually completely supplanted and reverted to being a purely local industry around the Matetsi river.<sup>21</sup>

### **The East Coast Portuguese Slave Trading Complex along the Zambezi**

The Portuguese had established themselves on the coast of Mozambique in the sixteenth century. They began to make their way up the Zambezi to the Lower River area by the end of the seventeenth century, attracted by the cheap and abundant ivory that the area had to offer.<sup>22</sup> The Zambezi, which was unbroken by rapids for almost 500 kilometres from its mouth to the Kebrabassa rapids, formed the best natural trade route into the interior in the whole of East Africa. Moreover, via its tributary, the Shire, it tapped Malawi, one of the major sources of slaves for export.<sup>23</sup> While the Portuguese and their Chikunda agents were able to use the 800-kilometer Lower River stretch of the Zambezi between Quelimane and the Kariba gorge as an economically viable commercial highway by using canoes to transport their trade goods, this was not true of the 400-kilometre stretch of the Middle Zambezi river above the Kariba gorge. There were various obstacles to the navigation of the middle Zambezi river, such as its speed of flow when in flood and the occurrence of rapids and the Kariba gorge which could not be navigated when the river was low, except by fearless Tonga canoe-men. Consequently, regular trade developed along the banks of the Zambezi.

There were two main slave-trading complexes that operated in the interior of Mozambique. The first one linked Mozambique Island with the territories of the Yao and Makua, and stretched as far as the southern Lunda and southern Tanzania. The second one linked Quelimane with its hinterland, extending up the Zambezi river as far as the Gwembe valley, and as far north as the Lunda kingdom of Kazembe, while to the south, it reached the Rozvi Chingamire state in Zimbabwe.<sup>24</sup> The Portuguese traders largely used overland routes along the Zambezi valley floor and transported their goods by means of slave porters. Any development towards the use of canoes for carrying trade goods was probably inhibited by the cheapness of slave labour for portage and the risks of losing one's trade goods since canoes could be easily upset in the rapids. This development of trade along the Zambezi river brought them into contact with the people of northwestern Zimbabwe. There is also evidence of overland trade routes across the Zimbabwean plateau that brought them into contact with most of the Shona-



speaking areas as far west as Chireya's village in the 1780s. Evidence also exists for overland trade between Sena and the Ndebele state in the mid-nineteenth century. The Portuguese traders established temporary settlements along the Zambezi that served as trade bases.<sup>25</sup> The small Chikunda settlement of Nkalande was the furthest upstream of the trading settlements in the Gwembe and was situated just above the Chete gorge on the downstream periphery of Mwemba's sphere of influence.<sup>26</sup> Livingstone learnt that Tonga trading expeditions had been to one such trade base, the feira of Dambarare, before 1855. In the 1890s they had another such settlement at Saba's village.<sup>27</sup>

The actual slave-trading in the interior was not carried out by the Portuguese themselves but by their middlemen, the *vashambadzi*, who were specialist slave agents of the *prazeros* of Zambesia. The *vashambadzi* were backed by powerful private armies of the *prazeros*, the Chikunda, whose numbers at times reached 10,000 slave soldiers. The Chikunda were used in slaving expeditions and in the escort of slave caravans to the coast.<sup>28</sup> The earliest Portuguese trading party to reach the Upper River from the east was the one which followed Livingstone in 1860 and had been sent by Jose Anselmo de Santana. They traveled along the river bank as far as Chete gorge where they purchased ivory, slaves and ten canoes for very small quantities of coarse white beads and cloth. The canoes were used to carry the ivory downstream.<sup>29</sup> The Chikunda appear to have spread upstream from the Lower Zambezi after 1862 in the wake of Livingstone's second expedition.<sup>30</sup> Like the Ovimbundu, their counterparts in the west coast trade with the interior, the main quest of the Chikunda was for ivory and slaves, which they traded for cloth, and later, firearms. On their first expedition upstream in 1862 they bought a number of good-looking girls in the Middle Zambezi very cheaply.<sup>31</sup> On his second expedition in the Zambezi valley, Livingstone frequently drew attention to the rapid spread of slavery since his first visit in 1855-6. He thought there had been a significant increase in the trade in the Zambezi region and attributed this to the drive by the Portuguese and Arabs to acquire more slaves for export.<sup>32</sup> Later scholarly work has confirmed his impressions. The Tonga are vague about precisely who was buying slaves, some cite the Chikunda, but many merely refer to 'black people from the east'. The 'black people from the east' probably included the Bisa, whose trading ventures were reaching the edge of Tonga country as early as 1856 (according to Livingstone) and involved buying slaves.<sup>33</sup> Before the fall in the external demand for slaves in the late nineteenth century, Portuguese slave traders and their African agents, the Chikunda, had been able to purchase large numbers of slaves from societies along the Zambezi and north-western Zimbabwe in the 1850s and 1860s in exchange for comparatively small quantities of beads and cloth.<sup>34</sup>

In 1867 Thomas had met Chikunda slave traders from Tete at Sinangombe's village and had learnt from Sinangombe that their visits up the Zambezi river were frequent and that they bought a considerable number of children annually as slaves. The Tonga used to take their ivory and children intended for sale to the Zambezi river bank where they met the slave traders who then bought the children for a few coarse beads.<sup>35</sup> Portuguese slave traders from Zumbo and Tete also visited Hwange Chilisa's north bank village annually in the 1860s to buy slaves.<sup>36</sup>

In 1877 Selous set off from Pandamatenga to chief Hwange's village opposite the mouth of the Deka river and made first hand observations of the depredations of the slave-seeking Chikunda among the Nambya and Tonga on both the south and north banks of the Zambezi. He saw abandoned villages left by the fleeing Tonga, and abandoned fields with crops scorched by the sun and pillaged by wild animals. He observed that many of the huts had been burnt and the grain bins emptied. The few Tonga men he saw walked about in groups for mutual protection, while women were very few since they were especially sought after by the slavers. Occasionally, Selous came across recently raided villages where the smell of burning and rotting flesh was strong in the air and the bodies of the dead, half eaten by hyena, lay in the path at his feet.<sup>37</sup> Further downstream, below the Kariba Gorge on the south bank, Selous met Kanyemba, a half-caste slaver whom Selous described as an African with strong Portuguese 'overtones'. Selous noted that Kanyemba was at that time a very powerful figure who virtually controlled the whole Zambezi valley and could muster a slave-raiding force of some 600 Chikunda, each with a firearm. It was these Chikunda who had completed the recent horrible series of raids that Selous had witnessed on his way down the river.<sup>38</sup>

For all the Portuguese who settled on the East Coast, the easy road to personal wealth was to participate in the slave trade. Although Portugal barred its nationals from engaging in slave trading activities in 1836, this decree was almost completely ignored by the colonial administrators of Mozambique because of the colony's economic dependence on slave exports. Furthermore, the Governors of Mozambique were unable to stop the slaving activities of the *prazeros* because they had a very small colonial force at their disposal, estimated at the start of the nineteenth century to have ranged between 100 and 300 soldiers. The *prazeros*, on the other hand, were unstoppable because they commanded slaving armies of the Chikunda ranging into several thousand men. Moreover, there existed a collusion between the ill-paid Portuguese officials and the *prazeros*.<sup>39</sup> Lyons McLeod, the British Consul at Mozambique in the late 1850s, stated that Portuguese officials knew the terms of their appointments, 'a small salary and the opportunity of making a large fortune by the slave trade'.<sup>40</sup>

One Governor was reported to have made 80,000 pounds sterling out of the slave trade in one year. When Livingstone 'opened up' the Shire Highlands, the immediate result was an incursion of Portuguese slavers, one party of which worked for the Governor of Tete.<sup>41</sup> A British Officer in the anti-slave trade squadron expressed his disappointment on finding that the Portuguese Authorities, instead of repressing the slave trade, actually abetted it.<sup>42</sup>

### **Numbers**

There can be no telling the actual numbers of subjects that societies in the Middle Zambezi Valley and adjoining territories on the Zimbabwe plateau lost to slavers from Mozambique, but a study focusing on the numbers exported from Quelimane can give us a reliable estimate because it is the Quelimane slave-trading complex that operated in the Mutapa state and other north-eastern Shona societies adjoining the Zambezi valley; and extended up the Zambezi river to its middle reaches, thereby coming into contact with the Tonga and Nambya societies of north-western Zimbabwe; and even reached the Changamire kingdom in south-western

Zimbabwe.<sup>43</sup> Although the totals of the Quelimane complex include captures from the Kazembe kingdom in south-eastern Zambia, they are still very reliable because they exclude figures of slaves captured from Malawi, Northern Zambia and southern Tanzania, who were exported from Mozambique Island, and therefore belong to the Mozambique Island complex. Maybe another indication of the extent of demographic losses suffered by Zimbabwean societies is the fact that Quelimane, at the mouth of the Zambezi, was acknowledged to be the greatest slave market in Africa by the 1830s.<sup>44</sup> In 1821 it was reported that there had been a dramatic growth in slave exports from Mozambique and this was reflected in the rise in customs revenue from slaves at Quelimane, from 17% of the total in 1806 to 85% by 1821. It has also been estimate that by 1821 net slave exports from Quelimane sometimes equaled those from Mozambique Island.<sup>45</sup> By 1830 Quelimane was probably the most important slave port in Africa, exporting about 10,000 slaves annually and perhaps up to 15,000 individuals in more active years.<sup>46</sup>

The number of slaves exported from Mozambique was small until the late 18<sup>th</sup> and particularly the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when it developed rapidly due to growing demand, notably from Brazil, which emerged during the Napoleonic Wars as one of the world's major sugar producers, but also from the Western Indian Ocean islands of the Mascarenes. Milburn estimates that 60% of Mozambique slave exports were initially destined for Brazil, with most of the remainder – ranging between 4,800 and 8,000 a year in the 1820s, being shipped to the islands of the Western Indian Ocean.<sup>47</sup> The dramatic growth in slave exports is reflected by the fact that by 1830 slave exports were responsible for between 55 and 75 per cent of all exports from Mozambique.<sup>48</sup> From 1800 to 1853 most of the slaves exported by the Portuguese from Mozambique went to Brazil, although from the 1840s onwards this meant running the Atlantic blockade by Royal Navy cruisers following the British decree against the slave trade. Between 1817 and 1818, twelve ships with 4 000 slaves on board sailed from Mozambique for Rio. Between 1815 and 1830 an average of 10,000 slaves a year left Mozambique for Brazil alone, and a further 7,000 for the French islands in the Indian Ocean. When we allow for smuggling, it seems reasonable to suggest that close to 20,000slaves were being carried away from Mozambique each year in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>49</sup>

This is supported by Campbell who estimates that between 1810 and 1814 over 12,000 slaves per annum were shipped from the ports of Mozambique and Quelimane, and this rose to over 20,000 a year in the 1820s.<sup>50</sup> As we saw above, by 1830 Quelimane was probably the most important slave port on the African continent, exporting between 10,000 and 15,000 slaves annually. In 1837, the last year for which good figures on the old Portuguese trade are available, the export of slaves from Mozambique to Brazil and Cuba reached 15,000.<sup>51</sup> Curtin estimates that Brazil imported 116,000 slaves from Mozambique and Madagascar, predominantly from the former, between 1817 and 1843, representing approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of slave exports from Mozambique during those years. The majority of the remaining exports would have been shipped to the Indian Ocean islands. Indeed, new evidence is now showing that, contrary to traditional assumptions, the Mascarenes rivaled and might even have replaced Brazil as the major export market for Mozambique slaves by 1830. Gwyn Campbell has shown that between 1820 and 1840 Mozambique became the major source of slaves for the Mascarenes.<sup>52</sup>

Several factors combined to bring an end to the Brazilian slave trade in the 1850s. On the Atlantic front, British warships entered Brazilian ports to enforce the abolition of the slave trade. At the start of the nineteenth century the trans-Mozambique Channel slave trade was carried out openly as the British, who concentrated their anti-slave trade patrols off the West African coast, had little notion of the extent of the East African slave trade, especially below Zanzibar. An observation has been made that the British were more familiar with the coastal geography of Australia and China than of the 2,100-kilometre coastline of Portuguese East Africa or that of the west coast of Madagascar.<sup>53</sup>

The British anti-slave trade squadron largely ignored the Mozambique Channel until the 1840s. Not until 1839 did Britain declare the right search Portuguese ships suspected of slaving, and only in 1842 was a naval patrol established in the Mozambique Channel. Even then, rarely as many as three cruisers were employed in the area, and they were generally easily evaded by the captains of slaving ships, who co-operated to establish an effective system of warning signals. The most common boat used for trans-Mozambique Channel slave traffic was the Swahili or Arab captained *beleta* dhow, which could sail as fast as most of the boats possessed by the British, who stood little chance of catching slave dhows until the development of steam in the 1840s. Even then capture was still rare. The greatest contributory factor to the continued success of the trans-Mozambique Channel slave runners was the immunity they gained from British naval searches by flying foreign flags – particularly French and, and from the 1840s, American colours, for France and the United States until the 1860s, refused to grant the British the right to search their vessels. In 1844 the British insisted that ships' flags be verified, but anti-slave patrols could not enforce this measure on ships carrying French colours unless within Malagasy waters, as defined by the 1833 accord.<sup>54</sup> Despite the Quintuple Treaty of 1841 which gave Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and Russia the right of search and bound them to seize all ships fitted out for slave trading, a treaty the Portuguese were browbeaten into agreeing to in 1842, it was reported in 1848 that there was no significant abatement in the slave trade from Mozambique to Rio. This was because an effective anti-slave trade campaign was prevented by the refusal of the United States and France to agree to the right of search, considering it an infringement of their sovereign rights.<sup>55</sup>

In Brazil itself, public opinion was changing. An epidemic of yellow fever in 1849-50 was attributed to the incoming slaves and there arose an outcry against their continued importation. The result was a considerable decrease in the number of slaves entering Brazil. Whereas 60,000 slaves entered Brazil in 1850, three years later this number had been reduced considerably to 2,000. Between 1853 and 1871 the number of slave imports continued to decrease until the Rio Branco bill of 1871 abolished slavery itself.<sup>56</sup> But the trade in slaves from Mozambique to the western Indian Ocean islands continued.<sup>57</sup> Following the abrupt closure of the Brazilian market in the 1850s, Mozambique slave exports were sustained predominantly by demand from the French plantation islands, which imported up to 11,000 slaves per annum, and from Madagascar where the number of East African slave imports rose after a lull in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>58</sup> French resistance to the right to search seriously impaired British efforts to end the slave trade on the Indian Ocean front. Livingstone, who

traveled through the Portuguese territories in the 1850s, testified to the way the French tricolor was cynically used as cover by Arab traders in the Mozambique channel, who sneeringly challenged Britain to do something about it.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Internal Slave Trade. Reselling Slaves Into The Interior**

The existence of an internal slave market for Mozambique slaves was first exposed to the outside world by Livingstone, who stumbled upon it in 1856.<sup>60</sup> The Gaza Ngoni, who settled in southern Mozambique during the turbulent times of the Mfecane in the 1830s under chief Manicusse, were the first group to participate in the internal slave trade with Portuguese river dealers along the Zambezi as they sought to replenish their numbers. Because of the Ngoni willingness to trade in slaves, there developed an aspect of slavery with important implications. For the first time, there was an internal African slave market that avoided the naval blockade that Britain had deployed to bring the slave trade to an end. Once it had been established, this internal slave trade flourished. The Ngoni maintained good relations with the Portuguese who sold them female slaves taken from north of the Zambezi. Other buyers included the Kololo from south-western Zambia, who came down the Zambezi river as far as Zumbo and the Luangwa junction to trade.<sup>61</sup>

When the fall in the external demand for slaves made it less practicable to export slaves from the Mozambique coast in the 1870s and 1880s, the Portuguese and their Chikunda agents found it increasingly profitable to sell slaves back to the Tonga and Nambya in the interior in exchange for ivory. The fall in the external demand for slaves coincided with an increasing local demand for slaves among the Tonga and Nambya whose rulers wished to replenish their followers who had been depleted by the slave trade in the 1850s and 1860s, and by the loss of large numbers of captives to the Ndebele in the period from the 1860s onwards.<sup>62</sup>

In 1876, H. Rowley, a U.M.C.A. missionary, observed that the Portuguese not only exported slaves but also them for ivory 'to a tribe that lived far inland, and who, having been unfortunate in war with the Matabele, had lost to their conquerors most of their women and children'.<sup>63</sup> Ovimbundu or 'Mambari' traders from the west had also been able to acquire large numbers of slaves from the Nambya and Tonga in the 1850s and 1860s in exchange for hoes. Selling slaves into the interior marked a significant change both in the direction and nature of the Portuguese slave trade because earlier in the nineteenth century the export trade had flourished.<sup>64</sup>

In 1877 Selous met a Portuguese trader named Simoes at Monteiro's island in the Middle River and observed that Simoes had brought with him several girls whom he wanted to sell for ivory. At Kasoko, which is further downstream, Selous met yet another trader who had just bought two young Tonga girls from Kanyemba and was apparently taking them upstream for resale.<sup>65</sup> Terorde, a Jesuit missionary in Father Depelchin's party, was amazed at the number of slaves he saw in Hwange's north bank village in 1880. He learnt that the Portuguese and their agents were buying these slaves for small amounts of cloth somewhere up the Kafue and reselling them in the Gwembe valley for ivory.<sup>66</sup>

It should be noted however that the resale of slaves into the interior did not commence following the fall in the external demand for slaves in the 1870s and 1880s. When Livingstone reached Mozambique in 1856 after his great trans-Africa journey, he found that the Portuguese regularly sold slaves to the Transvaal Boers in exchange for ivory.<sup>67</sup> Also, when he visited Tete in 1862, he saw some slaves being sent ‘up the Zambesi’ where ‘young women were sold for ivory’ while ‘the men and boys were kept as carriers’.<sup>68</sup> In 1877 Richard Frewen wrote that the Portuguese traders went up to Hwange from Zumbo and Tete to buy slaves ‘to exchange for ivory’.<sup>69</sup>

Although Frewen did not say where they exchanged the slaves for ivory, it is reasonable to suppose that it was within the Middle Zambezi valley or further downstream in the Lower Zambezi valley. Nevertheless, it should be noted that prior to the fall in the external demand, slave traders were probably of little significance as a source of slaves for resale in the interior. Since slaves were used to carry ivory and other goods, they were probably sold in the interior only when their numbers were in excess of those needed in transportation. When this was the case, exchanging some of one’s surplus slaves for ivory was a simple and effective means of eliminating the excess capacity in one’s transportation operation. Many other slaves were employed on prazos or great estates of Mozambique.

### Conclusion

The depredations caused by Portuguese slaving in the Middle Zambezi valley remain one of the lesser written about episodes in our history, and there has been a tendency, even among our foremost authors on Afro-Portuguese relations in Zimbabwe, to think that Portuguese slaving only affected areas north of the Zambezi. Bhila, for example, writing in 1982 and using only evidence pertinent to Portuguese-Manyika relations, mistakenly concluded that “the trade in slaves must not be exaggerated because it was never as important an aspect of Afro-Portuguese trade in the south as it was north of the Zambezi river”.<sup>70</sup> This traditional assumption needs to be challenged in light of abundant evidence, especially from the large corpus of published primary sources written by contemporary European observers in the nineteenth century, detailing the impact of the slave trade on the northern regions of Zimbabwe bordering the Zambezi.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> D and C Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi and its Tributaries; and of the Discovery of the Lakes Shirwa and Nyasa, 1858-1864*, (John Murray, London, 1865) 239-241; E. Colson, *The Social Organisation of the Gwembe Tonga*, (Manchester, 1960) 29; T.I. Matthews, ‘The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Gwembe Valley, Middle Zambezi’ (PhD. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1976) 383.

<sup>2</sup> F. Mclynn, *Hearts of Darkness: European Exploration of Africa* (Hutchinson, London, 1992) 201; Matthews, ‘Historical Tradition’, 392, 397, 399.

- <sup>3</sup> Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 384-5; G.T. Ncube, 'A History of Northwestern Zimbabwe, 1850-1950s: Comparative Change in Three Worlds', Mphil. Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 1995) 128.
- <sup>4</sup> Gwyn Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean, 1800-1861', *Slavery and Abolition*, IX, 3, 1988, 167, 169, 186.
- <sup>5</sup> McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 201.
- <sup>6</sup> Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, 406-07.
- <sup>7</sup> H.A.C. Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism, 1840-1890* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965) 126.
- <sup>8</sup> Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 392, 397, 399.
- <sup>9</sup> E.C. Tabler, (ed.) *To The Victoria Falls Via Matabeleland, The Diary of Major Henry Stabb, 1875* (C. Struik, Cape Town, 1967) 146, 148.
- <sup>10</sup> T. Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa, being an account of a journey in the years 1861 and 1862 from Walvis Bay, on the Western Coast, to Lake Ngami and the Victoria Falls* (Londman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, London, 1864) 453-454.
- <sup>11</sup> Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism*, 126.
- <sup>12</sup> MacLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 201.
- <sup>13</sup> Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism*, 126.
- <sup>14</sup> Ncube, 'History of Northwestern Zimbabwe', 128; E. Colson, 'A Note on Tonga and Ndebele', *The Northern Rhodesia Journal*, No. 2, December 1950, 40; J. D. Cobbing, 'The Ndebele Under The Khumalos, 1820-1896', (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976), 290, 328.
- <sup>15</sup> M.P. Miracle, 'Plateau Tonga Entrepreneurs in Historical Inter-Regional Trade' *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, XXVI, 1959, 34-50.
- <sup>16</sup> D. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (John Murray, London, 1857) 526.
- <sup>17</sup> Miracle, 'Plateau Tonga Entrepreneurs', 39; Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 348.
- <sup>18</sup> Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, 321-322.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Miracle, 'Plateau Tonga Entrepreneurs' 34-50.

<sup>21</sup> Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 348.

<sup>22</sup> M.D.D. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlements on the Zambezi*, (Longman, London, 1973) 130.

<sup>23</sup> Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean,' 174.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 176

<sup>25</sup> Matthews, *Historical Tradition*, 345-6, 383-5, 388-390.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 388.

<sup>27</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 532; Ncube, 'History of Northwestern Zimbabwe', 107.

<sup>28</sup> D. N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900-1850. An Outline of Shona History*, Mambo Press, 1980, 149; H. H. K. Bhila, *Trade and Politics in a Shona Kingdom. The Manyika and their Portuguese and African Neighbours, 1575-1902*, Longman, Salisbury, 1982, 44; Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean, ' 177.

<sup>29</sup> Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 384, 385.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 383.

<sup>31</sup> Ncube, 'History of Northwestern Zimbabwe', 106-110; Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 392, 397, 399.

<sup>32</sup> McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 201.

<sup>33</sup> Miracle, 'Plateau Tonga Entrepreneurs', 43, 44.

<sup>34</sup> Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 392, 397, 399.

<sup>35</sup> T. M. Thomas, *Eleven Years in Central South Africa* (J. Snow, London, 1873) 381.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Frewen's letters in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 22, 223-224.

<sup>37</sup> F.C. Selous, *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa*, Richard Bentley & Sons, London (Fascimile Reprint, Books of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, 1970) 291-299.



<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean, 174.

<sup>40</sup> Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism*, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean,' 175.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 176-177.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Main, *Zambezi. Journey of a River*; Southern Book Publishers, Cape Town, 1990, 221; E. Alpers, *The East African Slave Trade* (Historical Association of Tanzania, Nairobi, 1967) 8-9; McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 193

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean,' 174.

<sup>46</sup> Alpers, *East African Slave Trade*, 8-9; McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 193

<sup>47</sup> Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean,' 184.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>49</sup> McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 193; Alpers, *East African Slave Trade* 7-8.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean,' 184.

<sup>51</sup> Alpers, *East African Slave Trade*, 8-9; McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 193.

<sup>52</sup> Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean' 169.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 181.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 181-183.

<sup>55</sup> McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 193-4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 193.

<sup>57</sup> G. Campbell, 'The East African Slave Trade, 1861-1895: The 'Southern' Complex' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22, 1, 1989, 21-23.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 23

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 21-23

<sup>60</sup> McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 201.

<sup>61</sup> Main, *Zambezi. Journey of a River*, 222.

<sup>62</sup> Newitt, *Portuguese on the Zambezi*, 221-22; Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 392, 297, 299.

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<sup>65</sup> F.C. Selous, *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* (MacMillan, London, 1920) 290, 297.

<sup>66</sup> Matthews, 'Historical Tradition', 400.

<sup>67</sup> McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness*, 201.

<sup>68</sup> Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, 406-07.

<sup>69</sup> R. Frewen, 'The Journal of Richard Frewen, 1877-1878', in E.C. Tabler, (ed.) *Zambezia and Matabeleland in the Seventies: The Narratives of Frederick Hugh Barber, 1875 and 1877-78, and the Journal of Richard Frewen 1877-1878*, (Chatto and Windus, London, 1960) 192.

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