

2018

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Phillip Lorenzo
Chapman University

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Lorenzo, Phillip (2018) "The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Portuguese Prazeros: An Economic Creation of Cultural Identity," *Voces Novae*: Vol. 6, Article 3.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/vocesnovae/vol6/iss1/3>

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Voces Novae: Chapman University Historical Review, Vol X, No Y (YEAR)

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The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Portuguese *Prazeros*: An Economic Creation of Cultural Identity

Phillip Lorenzo

For 366 years, the transatlantic slave trade dominated the activities of the Atlantic Ocean, marking the single largest migration of peoples and cultures ever seen, stretching from Africa and Europe, to the Americas, all connected by the movement of people and goods. Due to an increasing desire to exploit the economic benefits of cheap labor for the production and transportation of precious metals, sugar, rum, rice, tobacco, cotton, coffee, indigo, and other luxury goods, this trade facilitated not only the creation of a vast web of trading networks, but also the Atlantic Ocean World.^[1]

During this period of exploration and colonization, the Portuguese Crown and her protectorates controlled a majority share of all captives and commodities being exported from Angola through its main ports at Luanda, Benguela, and Cabinda, located on the Atlantic side of the continent. However, the initial royal Portuguese interest in the African continent began on the Indian Ocean, at the Zambezi River of Mozambique in the early years of the 16th century. The hope was to acquire access to the mythical gold mines of the Queen of Sheba. The Zambezi outlet into the Indian Ocean was largely controlled by Arab traders prior to the arrival of Portuguese exploration. Eliminating the Arab middlemen, the Portuguese filled the economic vacuum, redirected trade, and established a system of crown-issued land grants, known as *prazos da coroa*, which were distributed to members of Portugal's aristocracy along with the title *Prazero*. By attempting to control this section of the African interior, the Portuguese crown hoped to create a monopoly of the major trade routes linking Angola in the west, to the source of the Zambezi River in the east.

An enclave of *prazos* was first established in central Africa as the transatlantic slave trade expanded and then perpetuated. However, investigation of the Portuguese sociopolitical interactions with the chieftaincies of the Zambezi River Valley, if only initially because of their participation in the transatlantic slave trade, sheds light on the cross-cultural exchange that occurred in this region, allowing for a clearer characterization of the identity of the *prazeros*, and their subsequent economic impact. As the slave trade was declining in the early years of the 19th century, the continuous inability of the Portuguese to establish a transcontinental trade network from Angola to the Zambezi forced the *prazeros* to find an alternative source of economic prosperity. Ultimately, the *prazeros* adapted and were incorporated into older and more enduring political economies that reached the networks of both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds.

The study of African history has become more fashionable for Americans in the last few decades, because of a growing interest in the establishment and interrelationships of the Atlantic Ocean World. This system of perpetual trade and exploration provided direct cost effective ocean routes to regions of the world that had no previous sustained contact with peoples of a foreign origin. While past historians were satisfied with studying continents in isolation, scholars today instead focus their attention on the networks of migration and economic links that were developed between continents across the Atlantic Ocean. This new method brings to light an understanding that these trans-Atlantic ties have been more important and influential in determining historical change than those developed across land.

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In 1949, Fernand Braudel published *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*, which pioneered a new way of looking at regional history by placing economic and social factors at the center of things. This inspired students of the *Annales* school and other historians to apply his ideas to the study of Atlantic History.^[2] One such scholar, French historian Pierre Chaunu, utilized this method and approach to develop his own arguments about the effects of the Atlantic migration. This idea of "disenclavement" which, Chaunu defined as, the ending of isolation for some areas and the increase in intersocietal contacts in most others, refers to the growth of trade and ideas between all areas of the world regardless of a previously known status of isolation.^[3] Where this argument fell short, along with the work of Frédéric Mauro's study of the Portuguese Atlantic and Vitorino Magalhaes-Godinho publication of the Portuguese world economy, was their isolated focus on the efforts of European migration with the exclusion of the role of other Atlantic societies, primarily African. Braudel's examination of the Atlantic, specifically the Mediterranean, acknowledged in part the participation that the local indigenous inhabitations had on the creation of the Atlantic Ocean World but still held on to the ideals of European superiority in this process.

Philip Curtin was among these first historians to apply Braudel's ideas, and with them created new methods for analyzing the demographics of the Atlantic Slave Trade. To many historians he is recognized for compiling the first accurate quantitative statistical analysis of the entire transatlantic slave trade in his book, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, 1969). This work and many others have allowed historians, such as David Eltis and Herbert S. Klein, to conduct their own research and further the discussion of how and why this movement of people occurred and the effects it has had on the world. While Philip Curtin is not the first scholar to write about the slave trade in the Atlantic world, he is recognized as creating the first quantitative history and demography of the African diasporas, creating in its self a new discipline, Atlantic History: a view of the Atlantic Ocean as a connecting entity between continents instead of a partition.^[4]

In accordance with this study, Curtin also wrote the first full-fledged economic history for a portion of pre-colonial Africa, which proved that a coherent and convincing economic history could be written for pre-colonial Africa, and that it parallels many of the economic theories and changes seen in the western world.^[5] In his later years of work, Curtin demonstrated a fascinating and unique look at cross-cultural trade through a comparative analysis in his book, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1984). This book demonstrated how trade diasporas all over the world shared many common characteristics for centuries until they became inefficient when Western practices overran them during the industrial age.^[6] These differing focuses on the transatlantic slave trade and Africa, have ignited the academic community and begun the spread of new ideas and opinions related to this study. As new generations of historians enter into this ongoing debate, they look to the past for inspiration and ideas that ultimately guide their own work and research. This is why it is so important to understand the arguments of the past, so as to help further these conversations and incorporate new ideas and opinions that have yet to be discussed.

In 2006 David Eltis and David Richardson, along with the support of other historians, moved beyond Curtin's research and created the most comprehensive collection of quantitative data outlining the number of captives transported out of western Africa, through the various trade networks of both European and American merchants with the publication of The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database.^[7] Alongside this database, which takes on the medium of a digital source that can be accessed through the Internet, Eltis and Richardson have produced an accompanying set of maps and diagrams. The *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* provides readers with nearly 200 visual recreations, specifically created for the volume, that explore nearly every detail of the African slave traffic across the Atlantic. The value of viewing this atlas is the visual representations of the numerical data located online in the slave voyages database, and the examples of possible outlines for the creation of specified maps and tables that relate specifically to the research being presented throughout this paper. However, this study of the creation of the

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Portuguese *prazeros*, and their subsequent economic impact on the human total exported out of Africa, does not take into consideration the experiences of these captives throughout the entire process from capture to final sale in the Americas. The maps and illustrations created by using this statistical data have changed the way we think about and teach the Atlantic Ocean World. They paint a picture as to the vast complexity of the transatlantic slave trade and the influence its networks of oceanic connections have had on the cultures and economies of the countries involved.

In contrast to this atlas produced by Eltis and Richardson, historian Herbert S. Klein has taken the data compiled by Curtin, along with additional primary material from European and American archives, and applied it in yet another form that attempts to evaluate the relation of exports and imports to seasons, local and international economic circumstance, and the condition of supply in the interior.^[8] This research was compiled in a paper entitled, *The Portuguese Slave Trade From Angola in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1972), and narrowed the focus from an all-inclusive study of the complex structure of the transatlantic slave trade to an investigation of the Portuguese trading networks located in the African country of Angola. Klein's research was aimed at answering broad questions regarding the organization, rhyme, direction, and volume of one of the major Atlantic slave trading nations, in this case the Portuguese.^[9] In broad strokes, Klein was able to give a more detailed look at the specifics surrounding the Portuguese involvement in providing slaves to Brazil and the Americas; however like many historians, Klein concluded his paper with follow up questions that challenged his colleagues and future historians to answer.

Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems analysis is an even further extension of Braudel's ideals and incorporates the interconnectedness of three identifiable social systems that make up the world-system of capitalism. According to Wallerstein, the modern nation state exists within a broad economic, political, and legal framework, which he refers to as a "world- system."^[10] This idea enforced the reality of studying individual behaviors and stressed how a complete understanding cannot be had without reference to the sociopolitical system in which they are active participants; individual societies and nation states cannot be understood without a full examination of the world-system in which they are embedded.^[11] The Portuguese *prazeros* fall within the confines of this theory, as it is impossible to understand them as a unique cultural entity without first evaluating the "world-system" that allowed for their creation.

Within this theory of "world-systems," Wallerstein identified three basic types of social systems that interact in accordance to create an ever-fluid "world-system."^[12] The first of these three basic types according to Wallerstein, were "mini-systems," which were characterized as small homogeneous societies that find subsistence through hunting and pastoral gathering. They are self-contained economies that produce all goods and services within their own sociocultural organization.^[13] It was this concept of "mini-systems," that a majority of European nations, during the time of the transatlantic slave trade, viewed the inhabitance of Africa, relying on knowledge of the world that did not extend outside of their western scope. The second type of social system Wallerstein suggested, was a "world-empire," In contrast to the characteristics of a "mini-system," this social structure had an economy that was based on the extraction and exploitation of natural resources and services from foreign regions. A majority of these acquired assets, known as "tribute," went to support the proprietors who extract the wealth from the region to ensure a continued military dominance. The remainder of this "tribute" is then dispersed to the bureaucrat elite at the head of the empire, or the monarch in a majority of cases.^[14] It was in this category that European powers such as the British, Dutch, Portuguese, and French could be classified under, with the expectation of extracting "surplus" from the Africans.

The third and final social system within Wallerstein's theory was the "world-economies." In contrast to "world-empires," the "world-economies" were not guided by an amalgamated political system, and did not entirely derive

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its power from military dominance. In correlation with "world-empires" however, "world-economies" were still supported by the extraction of resources from outlying areas and controlled by those who rule at the center. [15] The Atlantic Ocean World was an example of this third social structure, as defined by Wallerstein, and it incorporated the actions of the previous two social structures for its own perpetuation. In this case, the Atlantic Ocean World depended on the "success" of the transatlantic slave trade, which in turn relied on the activities of all the nations involved, regardless of their social and political structure, or their perceived social and political organization. This theoretical analysis of the world's social and economic make up from the 1500's to the twentieth-century encompasses an understanding, if only on the aggregate level, of the major players involved in the creation of the Atlantic Ocean World through the dealings of the transatlantic slave trade.

For Wallerstein, and in correlation with this research, the capitalist "world-economies" were a mechanism of resource appropriation, which is guided by the need for sustainability through expanded productivity and a constant influx of surplus resources to benefit the elite member of this social structure for the end goal of profit creation. [16] Within the capitalist "world-systems" there was a consistent division of labor that was divided into two separate entities based on class levels and status groups. Depending on your social status, according to Wallerstein, access to resources within your defined space would have been clearly outlined, which also extends to differential access to goods and services in the world market. Individual access to both types of markets, are directly dictated by power. [17] The perceived dominance that European expansion held when entering the African continent was not met with any significant resistance until the scope of their economic endeavours reached beyond the coastline and into the interior, where the possession of power was firmly in the hands of the indigenous Africans.

To take an even deeper look at the structure of capitalist "world-economies, "it becomes possible based on Wallerstein's theory, that they can be divided into core states, which are defined as "semi-peripheral," and "peripheral" districts. [18] It is these "peripheral areas" that are defined as being less developed societies and fall into the role of being "easily" exploited by the core political entities for the accumulation of cheap labor, raw materials, and agricultural production. On the other hand, "semi-peripheral" areas act as an intermediary, as they are both exploited for their wealth but also play a role in the exploitation of the "peripheral areas." [19] It is in this role that the inhabitants of the African continent found themselves when European's entered into the interior provinces. The best example of this level of "periphery" was the Portuguese attempts at colonizing the Zambezi in an attempt to create a monopolistic trade network from Mozambique in the East, to Angola in the West. This endeavor however, would prove to be unsuccessful due to a flawed Eurocentric view of the political economic conditions of the African people. It was argued within this World Systems theory that the "core states," are generally within geographically advantages areas of the world, which Wallerstein categorized as Europe and the Americas. These core states promote capital accumulation in the "world-economies," by way of their perceived political, economic, and military dominance over both the "peripheral" and "semi-peripheral" regions of the world where they enforce unequal rates of exchange between the core powers and the "periphery." [20] It is by way of their economic, political, and military power that the core states allow for a significant level of capital to be accumulated in the hands of the few as a way of maintaining a level of economic and political inequality with and between nations.

This point of Wallerstein's theory holds true, but only when properly applied to the realities of the current state of the African-European relationship. Yes, the accumulation of capital does fall into the hands of the few in the capitalistic "world-system," but the few, in the instance of the Atlantic Ocean World, is not limited to just Europeans and Americans. African participation in the transatlantic slave trade saw profits fall into the hands of African chieftaincies that controlled core states within the continent. The exploitation of the capitalist "world-system" was not entirely felt by Africans alone, but by Europeans who underestimated the true power that many African societies possessed. As an example, capitalism practiced within the confines of nation-states, based off of the unequal

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distribution of power, was not uncontested. It was the subject of struggle, that there were internal contradictions, and with the passage of time caused political and economic instability and social unrest.^[21] This was where an examination of the Portuguese *prazeros*, provided invaluable insight into the affects that time has had on the political and economic stability of a region, in particular the Zambezi of the central African interior.

As a comparison of the above-mentioned modern scholarship on the topics of social construction, economic systems, and the creation of culture, more attention had been paid towards the European migration and its effects on the Atlantic world. Up until recently, minimal consideration had been awarded to the effects of African migration and their role in the "world-system's" analysis. On this point, Allen Isaacman and Paul E. Lovejoy offered scholars the first insights into the social, political and economic effects that the transatlantic slave trade had on the indigenous populations inhabiting the central African interior, most notably, as it concerns this research, the impact on the Portuguese *prazeros*.^[22] In addition to the scholarship of Lovejoy and Isaacman, Edward A. Alders in his most recent publication, has shifted attention to include the Indian Ocean World as an important element in instigating Atlantic history and the effects of the transatlantic slave trade. It is in part due of the inspiration from these collected works that this paper seeks to further the investigation into the economic, sociopolitical, and cultural effects of this trade. By using the *prazeros* as an example, this research aims to challenge our current perspective of the Atlantic Ocean World to incorporate the profound role of Africans as economic administrators.

As early as the 16th century, merchants, traders, and entrepreneurial specialists expanded the blossoming western central African sphere of commerce and transportation, such that, by the collapse of the transatlantic slave trade in the 19th century, this economic structure had developed integrity of its own through elaborate organizational forms and complex geographical trade routes.^[23] The participants in this growing commercial sphere included European and American actors, such as the British, Portuguese, Dutch, Brazilian, and in the later years the United States, but also saw the inclusion of Africans and other small-scale indigenous traders all seeking economic prosperity through exploitation. Beyond the arguments suggest above pertaining to the effects of European migration on Africa, these elaborate systems of trading had been a key fixture in the success of the African economy prior to European and American arrival. This is not to say that European and American migrations did not substantially contribute to the creation of a "world-empire," the Atlantic World. It was through the European experience with oceanic travel that probably contributed to their dominance over the transatlantic trade leading to them finally conquering the Atlantic. Together, these separate players combined to keep eastern and western central African ports in touch with the fleeting trading frontier of the African continent and established new commercialized economic centers. The activities of the transatlantic slave trade in the formation of the Atlantic Ocean World would not have been possible without the efforts of all the players involved, African, European, and American.

Classic historical thought pertaining to European motives for initiating exploration of the Atlantic have, in a sense, romantic roots, which maintain that Europeans either undertook exploration for the simple joy of discovery or to establish a Christian presence in the eastern trade to break the Muslim stranglehold.^[24] It is not accurate to completely disregard these as possible motivating factors, but these romantically charged notions have since been altered, as they do not fully explain the environmental conditions that were in place to support such a level of exploration and trade. It was through a combination of these romantic ideals of European exploration, and the overarching motives for economic, political, and military dominance that truly ignited the spark for Europe to begin voyaging across the Atlantic. "Thus, whatever contemporary writers may have said about these motives, the progress of Atlantic exploration ultimately depended on financial considerations."^[25] The motive of acquiring sustainable economic prosperity was universal in nature; it held true for the Europeans as they traversed the Atlantic, but also dictated the actions of the local African chieftaincies that were actively engaged in the transatlantic slave trade.

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In previous years, scholars have argued the point that the domination of the seas gave Europeans insurmountable political and commercial advantages over any local community inhabiting Africa and the Americas.^[26] This claim has held true by many scholars and historians to date, but it overlooked the true complexity of a "world-empire" and how the actions and motivations of all the actors, although similar in nature, played a role in its creation. It is readily accepted by academics as to the impact that European migration has had on Africa and the rest of the world, which is why this research does not aim to contradict this fact, but to offer an amended viewpoint that takes into serious consideration the powers that resided within the hands of local communities, specifically in Africa.

A key reason for why some scholarship has arrived at these assumptions, pertaining to a perceived lack of authority that Africans held over their own economic and political activities during maritime exploration of the Atlantic, comes from an examination of their current state of affairs, and has worked backwards to establish these conclusions. This argument has been rationalized by holding onto the notion that since a majority of African countries are underdeveloped and dependent on European and American support in modern times, it can be assumed that dependency and a lack of development has always been a common theme in African history. This argument, however, is not true and using this method of analysis in relation to African history is out of place and has been detrimental to the discipline as a whole, which is why, in part, many wrong assumptions have been made. It is wrong to place Africans in the passenger seat during the development of the Atlantic Ocean World, when in reality they were key contributors and dominated many aspects of the trade as it was perpetuated over time.

John Thornton, an African historian, provided insight as to the role of Africans and has challenged many of the theories and arguments presented by the above-mentioned historians; however, Thornton's work still falls short of actually placing Africans at the center of things. It is the intention of this paper to place African migration at the center of focus, but to also acknowledge and incorporate the role of Europeans. This analysis will focus on the sociopolitical structure of the Portuguese *prazos* and how their subsequent economic activities shaped their cultural identity. The *prazos* represent European, more specifically Portuguese, efforts at colonizing the African interior, and how this endeavor to effectively monopolize the intercontinental trade between Angola in the West and the Zambezi in the East was never accomplished. By assessing the political economic structures that were in place when the Portuguese and other European nations arrived on the African continent, it is possible to see how any efforts to successfully penetrate into the central African interior to establish political and economic control would have required an unprecedented amount of force and resource allocation to dislodge the already established political economy of the region.

"Transfrontiersmen" is defined as "people of European descent who permanently settled beyond the limits of Western society."^[27] This term coined by Curtin, describes a process of cross-cultural exchange that occurs in very specific environments, such as the Zambezi Valley, which was inhabited by the *prazos* and many indigenous African communities.^[28] This process of acculturation occurred in this region of Africa because of the economic motivations of the Portuguese, and the already established political economy created by the commercial behaviors of these indigenous people, both of which were facilitated by the transatlantic slave trade. By way of combining a racially homogeneous group, the Portuguese elite, with that of the racially diverse heterogeneous demographic in the central African interior, an eventual if not systematic integration of the two groups was the predictable outcome.

Now, a question that arises from this creation of a new cultural identity, is whether the local indigenous population of central Africa adopted the western ideals of their newly established Portuguese neighbors, or was the transformed *prazo* system and the economic endeavors of the *prazos* more reflective of the traditional socio-political sphere already in place? It should be noted, that the aim of this paper is not to debate, in its entirety, the

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identity of the *prazeros*, but to take a serious look at the consequences that arose due to their proximity to the local African chieftaincies, and how the climate of the political economic environment affected the "more developed" European community. While this places the importance on the role of Africans in the creation and transformation of a European community, it also coincides with the scholarship of both Isaacman and Lovejoy who created their own interpretations as to the specific nature of the *prazeros*, and their evolution as a uniquely identifiable cultural entity. Both scholars challenge the status quo on accurately presenting the *prazeros* as a hybrid society comprised of both European and African cultural heritage specifically highlighting the influences of the local African societies.

The Portuguese initial interest in Africa began in the Zambezi Valley as early as 1505, by the middle of the sixteenth century the Portuguese had established administrative centers at Sena and Tete, as well as a number of inland trading fairs, where they purchased gold, ivory, copper, and tropical products from the surrounding peoples. This quickly led to an appreciation of the commercial potential that the Zambezi Valley held, and led to further inquiry into the central interior of the African continent. As a result of this discovery, a small but sustained migration of Portuguese began to appear in the region throughout the seventeenth century.^[29] The Portuguese first attempt at colonization was to establish land-holdings, not through individuals, but instead through the authority of the offices and forts that had been previously established in locations such as Tete and Sena.^[30] To encourage further migration into this region, and establish incentives for members of Portuguese society to migrate to this vastly uncharted regions of the central African interior, the Portuguese crown began to issue individual land grants known as *asprazos*. This system of crown issued land grants was an attempt by the Portuguese to maintain their status of majority control over the fairs, slave trade, and ultimately their subsequent interest pertaining to the interior commerce of Africa. Beyond this understanding of the development of the *prazeros* as a "transfrontiersmen" community, historians consistently treat them as an extension of Portuguese colonialism in helping to establish a strong European presence in the African interior with the ultimate goal of controlling all trade to Angola in the west.

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese Crown was not the only European or African power aggressively exploring the economic potential of Angola. For a brief period of time, beginning in the early 1600's, the Dutch took over control of the Portuguese monopoly by capturing ports at Luanda and Benguela. The Dutch West India Company justified this attack on the Portuguese sighting rights of freedom of the seas, which would ultimately not affect the indigenous peoples living on the coast, but caused tension between the European powers as they sought for control of the African West coast. In a retrospective report written by Heerman Abramsz to the director of the Dutch West India Company, the failure of the Dutch to successfully maintain control of the monopoly that they had taken from the Portuguese due to intervention by English, Swedish, and Danish companies who made their own agreements with African rulers was outlined.^[31] This conflict for control over Angola, and its trading networks, was the driving force behind the Portuguese's renewal of their presence in the Zambezi, to insure their presence on the African continent was not lost. This revival by the Portuguese to obtain a sustainable European community in the central African interior through *prazogrants* was motivated by the seemingly untapped economic potential of the Zambezi, and a method in which to secure control over the inland trading fairs that supplied the West African coast with captives and other commerce.

Prior to the introduction of the *prazo* system by the Portuguese Crown in the early 17th century, this region of the African interior had been dominated by Arab traders who were said to have access to a large fortune in gold. However, by the end of the century the Arab traders had been successfully eliminated and the gold deposits were not as abundant as had been previously thought. In place of the Arab traders, who had acted as middlemen in the trading process, came individual Portuguese *conquistadores*, who held private titles to these lands they had acquired through concessions from local chieftaincies for their assistance in local wars. It was not until the interests of the Portuguese focused on this region of Africa, that the *conquistadores* sought official titles for their land through the

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authority of the crown, and the *prazo* system was born.^[32] This system of crown issued land grants has been described as a transplanted Portuguese feudal system, and was an attempt by the Portuguese to establish a status of majority control over the fairs, slave trade, and ultimately dominate all aspects of commerce in the central interior of Africa. The Portuguese Crown wanted to not only dominate the shipping of these goods and captives across the Atlantic to supply the growing demand in the Americas, but also wanted to control all stages of this material acquisition and means of production through vertical integration.

Both Portuguese and Dutch attempts to infiltrate the African interior through Angola across the Kwango River were futile due to local resistance. Both the major European powers and the African chieftaincies fought for majority control over the trade market. The economic and political control that could be had over the activities of the transatlantic slave trade began with the old-established trading routes that led into the African hinterlands. It became a realization for both Europeans and Africans that control over this vast network of trading routes would allow for monopolistic control over the supply of commerce to the coast, which would give this controlling group the power to establish their own prices. Having dominant control over these trading routes in the interior was never accomplished by a single community; neither the European nor African peoples successfully monopolized this trade from the interior to the coast.

Of the European nations that were engaged in the Atlantic trade, the Portuguese were the most successful in their attempts to control this intercontinental trade, though they never fully succeeded in connecting both coasts. By way of Angola, the Africans at Matamba and Kasanje prevented the spread of Portuguese commerce beyond the Atlantic coastline and into the hinterland of Angola through the erection of trade barriers along the Kwango River.^[33] The effectiveness of African attempts to keep the Portuguese and other European powers out of the interior came in the form of both military and commercial resistance. As previously stated, there remains a misconception in modern literature in the acknowledgment and acceptance of the role that Africans themselves played in the process of enslaving and shipping captives. "It is now generally recognized that Africa and its people were fully enmeshed in the international system of slavery that stretched across the world and specifically tore at the fabric of African life."^[34]

From the beginning, the primary interest of the Portuguese in establishing their administrative centers on the Zambezi was to control the profitable long-distance trade with the various chieftaincies, specifically with Karanga and Malawi. The Portuguese Crown viewed this venture as an easy acquisition for market control over the intercontinental trading networks that had been previously established by both African and Arab traders. So it was the intention of the early *prazeros* and other Portuguese entrepreneurs to fill this economic power vacuum that had been created, and redirect the trade from the Swahili coast and the Persian Gulf to Goa, the administrative center out of the east.^[35] These commercial interests throughout the Zambezi region, began around 1750, and provided to be very lucrative for the *prazeros*, often times yielding profits of 200 to 300 percent.^[36] These figures could potentially be exaggerated, but even so, this profit margin for goods should have been sufficient enough to offset the normal operating costs, spoilage and theft, with enough left over for a comfortable level of earnings.

In correlation with these suspected profits, is that for two centuries, the cloth-gold-ivory trade of the Zambezi was the dominant source for economic prosperity for both the *prazeros* and other local African communities. This profitable means of trade however, was cut short by the local indigenous chieftaincies through intense local competition, and internal political instability, which ultimately destroyed the *prazeros'* commercial network and economic success.^[37] It was due in large part to these factors that most *prazeros* were no longer able to compete in the market, and their attentions were forced towards other areas of the trade, slaves.^[38] Now, the slow perpetuation of the Zambezi slave trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century helped to temporarily alleviate

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the economic dislocation which threatened the *prazeros* due to the conflicting factors of other local traders and constant political unrest. An element of this unrest was the political economic framework in which the *prazeros* chose to operate within, and the affects that they themselves had on this ever-changing environment. The issuance of land grants by the Portuguese to willing members of their aristocracy began in the early 17th century and continued for over a century until the legitimacy of this European institution was lost due to sociopolitical conditions in the Zambezi Valley. It was this period of civil unrest between this transplanted Portuguese society and the local indigenous population that forced the *prazeros* to take a different approach to gain access to the highly competitive intercontinental trade. Due to the *prazeros* close proximity to major African chieftaincies, and the inability of the Portuguese Crown to maintain control over their people in the Zambezi; they were forced to acquire local recognition. To obtain this legitimacy from the surrounding African communities the *prazeros* had to acknowledge the sanctity of the royal family and the legitimacy of the traditional political process already in place.^[39] Even before the Portuguese Crown lost their control over the *prazeros*, they rarely attempted to remove the aboriginal chiefs in power, and there is no evidence that they sought to restructure the indigenous political economic system.^[40] In order to gain access to the trading fairs, the *prazeros* had to accept the local African social and political conditions, which were as structured and complex as any European institution of the time.

In the early years of *prazo* formation in the Zambezi, the Portuguese Crown was able to encourage a sustainable migration of its citizens to this remote region of the African interior through promises of vast plots of land and access to a highly profitable trade. As the decades continued and the mortality rate of these Portuguese entrepreneurs began to increase due to climate changes and disease, attentions turned toward the local indigenous population to help perpetuate the longevity of the *prazo* system. This integration of European men with that of African women began the process of acculturation and thus Portuguese attempts at establishing a "Transfrontiersmen" society failed. By the middle of the eighteenth century, there were enough people of color within the *prazero* communities to be characterized as a unique racial entity known as *muzungu*.^[41] This change in cultural identity of the *prazeros* could also be seen in the shift in demographics of other Portuguese settlers that lived around the administrative centers at Sena and Tete. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the *prazero* communities of the Zambezi Valley had become integrated into the dominant local society.^[42]

The "success" that came to the Atlantic Ocean World can largely be attributed to the vast migration of peoples and captives facilitated by the transatlantic slave trade. African participation in this trade was an essential element in this research because of the significant role they played in providing the highly demanded commodity of slave labor to the growing world. To a large extent, the organizational intricacies that many African's used to conduct business rivaled even the most sophisticated European institutions. "The relative importance of...raising credit, negotiating profit margins, competing for trade-routes, is not yet known in its entirety. What is clear now though, is that those who emerged on top (...) must have had considerable commercial expertise."^[43] When it came to intercontinental trade of slaves, ivory, gold, and cloth, the Africans had the upper hand. A fact that is commonly overlooked when analyzing the Atlantic trade was that in its early years Europe offered nothing to Africa that Africa did not already produce.^[44] In the succeeding years of the Atlantic trade African manufacturing capabilities quickly diminished as European industrialization was rapidly spreading. A well-established argument for why Africans fell behind in this area of commerce was the lack of a centralized government to organize such production capabilities as well as the role of middlemen that Africans played in the trading process.

The *prazeros* reached their peak economic success late in the 18th century and into the 19th century as they transitioned their attention from the trading of gold, ivory, and cloth, to focusing on the transportation of captives. Even during this period of economic prosperity for the *prazeros* and other inland traders, they were still dependent on the indigenous African communities for knowledge of the interior and trade negotiations. The *prazeros*, now a

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uniquely identifiable hybrid community with deep matrilineal ties to many local communities, were at the mercy of the indigenous chieftaincies to continue their participation in the trade and were often undercut by African traders. The Portuguese *prazeros*, as a European institution, failed to accomplish the social, political, and economic goals of the crown due to the power of the African people. A byproduct of the proximity of the Portuguese *prazeros* to the local African communities and the previously established political economic conditions of this region was the transformation of the European institution by African culture which resulted in a hybrid society deeply vested in African roots.

During the peak years of the transatlantic slave trade between 1700 and 1809, the British began their campaign for abolition over the transportation of slave out of western Africa. This effort was challenged by an emerging Brazilian presence that also helped to keep control in the hands of the Portuguese crown until Brazilian independence in the 1820's. As this idea of abolition began to take hold, many more European countries started to follow suit as well as many regions in the Americas. On the other hand, Portugal attempted to hold on to these means of trade, and shifted their focus away from the western coast of Africa and Angola and look east again to Zambezi, where they had originally claimed the land to be the property of the Portuguese Crown. During one of their attempts to re-establish ties with the peoples of this African interior region, both the *prazeros* and *sertanejos* (backwoodsmen) sent an expedition into the interior of central Africa, following the traditional trade routes in order to connect the two coasts as a way to efficiently move slaves and other valuable material.

Of the documented explorations into the central African interior, one journey stands out above the rest since it was conducted in 1798 by Dr. De Lacerda, a Brazilian born man, who in his earlier life, "explored and conquered the vast area bounded by the Amazon and by a Plata, and stretching from the Atlantic to the Andes."^[45] After his graduation from Coimbra University, where he received his doctorate of mathematics, Dr. Lacerda embarked on a journey to survey and lay down the western limits of the great Luso-American dependency.^[46] It was largely due to these two explorations, and his first venture into south-central Africa, that allowed him to appeal for a second time to D. Rodrigo de Seusa Coutinho, the minister of state, to procure an additional exploration from Angola to Mozambique. The argument that Dr. Lacerda placed before the minister of state was that this adventure into the African interior would bring positive externalities to the crown by reestablishing control over the lands of the Zambezi and would help improve communication between the eastern and western coasts of the African continent. By doing so this would create a form of protection over the commerce in the region and stimulate the efficiency of trade between the two coasts.^[47]

In a sense, Dr. Lacerda understood the empirical reasoning for his journey to the center of Africa but did not disclose his alternative intentions in his proposal to the Portuguese crown. There was a great deal of evidence within the works of Lacerda and other scholars that highlighted his actual motives, but the intentions of this paper are not to examine these differences but instead to point out that there was a discrepancy in the motivations for this adventure. It was this exploration that got at the very basis of why the Portuguese wanted to expand into the central African interior. As their power deviated over the years as did their control over this region in Africa, and by sending Dr. Lacerda to investigate, the Portuguese crown could evaluate the social and economic conditions that had been created in their absence, and choose the best method to regain their lost territories. Whether or not these were truly the intentions that Dr. Lacerda had in wanting to embark on this journey are still in question, but his appeal caught the attention of the Portuguese Crown nonetheless.

The institution of *prazos* that the Portuguese government implemented in an attempt to colonize the African interior and subsequently secure an efficient route from Luanda in western Africa to the Zambezi valley in eastern Africa, can be categorized as a failure. It is at this point that it must be asked as to the intentions that the Portuguese had

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in implementing this "failed" system of colonization and appropriation of the trade networks that had developed within the African interior, due in large part to the transatlantic slave trade. The first of two answers to this questions is the failure of the Portuguese crown to intervene into this *prazo* system because of a lack of active participation in the colonizing effort. The Portuguese government was incapable of providing the necessary number of men and supplies to the region. This allowed the *prazerosto* transform and create their own form of power based on legitimacy given to them by the local African chieftaincies. "It was also reluctantly admitted by observers of the situation in the Zambezi that, without the existence of the great *prazos*, Portugal would not be able to retain any of its possessions. The government was thus absolutely dependent on the system and powerless to alter it." [48]

The second portion of this answer reveals the underlying agenda of such a decree, and it is still debated today as to whether the purpose of this policy was to attract white settlement, to defend an important base, to organize the economic exploitation of the land, or simply to provide a cheap form of administration. [49] However, regardless of the lack of consideration as to the purpose of these *prazos*, it is clear that the ultimate intention behind them is a combination of the above mentioned but with a larger emphasis placed on organizing the economic exploitation of the land. Despite the overarching confusion that has been attached to the study of this style of European colonialism and identifying its underlying purpose, the effects are quite clear. By analyzing these effects, it becomes possible to see the incentives and motivations of the Portuguese, which was systematically based on establishing claim to this foreign land, as an attempt to improve Portugal's economic stance in the world. The abundance of fertile land, iron, gold, ivory, and slaves is what incentivized the Portuguese crown to colonize the Zambezi river valley through *prazos*, but also the reason as to why the system failed.

The British abolition of slavery in 1809 caused an incredible increase in the value and price of slaves in all the world markets because of the blockades and suppression of transporting slaves out of the African continent. The Portuguese *prazeros* were not immune to the progression of abolition, and their ultimate decline was due to their own lust for wealth through the sale of captives to the newly created black market. During this period of the Contraband slave trade, most *prazeros* began to capture and sell the slaves that came directly from their own lands. This decision on the part of the *prazeros* was self-destructive and can be attributed to the decline of the institution of land grants and colonization, which the Portuguese crown had created in the early parts of the 16th century. It can be argued that if the Portuguese had maintained stricter control over the regions in the central interior of Africa by supplying it with a greater abundance of peoples and capital, their claim over the African interior slave market would have dominated the region much later into the 19th century, and would also have procured a much longer and more profitable illegal slave trade.

As a result of local African and foreign European threats, the Portuguese government was forced to establish their system of land grants, because their premature monopoly over the southwestern portion of the transatlantic slave trade was coming to an end. The Portuguese government saw the colonization of the African interior as their final chance to retain control. "The journey of Dr. de Lacerda shows that the Portuguese never abandoned the idea of a "viagem a contracosta," and we can hardly characterize their claims to having crossed Africa as "hanging on a slender fiber." [50] This idea of establishing and controlling aspects of a world market to improve one's economic stance is inherently true for the motivations of almost all the players involved in the transatlantic slave trade. There was a great deal of incentives available to the country or region that was able to control the African interior, because with this control came the ability to dictate the supply of goods being exported out of the continent. Portugal and its *prazeros* were the closest European power to establishing a direct line of trade from East to West, but the power in which the local indigenous population had in disrupting this attempt of control was in large part associated with the decay of the *prazosystem*.

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In order to fully understand the role that African migration and participation played in the creation of the Atlantic Ocean World, it is essential to understand the process of enslaving captives and transporting them to the coast to be sold. The examination of slavery and its transformation help explain in part why the *prazeros* were subject to this sector of economic activity. This can be explained by looking at the inability of the social formation (slavery) to maintain itself without the acquisition of new slaves. This illustrated one of the major characteristics of the slave mode of production, which was the need for continued enslavement and trading of captives to sustain the social order and the economic base of the state. In other words, the mode of production that came with the use of slavery could not be maintained because it was not a self-reinforcing institution, it required continued inputs of more slaves which could not be satisfied by biological means of human reproduction. For slavery to be a viable long-term source of cheap labor, this void would need to be filled with a constant influx of captives from the African interior, which was propagated in the later years of the transatlantic slave trade by the *prazeros* and other inland traders such as the *pombeiros* and Ovimbundu.^[51] The identification of a slave mode of production correctly established a dynamic portion of the political economy of the Zambezi region.^[52]

By utilizing a wide economic, historical, and geographical perspective, it becomes possible to identify the two prerequisites for a slave mode of production. These requirements were the mechanisms of enslavement, which have to be institutionalized on the political level, and the method of distribution through trade networks.^[53] For example, many wars that were fought within the African central interior were not fought for the sole purpose of slave acquisition, but the enslavement of prisoners had to become an acceptable fate for defeated captives. The distribution of the new captives had to achieve a considerable level of organization, because the most important aspects of slavery were the market mechanisms that fashioned it.^[54] Those who controlled these mechanisms of supply and distribution, the Africans, invariably were the ones who benefited most from slavery as an institution.^[55]

With an understanding of the political economic structure of slavery in Africa, it now becomes possible to examine the transformations that took place within this institution and the role that the *prazeros* played in facilitating these changes. The emphasis on transformations helped identify important factors in the evolution of slavery, including changes in the external market, different responses to export demand, and particular adjustments in the availability of slaves for domestic assignments.^[56] To better understand what these transformations were and why they occurred, it is necessary to distinguish between the three sectors of the African slave system: the process of enslavement, the mechanisms of slave distribution, and the role of slaves in the social formation in Africa and the Americas, where a large majority of the slave population was transported to. The *prazeros* attempted to enter into the first two sectors of the slaving process, and they did this through means of military and commercial force in the region of the Zambezi Valley. A majority of the slaves that were captured by these Portuguese landholders were employed by way of military support for this land, and categorized as contributing to the overall enslavement process.

The institution of slavery has seen many transformations over time, and in different regions of the world:

"Its particular characteristic include the idea that slaves are property; that they are outsiders who are alien by origin or who are denied their heritage through judicial or other sanctions; that coercion can be used at will; that their labor power is at the complete disposal of a master; that they do not have the right to their own sexuality and, by extension, to their own reproductive capacities; and that the slave status is inherited unless provision is made to ameliorate that status.^[57]"

However, as transformations occurred over time due to both endogenous and exogenous political, economic, and social factors, not all of the above-mentioned characteristics remained true, except for a single distinguishing quality that could be attached and applied to all forms of forced labor, and that is slavery is one form of exploitation.^[58] In

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an effort to analyze how and why these transformations occurred, it is important to have a solid grasp on what constitutes slavery vs. other servile relationships, and how its institution was related to the political economic structure of the regions that had allowed it to dominate the labor supply.

In analyzing the role of slavery in the political economy of Africa, this research has attempted to apply a number of concepts that include, "mode of production," "social formation," and "transformation" to examine the expansion of productive slavery.^[59] This emphasis has drawn on the contributions of Marxian theorists, particularly those who have explored different modes of production.^[60] Although only a few scholars have recognized the importance of slavery to the political economy, only a few have argued that slavery assumed a crucial role. Foremost among these has been Emmanuel Terray.^[61] According to Terray's theory, relating the crucial nature of slavery to the political economy, "a social formation cannot be understood except by beginning with an analysis of the relations of production which are its base."^[62] Terray also established "the decisive importance of the exploration of captives in the functioning of the social formation:"^[63]

"We have tried to bring to light the existence of an Abron social formation with a mode of production based on slavery, which organizes a considerable part of the work in three essential sectors of the economy: agriculture, gold mining and transport (portage). But one must immediately point out that this mode of production contains specific characteristics concerning the reproduction of the social relations, which constitute it. We have already alluded to these peculiarities, which can be summarized as follows: there is no natural or biological reproduction of the captive population."^[64]

This final point was crucial to Terray's model because it explained that the inability of the social formation (slavery) to maintain itself without the acquisition of new slaves. This illustrated one of the essential characteristics of the slave mode of production, which was the need for continued enslavement and slave trading to sustain the social order and the economic base of the state.

With that being said, it is important to also make note of the fact that during the early years of *prazero* formation on the Zambezi, when the Portuguese Crown still held legitimacy over these inhabitants, the vast majority of enslaved Africans were not sent to the coast for export, but instead enlisted in private military regimes or put to work in mines and fields all in support of the *prazo*. As a foreshadow to the inevitable decay of the *prazeros*, this transition into the capture, transportation, and sale of slaves, would ultimately create new contradiction within this system and were the principle factors for their ultimate demise.^[65] So what lasting effects did this European institution have on the surrounding political economy, the transatlantic slave trade, and the Atlantic Ocean World? By analyzing the statistical data compiled by David Eltis in his online archive of slave voyages, the lasting effects of the Portuguese *prazeros* were highlighted.

The establishment of the Portuguese *prazeros* as a European institution was only made possible because of the migrations which occurred during the Atlantic age. However, when attempting to determine the effects that this institution had on the Atlantic Ocean World, little evidence is available to quantitatively determine any impact with substantial degree clarity. On the contrary, analyzing the activities of the Indian Ocean World provides evidence as to the *prazeros* intervention into the slave trade.

Prior to their destruction, slaves had been sold out of the Zambezi around 1645 after the Dutch conquest in Angola capturing ports at Luanda and Benguela, both of which carried the largest burden of slave exports for the Portuguese crown. This forced the Portuguese to establish slave markets in Mozambique in order to keep up with Brazil's growing demand for manpower.^[66] During the following century, slave exports out of the Zambezi continued on a relatively small scale due to the profitable trading of gold, ivory and cloth. Between the years of 1750-60, Mozambique and the Zambezi Valley only exported about 1,000 slaves annually, but Inhamabem, Sofala, and the

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Querimba Islands off the coast of Mozambique supplied some 800 of the 1,000 slaves, meaning the Zambezi could only account for the remaining 200 slaves. From the years 1781-90, there was a substantial increase in the number of captives leaving Mozambique, with the total number reaching the realm of 23,131 slaves in a 9 year period. This figure only accounted for slaves transported on Portuguese ships; if all foreign shifts were included as well this number would increase to 46,873 slaves.^[67] The development of the Zambezi into an important slave-exporting zone was inextricably linked to both the economic prosperity of Brazil and the Zambezi River Valley.

Since this region of Mozambique had been previously untouched by slavers for the most part, and the demand for cheap labor was rising in Brazil it motivated several Brazilian merchants to open up trading houses in Quelimane, but at this time it violated the local customs regulations.^[68] This abundant supply of inexpensive slaves also encouraged other traders to sail into Quelimane harbor, but to get around the previously established regulations they bribed the local officials, purchased their slaves, and sailed back to Brazil.^[69] Since the government was unable to regulate these bribes and were losing significant revenue due to this illegal transportation of slave, they modified the customs policies, which allowed these outside traders to have access to all the ports in this region as long as the paid the prescribed customs duties. This served as a strong stimulus to trade out of the Zambezi River Valley and its accompanied ports of trade. According to Isaacman, the *prazeros'* previous experience with long-distance commerce, the trading acumen of the *misambadzi* (agent slaves who worked in and around the prazero's homes), and the accessibility of potentially rich markets north of the Zambezi facilitated their entrance into the slave trade. Although the *misambadzi* continued to purchase such items as gold and ivory during this time of expansion, their main focus still rested on slaves, which is reflected in the declining volume of ivory and gold along with a corresponding increase in the number of slaves exported.

The *misambadzi* were responsible for both ensuring the safety of all the caravans moving throughout the interior and negotiating with the indigenous land chief or headman whose land they intended to conduct trade in. After the slaves were transported back to the *prazero's* estate, they either sold them to inland merchants or shipped them directly to the slave markets at Quelimane.^[70] This newly created focus in the trade from the previous goods of ivory, cloth, and gold to slaves provided a high profit for both the *prazeros* and their coastal trading partners.

The attractiveness of this trade and the enthusiasm of the *prazeros* are evident in the reminiscences of a government official and former estate holder: "The *prazeros* conscious of the financial benefits that others had derived, and motivated by the lucrative profits in this commercial sphere, abandoned everything else and focused solely on the slave trade."^[71] There is a collection of interrelated demographic, historical, and political factors that go into the explanation of the large availability of slaves and their accessibility to the *prazeros*.^[72] Arguably the most important of these factors was the disparity between the population density of the peoples living immediately north and south of the Zambezi, based on numerous informants all agreed that the highlands areas of the northern region were much more heavily populated than the insalubrious southern lowlands.^[73] It was partially due to these demographic imbalances that led to distinctly different, yet complimentary population pressures, which fostered the growth of the indigenous slave trade. All of which, was facilitated by the shift in the *prazeros'* focus from ivory, gold, and cloth, to the capturing and transportation of captives. This turn towards the slave trade was encouraged by a need for cheap labor in both the Indian and Atlantic Ocean Worlds.

The inability of the Portuguese or any other European nation to establish control over the central African interior and its trading networks is a testament to the power that the Africans had maintained throughout the creation of the Atlantic Ocean World during the transatlantic slave trade. The ineffectiveness of European institutions, such as the Portuguese *prazo* system, to colonize the African interior for the purpose of establishing a monopoly over the transcontinental trade networks and source to the slave mode of production, highlights the true distribution of power present on the African continent. The failure to establish a "transfrontiersmen" society by the Portuguese

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due to the political economic structure of the African interior, and the subsequent creation of a hybrid cultural identity, demonstrates the lack of knowledge that Europeans had about the African continent before their arrival. If the Portuguese had both maintained control over the land of the Zambezi Valley through the 19th century and managed to secure a sustainable trading network to the Angolan coast in the West, the *prazeros* would have accounted for a significant portion of the slaves being exported in the later years of the trade. However, this was not the case because of intense local competition by the African chieftaincies, the political economic structure of the interior and European misconceptions about local indigenous peoples.

The transatlantic slave trade was the catalyst behind the Portuguese attempt at colonizing the African continent. This network of international trade that spread throughout the Atlantic Ocean World brought many unique cultures in contact with one another and provided the necessary conditions for the creation of the Portuguese *prazeros*'s unique cultural identity. By attempting to colonize both the eastern and western regions of the central African interior for the purpose of control over an already established African political economic structure, the efforts of the Portuguese provided valuable insight into the importance of not limiting our scope when studying the Atlantic Ocean World. It was through the networks of oceanic trade that allowed for various economic links to be created and new cultural identities to emerge. By studying the impacts of the transatlantic trade on all the continents involved, it becomes possible to rethink old assumption, establish new theories, and provide deeper insight as to how and why historical changes occur. The Portuguese *prazeros* were a product of the transatlantic slave trade through confined social, political and economic interactions. However, the lasting impact that they had on the slave trade as a whole cannot be seen in the Atlantic but instead in the Indian Ocean World.^[74]

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