

**Guthrie, Zachary Kagan. *Bound for Work: Labor, Mobility, and Colonial Rule in Central Mozambique, 1940-1965*. University of Virginia Press, 2018, 240 pp. ISBN 9780813941547**

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Zachary Kagan Guthrie's book *Bound for Work. Labor, Mobility, and Colonial Rule in Central Mozambique, 1940-1965* makes for a compelling study on the local dynamics of colonial labor and mobility in central Mozambique between 1940 and the early 1960s, focusing on the period from the reintroduction of forced labor in Mozambique in 1942 to its abolition in 1961. The book results from the author's PhD dissertation, completed in 2014 at Princeton University.

Despite the recent interest sparked by global and transnational approaches to imperial and colonial history inscribed in a broader global context—which have paved the way for exploring topics such as the negotiation of empire in international fora and the role of experts in developing colonial territories—it is important not to lose sight of the local and regional dynamics of imperial history. Studies that seek to unveil particular aspects of the rule of empire on the ground, pointing out the complexities of the colonial situation, where both colonizers and colonized would struggle to pursue their own agendas, are still highly relevant in the field of colonial studies.

The book in question is a good example of how the study of colonial labor can benefit from such approaches. On the one hand, this is because of the themes that the author chooses to investigate: Guthrie uses a broader understanding of labor mobility that does not apply solely to migration, but also to other types of mobility, such as the forced displacement of workers in the context of forced labor, and internal migration for voluntary work. He goes on to tackle topics such as family life and the realities of colonial rule at the local level, including the limitations encountered by administrators and African intermediaries.

On the other hand, it is because of the methodological options taken by the author: there are many ways of telling history and Guthrie creatively approaches labor and mobility in Mozambique by taking into account the life trajectories and concrete experiences of dozens of people in central Mozambique. One positive feature of this method is the way that

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Guthrie sets about including different types of colonial labor and diverse personal trajectories in his narrative.

The author combines archival research (at both the local and the provincial level) with oral interviews, a methodological choice that enriches this study. As the author states, the interviews that he conducted provided him with an entryway to the mobility of workers that the official documents could not grasp, which is definitely one of the book's strengths.<sup>2</sup> Making use of a very comprehensive and solid corpus of literature on the subject and bringing in authors who have worked extensively on colonial labor—such as Frederick Cooper, Alexander Keese, and, for the Mozambican case, Eric Allina, and Allen Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman—*Bound for Work* is a notable study in which the author has managed to provide an innovative take on this particular subject.

African agency played a large role in shaping the colonial encounter and Guthrie is keen on observing that Africans “moved repeatedly between these different kinds of migrant labor, sometimes forced, sometimes voluntary, to different locations across central Mozambique and southern Africa” (2). The book cleverly explores the blank spaces left by a colonial rule which failed to control some aspects of colonial life and therefore displayed an unequal and intermittent power throughout space and time. As Guthrie puts it: “The enormous gap between law and practice meant that colonial power was sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker than was envisioned by colonial officials.” (123) Occasionally, the colonial reality would even find ways to reconcile the interests of both the colonizers and the colonized. Guthrie gives the example of colonial administrators deliberately ignoring pass laws, and, in such a way, allowing Africans to find work closer to home and avoid migration.

The author gives center stage to the agency of Africans, yet he does not fail to mention the violent disruption that the colonial state (in this case, through the imposition of forced labor) often represented for their everyday existence and family life. Guthrie pays attention to the complexities of different moments in different life trajectories, something he accomplishes by gathering together a very reasonable pool of personal experiences, confirming the agency of African laborers.

*Bound for Work* is divided into six chapters. The first three chapters examine how labor mobility was experienced by individuals in central Mozambique. The subsequent three chapters broaden the scope to include an examination of labor mobility within colonial rule.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that, despite their inherent bias, colonial sources, such as the ones examined in this book, often contain accusations of abuse among colonial officials and denounce the lack of administrators' resources, thus also accounting for the weaknesses and contradictions of the colonial state.

The first chapter analyzes the reintroduction of forced labor in Mozambique in 1942, coinciding with the reintegration of the Mozambique Company territories (Manica and Sofala, the territory under analysis) under government rule. It clearly integrates forced labor into the broader context of European colonialism in Africa, both as an economic and a political instrument. As the author puts it, “[s]ending people into forced labor was, along with collecting taxes, the prime method of demonstrating Portuguese political supremacy” (24). European empires were consensual about the necessity to instill the “moral duty of labor” into colonized populations. Leading people to work so they could be taxed, and at the same time bringing them into European civilization, was a common trait shared by empires throughout colonial Africa.

In post-1942 central Mozambique, forced labor was known as *contrato* (contract), a “six-month spell of low-paid and physically arduous work imposed by colonial authorities” (31) on jobs and locations decided by the latter. Another positive point is the explanation of forced labor on the ground (recruitment, forced displacements, working conditions, and employers’ violence), something that the literature often fails to mention.

Methodologically, this first chapter sets the tone for the rest of the book, with a combination of archival sources (which contain the visions of different colonial officials, not always as convergent as one might expect) and oral testimonies being used to achieve a richer analysis. Interviews give accounts of random and forceful roundups of men, who were then sent to work under poor conditions and on low wages. They show the concrete impact of this colonial interference on people’s lives. This is a coherent trait in the book, with interviews being used in later chapters to describe the role of African chiefs in recruitment and the employers’ disregard for pass laws.

The attention given to African agency is also illustrated by the ways in which Africans themselves appropriated forced labor, by choosing, for example, to volunteer for forced labor, which would provide them with an “easy” six-month contract. However, they still had no choice about what would happen next regarding the job they would be assigned to or even its whereabouts.

Chapter 2 is about mobility. It examines the three types of migrant labor that African workers in central Mozambique would usually undertake: working for rural employers, such as sawmills; urban jobs in Beira; or work in the neighboring territories of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa.

Guthrie explains the difference, and the complementarity, between *contratado* (forced) labor and voluntary labor. Voluntary workers enjoyed greater autonomy, as they still met

their fiscal obligations while being able to choose where to work and what job to take. The author's intention is that this chapter will invert "the focus of traditional histories of migrant labor by focusing on its outcome, rather than on its cause" (44), something he successfully accomplishes as he explores how Africans navigated those various options and what life was like at different work sites and locations.

The author distances himself from the traditional view of migrant laborers as a monolithic category: their personal histories actually account for a multitude of paths. A pivotal element is the fact that workers alternate periods of forced labor (and forced displacement) with chosen migrations. Their agenda and motivations change along the way, as do their identities.

The ways in which labor and mobility affect—or are affected by—gender dynamics and family life are the subject of the third chapter. Firstly, it examines the situation of women. In colonial society, African women were expected to fulfill a domestic, home-based role. They were exempt from forced labor obligations, yet still subjected to the colonial state's pressures and violence, being forced, for instance, to cultivate cotton and rice. Nevertheless, it was their agency that made reality a much more complex experience, one in which they did not fully comply with the administrators' expectations. One frequently mentioned example is the production and selling of alcoholic beverages by African women. Just like the men, in the colonial context, African women "undertook many different types of work and navigated a mixture of coercion and opportunity as they did so" (72).

Furthermore, women were key elements in negotiating labor within a family context, thereby shaping men's labor and migration options and strategies. Labor mobility had an impact on family life, just as the latter could also shape the former. The author thus brings emotions into the analysis. Emotions might interplay in different ways with laborers' lives: besides influencing their working strategies, they could be used by the administration itself in its own favor, as the interviewees stated that women were taken hostage to prevent men from escaping forced labor.

This chapter, however, could benefit from some more information on the institution of marriage in the region in order to better enlighten the reader on the subject. A brief portrayal of marriage and family arrangements in central Mozambique could be beneficial. As it is, despite the references to polygyny, readers may be inclined to see marriage in the region solely as a monogamist, "westernized" configuration.

The following chapters deal with labor under the broader context of colonial rule.

The functioning of colonial administration and the role of African authorities are the subject of the fourth chapter. African authorities (in the Mozambican case, *régulos* and village chiefs) and guards (*cipais* or *cipaios*) were key elements in the rule of colonial Africa. Struggling with personnel shortages, the Portuguese colonial state, like its European counterparts, relied on these intermediaries to perform imperial tasks such as taxation and labor recruitment. There are plenty of examples throughout the book, accounting for their actual presence in everyday life and their pivotal role in labor force recruitment.

The chapter sums up the major role played by the *régulos* within the administration, looking simultaneously at their importance and the contradictions that came from their particular position as in-betweeners. For instance, situations would occur where replacing a *régulo* failed to guarantee the population's allegiance to his replacement. Also, frequently being the ones charged with conscripting forced laborers, they were able to spare their own relatives and allies, just as they were in the position of demanding bribes in order to save men from forced recruitment.

Similar situations occurred with the *cipais*: in the previous chapter, three interviews reveal how, through deliberate negligence or by issuing a warning, those African guards would spare other Africans from punishments. Guthrie's book clearly shows that the agency of those intermediaries could shape and influence the way colonial rule affected people's lives.

This chapter therefore accounts for the contradictions of the colonial state, which was also unable to establish definitive borders for chiefdoms or to control the movements of populations. Colonial power was to remain limited and was exercised piecemeal. Chapter 5, rightfully entitled "Imaginary Laws and Colonial Realities," makes a closer examination of the actual gap found between colonial law and practice, which "meant that colonial power was sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker than was envisioned by colonial officials" (123).

While the book's first chapters (especially the first two) examine how labor mobility dynamics affected Africans' lives, this chapter places these people in relation with the administration that ruled their lives and considers how they interplayed with one another. Laws governing both forced labor and migration were ignored or unevenly enforced, creating a blank space through which Africans could navigate.

Both administrators and workers tried to take advantage of the situation and preserve their autonomy. For instance, administrators could try to control movement and migration, while the population would resort to bribery or even falsify situations in order to find a way

out. Men themselves were able to transfer between different types of labor. The administration could not control migrants, but would probably conscript them for *contratado* labor upon their return. The interviews at the end of the chapter vividly illustrate this state of affairs in a most coherent form. African auxiliaries could also take advantage of the situation in order to reassert their own power.

Finally, the sixth chapter delves into the changes occurring in migrant labor in the early 1960s, the abolition of the Native Code and the subsequent abolition of forced labor being the major ones. The author paints a comprehensive picture of the broader context in which these changes took place: the international pressures for Portugal to abolish forced labor practices; the unrest in neighboring Rhodesia, which made this country less attractive; and the growing economy in Beira, which allowed for more stable labor opportunities within the colony.

However, the abolition of forced labor on paper did not mean the end of it in practice. On the contrary, Guthrie notes the continuities. After the abolition, *contratado* labor still existed as an administrative punishment for “vagrants.” Migrant workers still endured poor working conditions and abuse, often with the administration’s complacency. The void left by administrative conscription was filled by private recruiters, whose services employers sought in order to find workers, and these recruiters still used *régulos* for recruitment. Here, Guthrie examines the various continuities that persisted from colonial history, as the gap between law and practice was still a reality, even if in a new context.

The theme of continuity is resumed in the conclusion, where Guthrie elaborates on some topics and trends in post-forced labor and post-colonial southern Africa and offers some excellent conclusions. A very interesting one is made when considering migrant labor as a phenomenon that helps to perpetuate labor structures and thus adjourn labor reforms, accessible most of all to stabilized laborers. The author also considers the region’s migrant labor to be part of what led southern Africa to take a different route during the period of African decolonization.

As I have emphasized, *Bound for Work* consistently displays an interest in “ordinary” people’s lives. However, in the introduction, the author gives the impression that he is going to delve more or less extensively into life trajectories, which is not completely the case. Instead, he picks out moments of those trajectories, analyzing them together with other people’s trajectories that shared similar features. The part where most attention is paid to specific life trajectories is towards the end of Chapter 2.

Moreover, Guthrie only very occasionally provides a portrayal of the interviewees. How old the interviewees were at the time of different events, for example, is not disclosed. The same goes for other aspects of their lives: marital status, wealth, possible relations with the intermediaries. Did labor mobility affect them all equally, regardless of their age and social status?

Locating the events in time—as the author does for the quotes on the first pages of Chapter 4—would be of help for the reader and would offer greater historical density to what is being reported, even if the period in question is rather short and the author himself declares his unwillingness to engage in a diachronic analysis.

Some details about the colonial officials quoted throughout the book would also be valuable. Since they make up the other side of this history as the producers of one part of the sources, a portrait of these men could be interesting, just as it would be for African chiefs whose situation was far from stable or consensual.

Despite these aspects, which could be of use without the risk of falling into a probably undesired micro-historical analysis, *Bound for Work* is a consistent, serious, appealing, and very interesting book on labor and mobility in colonial Mozambique. This book undoubtedly constitutes an important contribution to labor history, colonial history, and social history, while helping to broaden our understanding of the history of colonial Mozambique and the Portuguese empire. Using labor and migrant labor to tackle such issues as gender, family, rule of empire, and the economy, makes this study not only a very pleasant read, but also a compelling contribution to southern African history.