

Senior Editors' Note

The transition from slavery to legally “free” labor was, historians have long demonstrated, far messier and more ambiguous than formal definitions of these two categories and their neat demarcations would suggest. In the colonial and postcolonial world, forced labor survived in many forms, often aided by the state. Among the main ideological devices allowing the continuation of coercive production regimes was the imperative of development for the sake of building communities and nations. The multifarious and complex uses of “development” in perpetuating coercion in the aftermath, perhaps even the afterlife, of slavery on the African continent is the theme for this special issue of *ILWCH*, titled “Developmentalism, Labor, and the Slow Death of Slavery in Twentieth-Century Africa” and edited by Benedetta Rossi, from the University of Birmingham.

This issue presents a range of articles from different African contexts from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries. As Rossi explains in the introduction, several common threads link the various contributions across the diversity of very specific cases. First, developmentalism sustained the coercive inducement to work for low or no wages, which was presented as a contribution to community-building for the sake of populations otherwise deemed backward and stagnant. In this way, authorities could circumvent the constraints on unfree labor contained, since the 1920s, in ILO conventions while exploiting the loopholes in those very statutes, which allowed a broad range of exceptions justified by putative African “customs.”

Second, the malleability with which development discourse employed cultural norms made it possible to involve local intermediaries and indigenous recruiters (like “chiefs”) in the hiring process, thereby reinforcing impressions that coercion was for the benefit of local communities. As a departure from studies of development that emphasize hierarchical and technocratic modalities, Rossi points out that a range of African interests, from postcolonial rulers, to local administrators, company managers, and sometimes workers themselves, could use developmentalism and its contradictions to stage claims and enact social contestations.

Third, workers’ resistance to forced labor in developmental guise often took the form of migration, which meant that struggles over recruitment were in large measure also struggles over the control of labor mobility. At the same time, migrant workers have been especially vulnerable to coercive employment, which European authorities as well as African states justified in racial terms, as a way to “civilize” people deemed “primitive” and averse to work. The persistence of anti-black racism and ethnic discrimination as factors that de facto

prolonged the life of slavery on the continent is one more element shared by these articles.

In Christine Whyte's "A State of Underdevelopment: Sovereignty, Nation-Building and Labor in Liberia 1898–1961," Liberia emerges as the somewhat anomalous case of a "colony without a metropole," nominally independent but practically subjected to American imperial and corporate interests as well as the racialized rule of the Americo-Liberian minority over indigenous societies. The persistence of forced labor was here guaranteed by its inclusion in development as a form of "civilizing mission," which, in a sad irony, provided elites descended from freed US slaves with ammunition to enlist African workers for plantation labor under American multinational enterprises. The role of US imperialism remained decisive, however, as American development assistance abetted, especially in the interest of global strategic imperatives, both the country's neocolonial position and its despotic labor regime.

Reuben Loffman shows, in "Belgian Rule and its Afterlives: Colonialism, Developmentalism and Mobutism in the Tanganyika District, Southeastern DR-Congo, 1885–1985," that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) assisted the survival of forced labor by updating particularly brutal colonial practices in the name of an early abolitionist discourse turned into a more sophisticated paternalist state ideology. Across a century-long time span, readers are reminded of the long duration of the idea that "free" black populations allegedly remain in need of white supervision and discipline, an idea which has accompanied, on both shores of the Atlantic, the exploitation and political subjugation of black workers before and after legal "emancipation." Abolitionism and its mutations are therefore integral to colonial and imperial imagination.

One needs, however, to exercise caution in regarding development as the mere result of a seamless bureaucratic rationality. Annalisa Urbano discusses, in this regard, the case of Italy-ruled Somalia in her "A 'Grandiose Future for Italian Somalia': Colonial Developmentalist Discourse, Agricultural Planning, and Forced Labour (1900–40)," which documents how "development planning" was more a way to legitimize colonial rule than the expression of the avowed effectiveness and efficiency of European administration. As servitude was enforced in colonial agriculture, the pretense of building a modern economy couched racist assumptions about the need for Africans to be "protected" from themselves and the presumed dysfunctionality of migration and small-scale cultivation.

Mozambique was another case, analyzed by Zachary Kagan Guthrie's "This Was Being Done Only to Help': Development and Forced Labor in Barue, Mozambique, 1959–1965," in which development revealed the colonizers' hubris to a far greater extent than their actual capacity for strategic organization of production. The Portuguese state initially intended developmentalism as an avenue for reforming colonial rule, which would transcend forced labor. Yet, faced with African opposition to European racial domination, the ends of safeguarding Portuguese rule overrode in the end all other economic and

social considerations, and forced labor was reinstated as a form of control over colonized workers.

Northern Ghana between the two world wars, the focus of Alice Wiemers's "It Is All He Can Do to Cope with the Roads in His Own District": Labor, Community, and Development in Northern Ghana, 1919–36," provides the example of road construction as an activity colonial states used to present forcible development work as ultimately useful for local communities. African employment to build infrastructures was presented as a contemporary incarnation of timeless customary duties, which European rulers and local chiefs could invoke to thwart African migrations as attempts to escape coerced labor. In a glaring contradiction, the freedom of movement, a cornerstone of the liberal ideology underpinning late-colonial "reforms," was overtly abrogated by Ghana's British rulers since African mobility threatened the priorities of capitalist accumulation and racial domination.

Elisabeth McMahon's "Developing Workers: Coerced and "Voluntary" Labor in Zanzibar, 1909–1970" provides further insights into the ways in which volunteerism, steeped in the values of local traditions, could blur all divides between "free" and "unfree" labor as descendants of former slaves became the new conscripts of development-motivated plantation work. Not only is the very conceptual distinction between exploitation and coercion called into question in Zanzibar's case, but—as in Congo and Liberia—the casting of forced labor as voluntary permitted international organizations, Western powers, and postcolonial states to justify the regimentation of African workers for purposes of economic and social policies that claimed to be the legacy of abolitionism.

Niger is also a reality where enslavement proved remarkably resilient as an institution and in its legacies. Benedetta Rossi discusses, in "From Unfree Work to Working for Free: Labor, Aid, and Gender in the Nigerien Sahel, 1930–2000," the quandaries facing the transition from colonialism to independence as Niger's postcolonial state embraced developmentalism as an official ideology, the translation of which into practice remained nonetheless the responsibility of European personnel trained in the coercive exploitation of African labor and resources. As the state proved unable to thwart circular male migration, a historically major feature of local economies, women were left by their severely constrained survival options to be enrolled in "volunteer" yet ultimately compulsory "anti-desertification" work. An important aspect of Rossi's article is its elucidation of the gender hierarchies determined and reproduced by the conjunction of developmentalism and forced labor.

This issue features a free-standing article by Steven Parfitt, "Powderly will go to Paris: The Paris Exposition and the Knights of Labor," highlighting the complicated history of early transatlantic labor internationalism. The 1889 Paris Exposition offered the Knights of Labor an opportunity to internationalize their appeal by building connections, in the name of a shared affinity with labor republicanism as a moderate alternative to socialism and anarchism, with the French labor movement. That opening was ultimately squandered due to a

combination of internal factionalism and organizational inefficiency, as a far more systematic and radical approach to working-class politics, the Second Internationale, took off from Paris in 1889.

Our review essay, Luca Falciola's "The Radical Left after 1968: From Ideological Craze to Reconfiguration of Politics" also speaks to international and comparative labor movements by looking at recent works—by Eleanor Davey, Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, Takemasa Ando, and Guobin Yang—on the fate of the radical left generation of the 1960s in the United States, East Asia, and Western Europe. The biographical and organizational trajectories of former militants in such disparate realities troubles, Falciola argues, the assumption that deradicalization necessarily opened the way to depoliticization, as activism found new local and global possibilities of social contestation or policy-related work.

This issue reaffirms *ILWCH*'s commitment to the studies and debates that critically connect global dynamics of labor struggle and working-class politics to the operations of corporate capital, imperial forces, and international institutions, while emphasizing the reflections of such linkages in distinct local situations. It is a mode of inquiry that is particularly necessary at a time when racism, exclusion, and the proclaimed need to save "Western civilization" are resurfacing, in Europe as well as America, as discourses geared at rescuing capitalist development while still ensuring the violent subjugation, social vulnerability, and coercive employment of migrant workers everywhere.

Such critical intersections were central to the work of Judith Stein, a leading labor scholar and long-standing member of the *ILWCH* editorial board, who recently passed away leaving an outstanding scholarly legacy in working-class history, the history of capitalism, and Black studies. By opening this issue with Joshua Freeman's moving tribute to Judith's life and scholarship, the journal joins the mourning of the many readers, students, and colleagues she touched with her towering intellect. We will miss her deeply.

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