The Workers of African Trade

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In taking possession of the heart of Africa in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Belgians used Bangalas to carry their guns and Bakongos to bear their burdens. These were the first and most important Congolese—as opposed to expatriate—soldiers and porters of the initial period of colonization. They were critical for the Belgian enterprise, and for that reason their development was pursued consciously and vigorously. The intimacy of their involvement in the conquest of the Congo (now Zaire) River basin is portrayed iconographically in the innocent souvenirs recorded with the help of the new technology of photography: There in the picture is a group of porters at rest, some with their loads still on their heads (to show how carrying was done); to the side, in some kind of uniform, stands a man with self-conscious attention, rifle at shoulder.

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This present study crops the soldier from the picture and enlarges that of the porters. Yet, as in a cinematic documentary, there will be flashbacks to the soldier, because we cannot fully understand why the Bakongos were porters without understanding why Bangalas were soldiers.

The names of these peoples, it should be understood from the outset, are labels of convenience. The Europeans participating in colonial events used the name Bangala as an ethnic one, but it applied in only a general way to the riverine populations between, say, the mouths of the Kwa and Mongalla Rivers on the Zaire (see Map 12.1). Some of them would have been what Europeans later came to identify as Bobangis, but many others—all possibly speaking closely related dialects—were included. Convenience does not, of course, fully explain the way Europeans perceived the indigenous populations. They were all more or less engaged in ad hoc ethnography; and like all ethnography it had its intellectual if not ideological presuppositions. In other words, the social, political, and economic structures that Euro-
peans "saw" in Africa were based in part on what they observed in the field but also in part in what they brought with them as cultural (hence intellectual) baggage. Therefore the "tribes" they identified were to some degree or other of their own making. This topic is discussed in great detail with respect to the so-called Bondjo (Samarin, 1984d). It is to be expected that ethnicity (that is, the historical reality of a people) would in some cases be problematic. It is so with the Bangala, even though the Zairean historian, Mumbanza mwa Bawele, for example, argues (1971, 1974) for the existence of an authentic people—organized beyond low-level kin and clan units and self-conscious of their identity.

There is more justification for the use of Bakongo as an ethnic designation. (Since the first syllable of Bakongo is only a plural prefix, I prefer to use Kongo as the ethnic designation). That is to say, it has a much older history. In any case, regardless of the amount of integration of their societies in political units, such as that of the Kongo kingdom with which the Portuguese first came in contact, they spoke more-or-less closely related dialects, some of which, however, were not immediately mutually intelligible. This is not to say that nineteenth-century Europeans always recognized a vast Bakongo ethnolinguistic entity. Indeed, it is a fact of some significance that at the time when they were all talking about the so-called Bangalas, they were not equally categorical about Bakongos. The latter were generally referred to as the natives of the Lower Congo, or more explicitly Loangos, Kabin-das, and other such ad hoc names.

The exploitation of the Kongo peoples had already had a history of almost four hundred years when King Leopold II of Belgium sent the Committee for the Study of the Upper Congo (replaced in 1883 by the International African Association) up the Congo River. They had been involved in trade, mining, and most of all in selling each other (and others) into slavery (Broadhead, 1971; Martin, 1970, 1972). The introduction of colonialism only altered the nature of interaction between Europeans and Kongos.

THE RECORD OF PORTERING

The Kongo peoples were indispensable for the establishment of Leopold's African empire (Liebrechts, n.d.: 201, published around 1900 or 1909). Transportation figures alone demonstrate the truth of this assertion. Calculate the number of kilograms of goods that had to be transported from the start of the cataracts to Stanley (now Malebo)
Pool, assigning 30 kilograms (65 pounds) per person, and one will have an idea of the number of human beings involved. But this would only be the minimum, because every caravan required “support persons”—people to cook for the porters (many of whom must have been women) and others to carry the personal belongings of the porters (some of whom might have engaged in a little trade of their own); and children were frequently in these caravans, serving in different capacities.

Figures for loads coming into and going out of the region give some idea of the number of human beings involved in portering, but they represent only the minimum volume of trade, being official figures of the Congo Free State. In early years, before the Belgian government had established its bureaucratic hold on the territory, much would have transpired, and much would have been transported, without the knowledge of its representatives.

European recruitment of local porters began between 1879 and 1883 (Van Schendel, 1932). These years represent the period of H. M. Stanley’s first two trips up the Congo River, which includes the founding of the station at the Equator, so important for the subsequent recruitment of Bangalas into the work force. During this period he was concerned with establishing the claims of King Leopold in competition with the French. Speed in advancing into the interior was the most important factor. Nonetheless, he had 50 tons of shipment at Vivi, headed for Leopoldville, in 1880 (Stanley; 1885: 1, 159). When he arrived at Banana in December 1881, he had 600 tons of goods (Stanley, 1885: 468); not all of this went to Leopoldville, because some stayed at intermediate stations. Stanley himself provides little information about his recruiting of indigenous personnel: only that Kabin-das were hired at the coast, that he had 206 workers at Vivi, that in March 1880 he had a work force of 110 not counting natives, and that his personnel needed 400 pounds of rice per day (Stanley, 1885: 31, 153, 196, 216, 221). Gisanura’s estimate of Stanley’s shipments to Leopoldville in 1883 is 54 tons or 1830 loads (Gisanura, 1971: 87).

Whatever we might make of Stanley’s account of these first years, Liebrechts is explicit in saying that Stanley had in addition to 150 Zanzibaris the “renfort incertain” of some Kabindas to take over Stanley Pool and that early in 1883 a crew of 80 Zanzibaris had the heaviest responsibility of portering for the Pool (Liebrechts, n.d.: 22, 45). The absence of Kongo porters is confirmed by Wauters (1890a: 221), who reported that in 1883-1884 the International African Association found only “quelques rares auxiliaires” among the Lower Congo peoples. Yet 1200 porters had been used in 1883 (Congo Illustré, 1892: 19) and
in 1882 through 1884 Leopoldville was being supplied every three to four weeks by goods from the coast with a crew of 40 porters (Guiral, n.d.: 237, published in 1889).

By 1884-1885 stations had been established as far as Stanley Falls for the consolidation of Belgian claims in the interior. Because of this penetration there was a greater importation of goods; and in this period Belgian agents assumed more responsibility for the execution of the King's plans. Captain Alphonse Van Gèle recruited 1500 porters on a single occasion in 1884, possibly at Lukungu (Lukunga or Lukungo) or Manyanga (MCC 1896: 210). The total number of loads taken to the Pool in 1885 was ten times what it had been two years earlier (CI, 1892: 19). The following year Coquilhat recruited 1000, including the 800 engaged in one day at Lutete (Coquilhat, 1886: 2, 34, 36-37).

In 1887 the volume reached 50,000 loads (CI, 1892: 19). By 1889, several thousand young men of 18-25 years of age were used every month as porters. They were recruited at Lukungu, Lutete, and Manyanga, where "toute la jeunesse ... se fait porteurs" (Wauters, 1890a: 221). Lopasik's figure (1971: 66) of 18,000 for the year 1888 (if it applies to the whole year) is too low when compared to what went on in 1887. Lamotte (n.d.: 58, possibly published in 1894) said that on the left bank of the Congo alone and only during the latter eight months of the year, porters numbered 60,000. This was a busy year indeed, given the 1200 loads for the Emin Pasha expedition and the shipment of 6000 loads of the dismantled steamers "Ville de Bruxelles" and "Roi des Belges" (Wauters, 1890a: 222-223).

The construction of the railroad to Leopoldville, started in 1889, introduced another tremendous demand for porters, which continued until the first locomotive arrived at the terminus on March 16, 1898. When ships were unloading their cargos in 1892, it required 100,000 porters (Masui, 1894: 27) to transport the loads from a single steamer to the Pool (Belgique Coloniale, 1896: 231). For this year it was affirmed "without any exaggeration" that 40,000 men were engaged in transport. Where a dozen years earlier (i.e., 1880) one could not get even one porter now on a single day a person could see more than one thousand on march ("On initiating Negroes to European labor," CI, 1892: 19). It was also estimated that there were 4-5,000 identity cards for kapitas (i.e., caravan bosses) in circulation (1892: 179). There were not that many caravans at any given time, of course, but there were more than the "hundreds" of state caravans reported by Denis (1950:7). The word kapita is generally understood to be Portuguese in origin. Whatever its earliest meaning may have been, in the period
under discussion the kapita's primary responsibility was to assure the arrival of each load at its destination in good condition. He probably also directed the personnel in other matters, and we can suppose that with the intensification of transportation his role assumed more importance. He was, however, not the sole representative of the European because soldiers frequently accompanied the caravans. In any case, the kapitas represented a special category of the Europeans' work force—men in an emergent "middle management" position. Kapitas were not necessarily Kongo men, although it can be assumed that those who spoke Kikongo were more useful to Europeans.

In 1896 P. de Deken (MCC, 1896: 210) reported that 90,000 loads were carried annually. This figure may be too high, given Lemaire's estimate (1895: 74) of 25,280 porters and ancillary personnel for 1893: 11,280 for the state, 9000 for the Belgian trading company, and 5000 for the missions and others. By the time the railroad was completed the number had grown to 100,000 per year (Aaron Sims, Annual Report, BMM, 1898: 443; Liebrechts, n.d.: 201). Lemaire (1894: 180) also estimated the total number of porters at 100,000, and he was only judging from the necessary labor required to transport the dismantled parts of the 43 steamers that were at that time plying the waters of the Upper Congo. The total, he says, equaled the size of the Belgian army! Contrary to what one might suppose, the railroad did not put an end to caravans. The caravan from Loango at least was still being used as late as 1908 (Deschamps, 1907: 14).

In the construction of the railroad the Kongos provided labor only for portering and other tasks requiring no special skills. Skilled manpower needs were satisfied by imported workers and, of course, by European management. The workers in Trouet's history of the construction (1898)—at which time he was its technical director—are identified as coming either from Senegal or the Gold Coast.

The examination of the use of porters has been restricted entirely to travel toward Stanley Pool, a bias that reflects the sources. Europeans described their achievements not merely in terms of their successes but also in terms of the hardships they endured and the obstacles they had to overcome. Getting their goods beyond the cataracts, over difficult terrain and in debilitating climate, was indeed a challenge that tested the best of men. But among all their difficulties—they made explicit—was the mobilization of manpower. Coquilhat was applauded after having described the way he recruited a thousand men in two weeks: "It wasn't without difficulty," he said. "Besides, one doesn't
get anything without difficulty.... [These men] often made difficulties for me; it was the first time that they were working under the eye of a white” (1886: 2, 34).

What was there to tell about going to the coast, especially when for most narrators it meant returning to Europe? They were exhausted from a long tour of duty and usually seriously ill. Porters were just as necessary for transporting loads to Matadi from the Pool, but we have to go elsewhere for data to estimate the size of the labor force.

The volume of exports provides our downriver information, as investments provided data for the upriver journey. Exports rose from 4076 (presumably metric) tons in 1887 to 8722 in 1898 (Encyclopédie du Congo Belge, 3: 385). The volume of rubber exports from the Pool rose from practically nil in 1883 to 30 tons in 1887; from that year to 1891 they went to 131 tons (Vansina, 1973: 427). In March of 1889 Europeans bought only 5 tons of ivory at the Pool, whereas 3 tons went to the coast by African caravans; the figure rose to 27 tons by 1895 (Gann and Duignan, 1979: 118, 123, citing Büchner, 1912).

The enormity of the cost in human effort, each man carrying about 30 kilograms on his head, is represented in the total quantity of exports over the twelve-year period: 2,730,533 man loads! And this, we must repeat, was only for the downriver traffic. This pharaonic figure does not, of course, represent individually named human beings. Some worked for longer periods of time, others for shorter. The figure is comparable in usage, nonetheless, to the long-established one of “man-power hours.”

Kongo labor was used for portering because the Kongo lived in the very territory through which the Europeans had to travel. But location does not explain the whole story; it does not explain the fact that the Kongo people were virtually excluded from other forms of labor, particularly skilled work, but also specific projects like railway and telegraph construction. If there was no clear policy of exclusion, there certainly was one of preference for other groups of workers. Accounting for these differences must now be undertaken.

If Lemaire could say of 1893 that 245 “Bas-Congos” (that is, Lower Kongos) were serving in the district of Cataracts in positions formerly filled by foreign workers, he must have been referring to men who had already had experience working with Europeans, not “green recruits.” Since emphasizing indigenous labor encouraged the investment of capital in the Congolese enterprise, Lemaire and others probably suppressed information about foreign recruitment, which played an important role for quite some time. For example, in 1894 the mis-
missionary George Cameron wrote: "At Sierra Leone we took on board about a hundred Africans coming to Congo to be soldiers or labourers in the service of the government. They belonged to five or six different tribes, speaking as many different languages" (MH, 1894: 360). Inventories of personnel reveal the importance of these coastal workers. For example, literate young men—foreigners—could be found at the coast for certain tasks, but launderers and tailors came from among the Lower Congo people (Donny, 1897: 37). One would have thought that since the railway went through their territory, the Kongos would have been involved in more than a trivial way in that project. It would appear that they were not. Indeed, most of the African workers were foreign. In 1894, the only year for which we have a figure, there were 419 Congolese at work among 3000 (that is, 14 percent), the total Black work force being 2000 in 1890 and 7000 in 1897 (Cornet, 1947: 248, 176; MH, 1898: 246).

Non-Kongo workers also predominated in other projects. The Boma-Kwamouth telegraph line was built during 1895-1898 "especially by the Bangalas" (Musée, 1903: 122). They took part as well in the mounting of 40 steamers at Leopoldville—they in addition to other Upper Congo people, but without Lower Congo ones (Lemaire, 1894: 177). In a later publication (1895: 56), but possibly for the year 1894, he quotes Liebrechts as saying although "Manyangas"—that is Kongos—as well as Bangalas were involved in remounting the boats (Lemaire, 1895: 56). In 1894 "Bangalas, Kassais [and] Weles are drivers, mechanics, fitters, on the boats, on the routes of the State, [and] in the workshops on the railway" (P. de Deken, MCC, 1896: 212). Besides Kongos, liberated slaves from the Kasai River and people from as far away as the Wele River were trained workmen. These "Weles" were probably Yakoma-speaking people (Samarin 1982a, 1982b).

This difference in (if not discrimination against) the employment of Kongo peoples must be explained. Since some of the work required travel up the Congo River beyond the Pool, the Kongo people may have feared encountering others whose bad reputations they feared, or, unlike the upper populations, they were unaccustomed to traveling about on the Congo. Without further information such considerations are only speculative.

Portering was hardly an employment with enduring inducements. The journey was long, over hilly terrain protected by little shade. By foot one covered 368 to 400 kilometers from Matadi to Leopoldville in fifteen to twenty days (Denis, 1950: 7; Bailey, 1894: 137).2 In
1890 there were five barges (*allièges*) with eight teams of men (Lemaire, 1895: 51, 52) incessantly occupied with transport between these ports. The loading of goods in the earliest years had been done by Zanzibaris; in other words, Kongos were not trusted or were not available for this work. Guinness’s description (1890: 57) of the northern route, for example, characterizes it as unfortunate because it was “very difficult, rocky ground in a gorge naturally poor and barren, and not very populous.” Before the completion of the Belgian railroad, the Loango journey took “at least 35 days” (Dias-Briand, 1982: 59). Although longer, the Loango route had fewer streams than the Matadi route, along which one could be delayed for long periods of time when these were swollen after rains. At one point, the route rose 250 meters/820 feet in 20 kilometers/12.4 miles (Deschamps, 1911: 19; also see Foà, 1900: 274; Masui, 1894: 29; and Vandrunen, 1900: 250). These routes had been used by caravans for a long time, probably centuries (MacGaffey, 1977; Martin, 1970: 144).

Portering was a task that tested the mettle of the strongest of men (de Deken, 1902: 72-73), many of whom died on the path, leaving by 1898 “thousands of skeletons” along the way (de Mandat-Grancey, 1900: 176). (See also Michaux, 1907: 68-69.) Not all of these were men either—as we generally understand the term: They were in large numbers young adolescents (de Deken, 1902: 72-73) and by 1892 even children of 7 to 9, carrying loads of 10 kilograms (Lopasik, 1971: 71). Coquilhat’s account, cited above, may have been intentionally untruthful or in the earliest years more mature men may have been available.

**PAYMENT OF PORTERS**

Since carriers entered service in different ways, it is not easy to characterize the way they were remunerated—if at all. But an attempt must be made, because they took part, willingly or not, in the emergence of a laboring “class” in central Africa. It is clear from the records that free individuals were recruited for portering, but it is also clear that slaves were common. Although many voluntarily sought employment, force was also used on the Kongos. M. Juhlin-Dannfeldt, a Swedish army officer who had served twice as a District Commissioner for the Congo Free State between 1883-1891, noted in 1891 (as quoted in Lagergren, 1970: 110) that

recruitment of labour to these caravans was carried out by special expeditions consisting of a white officer and a number of soldiers. The
chiefs of the various villages were required to place a certain number of carriers at the disposal of the caravans, and, if the carriers were not available at the time appointed, the soldiers took a number of prisoners, usually women and children, in the refractory village. These were kept, often under harsh and humiliating conditions, until they were exchanged for the men who could be used as carriers.

Other Europeans did not, of course, have the authority to impress people into service. They had their own agents—labor brokers we might call them—who, undoubtedly working for their own profit as well, went about the country in search of porters (Cl, 1892: 178; Masui, 1894: 26). These were therefore independent entrepreneurs and must not be confused with the kapitas, who were employees of the Europeans. Payment in money for portering was an innovation, introduced by Europeans, but the use of slaves was not; Europeans exploited a system that had existed for centuries.

Nonetheless the Kongo responded to European needs for labor, although they usually wanted to be paid in kind. They may have seen temporary employment in their own territory as a means to build up capital for enriching themselves in trade—an activity they understood and valued (Wauters, 1890b: 176). As late as May 16, 1894, Thomas Adams of the Livingstone Inland Mission wrote: “Up here [at Leopoldville] we cannot buy food or hire boys for money [;] it must be articles of real value such as clothing etc.” (ABHS, 82). In 1885 the mission employed 32 or 33 “Loangos” at Leopoldville, at the Equator station and also on the mission’s steamboat, the “Henry Reed,” all of whom had to go south to Palabala (Mpalabala) to be paid their monthly salary of ten lengths of cloth (Aaron Sims to J. Clark, Leopoldville, March 11, 1885, AHBS). Cloth was also used in the early days (around 1882) as payment for Kongo porters (P. de Deken, 1902: 72), because it was a currency that could be used in trade.

According to Liotard (ANPM, Journal, writing on August 28, 1891), the State paid 36 francs to a Portuguese entrepreneur, who made a profit of fifteen francs for each recruit. It is not clear how much each carrier received. As late as 1888 or 1889, Probert—missionary of the Livingstone Inland Mission—wrote (1889: 135), “Carriers take cloth or handkerchiefs. They also get beads or knives to purchase food while traveling [to the Pool].” The statement suggests that these workers were “tipped” rather than remunerated in a systematic way. Lari workers were paid just one mitako (brass-rod currency) per day (Vansina, 1973: 303). Whatever this was worth (and Vansina provides
a comparison of the various currencies), this was just enough to buy food for one day (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1969: 462). In 1891 one mitako bought only three eggs at Wangata, which was on the Upper Congo where prices were somewhat higher (MRAC, Lemaire, March 18, 1891). In 1885 Coquihlat (1888: 353) recruited nine "young guards" for a period of ten months at 45 mitako (11.50 francs) per month, in addition to their rations and clothing. (In this case we see not so much the monetary inflation of the Upper Congo but the value that was placed on Bangala military labor.) According to W. H. Bentley (MH 1887: 440), at about two pounds per year the Bangalas were "far cheaper than any other labour available." He was obviously comparing the hiring of natives to foreign workers, since he mentions the Kroo in this context. Laborers did not actually get all the pay that French and Belgian officials wrote about. Clerc (1911: 300-301), who was at Bangui (on the Ubangi River) in 1910, had the following to say of the porters that military personnel were entitled to (eighteen for a captain, twelve to fourteen for a sergeant-major, eight to ten for a sergeant) and who were "relayed" every two days.

Ils doivent accomplir 25 à 30 kilomètres chaque jour moyennant 1 fr. 10 par étape. ... Souvent leur salaire ne leur est pas donné en mains, de suite, mais simplement défalqué de l'impôt dû par leur village. Il n'obéissent donc que sous la menace et la contrainte à des réquisitions que les postes opèrent dans un rayon étendu.

The Casimir Maistre expedition to the Upper Ubangi (i.e., from Bangui northward into what is now Chad) paid soldiers who were recruited on the west coast of Africa 35 francs per month (Comité de l'Afrique Française, 1892); rations consisted of one coffee-spoonful of bayaka beads every five days—and these cost only 75 centimes the kilogram (Chapiseau, 1900: 192). With this ration the men were able to obtain provisions, the help of natives to carry their own loads, and even "the favors of women." Four years later, 100 percent inflation apparently having set in, canoe men on the Ubangi were paid two spoonsful of beads (or two copper bars of 60 grams [2 ounces]) every five days (Bruel, ASOM, October 10, 1896). But for the year 1897, and in connection with the Marchand expedition to the Nile, a canoe men received the value of twenty centimes (i.e., one-fifth of a Franc) in two coffee-spoonsful of beads for each day's work: one for work and one for food (Dyé, 1899: 446), although Bobichon, the administrator in Bangui, paid only one spoonful per day (Baratier, n.d.: 24).
SLAVES AS PORTERS

Slaves and former slaves were also a source of porters. For example, when S. de Brazza left Franceville in June 1880 on his mission of exploration, he noted that his "men" were former slaves (Brunschwig, 1966: 17). Those called Kabinda, always referred to as liberated, figure most frequently. For example, nineteen of them were part of the garrison of Leopoldville in 1882 and in 1884 two of them were part of Coquilhat's force in the Upper Congo (Coquilhat, 1888: 55, 228). That was before the French put a stop to the emigration of workers from their territory. Therefore, when we read of liberated slaves nine and ten years later, we can assume that they were "Kabinda."

The French obtained some of their men from one with the Portuguese name of Carvalho, who is described as a "former merchant of slaves" and as an "agent libérateur" (with quotation marks and italics in the original source). In 1892 he was even operating in the Kasai River area, where he got a premium of 100 francs for each "liberated" slave (Cureau, ANPM). In the previous year he had furnished the Casimir Dybowski expedition with 33 men, whose provenience and ethnicity are not mentioned (Dolisie, ANPM). Many other instances of the use by Europeans of slaves or "liberated" slaves can be cited.

The Tio (Teke), who were the upcountry traders the Kongo had to deal with depended on slave porters. At the Pool, the Tio were devoted exclusively to long-distance trade: upriver with the Bobangis and downriver with the Kongos. Caravans came to them from downriver peoples or they sent their own, always respecting ethnic territorial rights (Vansina, 1973). The Tio do not seem to have gone to the coast itself. Because of Tio demand for slave labor, there was an active slave market at the Pool. Slaves were still being bought at the Pool in 1883, according to T.J. Cromber, an English missionary, who observed that there was "a sprinkling of Bakongo from Congo, Zombo, Makuta, etc.—chiefly slaves brought up and sold to . . . Nga-Liema, for ivory" (MH 1883: 79). Ngaliema was a Tio notable.

Europeans came to learn that the Tio, while hiring out some of their slaves to work, did not themselves deign to "work" at all, other than engage in trade. For the period we are examining, it would have been as impossible for a Tio trader to hire out a son or nephew as it would have been for Jacob Meyer (1792-1868), whose Rothschildian fortune made possible the creation of the railway system in France, to have hired out his son to work along with the urban proletariat in the gangs
constructing the railroad! This is why there was no exploitable labor force at the Pool when the Europeans began to establish themselves there. The Tio also refused to work for missionaries at the Pool and were reluctant to have their youths taught by them. The Tio did not “work” because they did not have to. By contrast people further in the interior worked more willingly. At Bopoto, far up the Congo, east of the Bangala area, also in 1894, for example, “There is a great demand for workmen and workboys in these parts, and high wages tempt the elder boys to leave their towns, and to go to work at factories [trading centers] or on steamers” (F.R. Oram, MH, 1894: 220). Reticence to let their sons become mission pupils could be expected of people who had had little contact with Europeans, but the problem was more than the usual one of culture contact. Missionaries in this period engaged school children in various kinds of work (that others would have been hired to do) to pay for their schooling. The aversion to manual labor consequently reinforced other attitudes among the Tio toward the European presence.

Only those Tio located away from the Pool were willing to work for wages. In 1880, for example, de Brazza was able to use Tio porters (Brunschwig, 1966: 253), but they came from the high plains, whose economy was not based on trade as was that of the Tio of the Pool. But even this exception must be treated with caution, because ethnic designations by Europeans were often confused. For example, Vansina (1973: 303, citing a report made by Pradier in 1886, as reported in Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1969) states that currency could not hire labor in the Tio economy, but that the Kongo Lari worked for one mitako per day. It is therefore important for the study of labor recruitment to identify these Kongo Lari. Coquery-Vidrovitch did not call them Kongo Lari but Lali (1969: 462, 276), and she identified them with the Teke, not the Kongo. Fehderau on the other hand (1962) identifies the Lari (also known as Ladi, Laadi, Lali, and Bwende) as one of the Kongo groups. Moreover, Coquery-Vidrovitch (1969: 97, citing Sautter in Brunschwig, 1966: 174) states that the Lali, a “Teke group,” located on the Niari River about a twenty-day journey from the Teke at the Pool, were “commercial intermediaries” between the Loango coast and the interior.¹ In any case there seems to have been some kind of Lalis working on the Catholic mission’s steamboat Léon XIII in December 1892 (Sallaz, 1893: 73). It is reasonable to suppose that they were “common laborers”—deck hands, choppers of wood, and the like.
ETHNIC STEREOTYPES

The last possible explanation for the way Kongos seem to have been restricted to portering is that of European attitudes. If we could find prejudice against them—a form of selective racism—this would have explanatory power. But whereas coastal Blacks are described as a rapacious, thieving, lying, lazy, and besotted population, the people in the region of Mount Bidi, between Vivi and Leopoldville (the very Kongos who served as porters) were seen as strong, industrious, and eager to work (Coquilhat, 1886: 2,35). Nonetheless, it is the Bangalas who came to have the best reputation:

[the Bangalas] are, by unanimous consent, the finest people on the river—athletic, intelligent, manly, energetic, and fearlous [sic] to a degree. They rather delight in exhibiting their superabundant energy. By many they are regarded as equal to the much-lauded Zanzibaris as personal servants. They are employed at every station of the State from Boma to Stanley Falls (George Stapleton, MH, 1892: 226-227.

The same year in which that statement was made there appeared an article in the Congo Illustré devoted to the Bangala “nation” (1892: 169-170); it was equally well-disposed. Chapaux considered the Bangalas (1894: 530) the only people on the Congo River with useful skills, to be compared with the Tio and Bobangi who appeared to be engaged in nothing but trade.

An explanation of racial stereotyping as a factor in hiring practices must incorporate both comparative ethnology and colonial history—both conceived processually and dynamically. Whereas Europeans came to Africa with ideas about Africans already formed, these took specific shape according to the various circumstances that characterized the European-Black contacts. When Stanley arrived at the West Coast on his first journey, he distinguished, favorably or unfavorably, the peoples with whom he had to deal. When personal “knowledge” is shared and adopted by others, it becomes social truth, powerful enough to influence subsequent events. Stanley condemned the people on the lower Ubangi River as “pirates,” and as a result he may have created the myth of the terrible “Bondjos,” who, although elusive and changing in ethnic identity, plagued Europeans as far as Bangui (Samarin, 1984d).

Accidental factors in European-Black relations played a part in the general admiration of the Bangalas at the expense of the Kongos.
However it may have begun, it was reinforced by each succeeding decision on the part of Europeans in choosing who served them and what they were employed at. The exclusion (in proportional, not exclusive, terms) of the Kongos from general and diversified employment was cumulative in force. Moreover, this type of discrimination occurred in other parts of Africa, as, for example, among the Yakoma-speaking peoples of the Upper Ubangi River, who, like the Bangalas, came early into the best of European employment (Samarin, 1984b).

**EXTERNAL POLITICS**

Not only were the Kongos at the mercy of the increasing exploitation of the Congo basin, as manifested in the development of trade, they were also pawns in the competition between Belgians and French. The French forbade the "Loangos" from taking employment in foreign territory (Bentley, MH, 1887: 439), although there is no evidence that this restraint had much effect. Indeed the French had little impact on the development of a labor market, at least until 1889. For one thing, many people going to French posts used Belgian transportation facilities. For another, it was de Brazza's plan to beat the Belgians to the Upper Congo by going directly east on the rivers, avoiding the costly and time-consuming journey to Stanley Pool.

In 1889 the Belgian government, at the highest level in Belgium itself, assumed full control of labor recruitment in the Congo Free State. Edict No. 90 (Boma, June 26, 1889) required those who hired Blacks in the state's territory to obtain a license. This law was meant to consolidate the power of the Free State, raise revenue for the state, and reserve manpower for the railway project. Albert Dolisie, the administrator in French Brazzaville, viewed this Belgian action with alarm (August 6, 1889, ANP). He saw as one consequence foreign recruitment of Bakongos in the French Congo. The only way, he wrote, to keep the Kongos "for our own use" was to "call" (by which he meant "restrict") them to the Loango route. In other words, he was suggesting the creation of a French land-route different from and in competition with that of the Free State's. It was eventually inaugurated, but the French did not handle the matter as categorically as the Belgians. Recruitment seems to have been left to private parties. In some cases in 1893, government loads were transported from Matadi to Brazzaville on French territory but using the Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handels Venootschap (New African Trading Company; Dolisie, ANPM), even though early in 1893 the Société d'Etudes et d'Exploita-
tion du Congo français (SEECF) was established for the explicit purpose of moving loads into the interior from Loango (de Mazières, 1982: 71).

By turning to the Kongos for porters the French added to the numbers, already nearly unbelievable, of carriers these people were providing. Although Kongos were used in some of the expeditions into the Ubangi basin (Samarin, 1928a, ms.), for example, they were assigned lowly tasks (except, of course, for those from the coast who were literate). Indeed, much of the indigenous manpower in the French possession of the Upper Ubangi appears to have been recruited in the Congo Free State. For example, in his expedition on 1894 Casimir Maistre had thirty liberated slaves from the Upper Kasai (Maistre, 1895: 40; Samarin, 1928a, ms.) Indeed official decrees did not always have the effect they were meant to have; the recruitment of labor was determined as often by immediate circumstances as by governmental policy, and slaves—liberated or otherwise—continued to figure significantly among the workers of the Europeans.

WORKER CONSCIOUSNESS

In the light of the foregoing history we can assume that the Kongos would have seen themselves as exploited and oppressed, especially in comparison to other indigenous peoples. Indeed the great Kongo strike of 1887—one of several collective actions on the part of porters against their exploitation—demonstrates that such consciousness in fact existed. The strike is extensively described by Lieutenant Franqui, one of those responsible for recruitment at that time (and quoted in Wauters, 1890a: 222ff). He does not call it a strike; that would have been inappropriate where the pervading metaphor was conquest. He explains that there was “a momentary halt” in recruitment at the beginning of 1887 because of a few “intestine wars” and especially the unhappiness of the natives who feared competition following the establishment of several trading posts at Leopoldville. The event is mentioned by Lamotte (n.d.: 58) but without explanation. It is ironic that in the propagandist literature, such as the Congo Illustré, it was reported (CI, 1892: 179)—with obvious allusion to labor trouble in Belgium and for the purpose of assuring capitalist investors—that the porters were not civilized enough to strike! Moreover, this was about two years after the first organized march of workers on May Day that took place in Vienna. In connection with these 1887 conflicts, Ngaliema, the wealthy Tio trader at Stanley Pool, appears to have organized his own ivory caravans to the coast, although the rulers at
Manyanga tried to stop them and even robbed them (Vansina, 1973: 428; citing Dupont, 1889: 213, 263). If this connection is accepted, then the work stoppage of the Kongos was directed against European and African merchants alike. Although Belgians interpreted the Kongo resistance to recruitment in terms that were favorable to European investment, it is not yet clear how we are to interpret it today. More information is needed to explain the grievances of the porters as laborers and to delineate the incipient consciousness of themselves as workers, and other such matters.

There must have been other interruptions in the transport of goods from the coast, about which we have still much to learn. In early March 1885, for example, the missionary Aaron Sims reported from Leopoldville that native transport had ceased "for a month or two while they, the natives are engaged in trade with the coast" (ABHS). Normally, however, the period of trade from the Pool to the coast took place in the dry season during the months from April to September, not in early March (Vansina, 1973: 257-258). In August of that same year Vittu de Kerraoul had difficulty getting porters between Franceville and Diélé, not only because of interethnic strife but also because of dissatisfaction over pay (letter cited in Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1969: 291). Finally in 1892, there were further caravan troubles, perhaps indicating another strike (de Mazières, 1982: 71).

What then did the writer mean in the Congo Illustré (1892: 107), in an article devoted to "Initiating Negroes to European Work," when he said: "Generally, the laborer regenerated by work, considers himself as a kind of aristocrat in his tribe"? The answer is revealing; he was not writing of the Lower Congo peoples—who were porters—but the Bangalas—who were soldiers. By 1892 all those who held privileged positions in European service considered themselves better—and better off—than others. They were not restricted to carrying loads, like slaves. Besides, they were equipped with the symbols of authority: clothing and arms. Europeans recognized the power of such symbols. This was the period, one must remember, when civil and military service in Europe was expressed in an explicit language of dress, when in Vienna, for example, even the Dienstmann ("public porter" but all-round neighborhood servant), had his own pitiful uniform. The member of the Belgian Force Publique was generally better dressed and had better perquisites. He was, moreover, one member of a large new social unit, visible in its solidarity on frequent occasions, not to speak of the ritual ones at the military camp. And his confrères uniformed for other kinds of work also accepted the symbolism of this new social structure.
Language was both effector and effect in the novel and sustained interactions between Europeans and Africans during the years of exploration, trade, and colonization. This relationship is why a sociolinguistic perspective in African history is revealing. It reveals a strong correlation between the nature of work among different populations and the place of these peoples in the new colonial state, and it is revealed in the histories of the origins of Sango, Lingala, and Kituba (pidginized Kongo)—"new languages," all more or less pidginized, of the Congo and Ubangi basins; all now very important to the Central African Republic, the Republic of Zaire, and the Popular Republic of the Congo (Samarin, 1971, 1980a, 1980b, 1982a, 1982b, 1984b). The analysis of labor-mobilization reveals the historical process of linguistic development as no purely linguistic study has been able to do. It can be shown, furthermore, that Fehderau (1962, 1966) is wrong when he concludes that pidginized Kongo was a trade language at the end of the nineteenth century, on the grounds that interethnic trade leads to such a language. A reading of the primary sources demonstrates that there is no evidence for this assumption.

The earliest reference to an explicitly simple form of Kongo, the antecedent of contemporary Kituba, is that by the widow of W. Holman Bentley. She (1907: 285) used the terms "State Congo" and "dog-Congo." This pejorative designation for the pidgin has been misunderstood by Gann and Duignan, who claim (1975: 135) that because missionaries "at times referred to the official tongue of the Congo as 'the State jargon,'" they were hostile, as British citizens, to the Free State. At that time the Kongo language was hardly "official"! Moreover, the study of missionary literature reveals clearly that the Protestants lagged behind other Europeans, even Catholic missionaries, in the use of the emerging lingua francas (Kituba and Lingala) because they valued the ethnic (so-called tribal) languages as authentic carriers of culture and appreciated their richness in grammar and vocabulary. It was their appreciation for the indigenous African languages, not a presumed antipathy toward those who were not British, that explains the linguistic policies of these missionaries.

Instead, it can be concluded that there was a close relationship between labor and language. The Belgian edict of 1889 regulated the recruitment of labor and helped promote a pidginized Kongo. The new form of Kongo (Kituba) that emerged out of the Babel of tongues that characterized the building of the colonial edifice was a product of the connection between language history and labor history. The present
argument is not sufficient for the linguistic demonstration; that will come only from a thorough analysis of the earliest linguistic data. But this is nonetheless a necessary argument. In the present state of knowledge, therefore, it is more credible to claim that Kituba arose in the context of the interaction between Kongo speakers and foreigners when the former were employed by the hundreds of thousands as, above all, porters than it is to say that it arose out of earlier trade between Europeans and Blacks or between various Congolese peoples.

Kituba seems to have arisen precisely where the most intense recruitment of labor by Europeans took place. It is related most closely to the central Kongo dialects and languages, closest indeed to the form at Manyanga (Fehderau, 1966: 76). The southern caravan route was especially important in the era before French and Belgian colonization, but that was not where Kituba seems to have developed. And although the Vili north of the Congo River were very much involved in the coastal trade earlier than the period discussed here, their language had even less effect, according to Fehderau, on vehicular Kongo. Whatever jargon may have developed in the nineteenth century, it was subsequently influenced more by Manyanga than by other dialects. From this perspective, vehicular Kongo is not and never was primarily a “trade language.” It served as the language of labor.

The relationship between labor and language has not yet become the focus of examination in the same way that the languages of politics, law, and religion have. These varieties (to which one attributes the name “language”) concern the sociolinguist, who seeks to identify the linguistic nature of all varieties of a given language and explain their function or role in the relevant social group. Some such languages emerge simply by semantic developments, or by the creation of new words, or by borrowing words from other languages (all three processes being illustrated in certain argots), or even by adopting an entirely different language. It is reasonable to suppose, for example, that in a large industry management and labor would use different “languages” for the same domains of experience. But languages do not merely indicate different social groups; they also serve as symbolic or real boundaries between them. European languages represented power and authority. This fact can be illustrated in the history of the construction of the Belgian railroad to the Pool. Trouet explicitly states (1893: 93) that all the [African] bosses, clerks, and craftsmen—who were the only ones in rapport with Europeans and spoke either French or English—transmitted orders to the workers in “the national idiom.” In the context, this would mean the various native languages of the foreign workers and not one of the vehicular languages (emergent
As language separated management from labor, so it must have separated the two kinds of labor described in this chapter. In its earliest years pidginized Kongo was the language of the porters and pidginized Kibangi (Bangala/Lingala) the language of the military and of skilled labor (sharing this function with Swahili, brought by personnel from the east coast, until indigenous labor was developed). Linked as they were to both ethnic and labor differences, these new languages must have contributed to a consciousness of distinct classes of workers in the minds of both foreigners and natives.

The study of different varieties of language ("codes" in a generic sense) contributes to the explanation of social change. Language can also be seen as a means of influencing behavior. Fabian (1982), for example, goes beyond the purely linguistic description of the use of French in Shaba Swahili (Zaire) to attempt to account for this mixing of languages by workers as a positive affirmation of their own identity. And my own work on African lingua francas reveals how these new languages emerged in new social relationships established by the indigenous peoples with the foreign non-European workers. For this area of study we have, of course, practically no linguistic data whatsoever; our argument has to proceed with different kinds of non-linguistic data. From this perspective, vehicular Kongo is not and never was primarily a "trade language." It served as the language of labor.

NOTES

1. It is not yet clear how and when this arbitrary and standardized load was established. In African caravans load sizes varied. But even in those for Europeans we cannot be sure what actually was carried. Since caravan bosses had the real supervision of these caravans there must certainly have been great variation in what was imposed on a carrier; what he could get away with must have been more constrained—unless he was able to recruit his own assistant.

2. The intermediate distances are the following: Vivi-Isangila (93 kilometers/58 miles), Manyanga-Leopoldville (152 kilometers/95 miles). The distance between Isangila and Manyanga (128 kilometers/80 miles) could be covered by water.

3. Vansina (1973: 11, 124, fn31; 143, fn10; 146, fn21; 304) confuses the identification by using different spellings: Lari (Kongo); Lali, who call themselves Fumu; Kongo-Laari; Lari, "e.i. formerly the Fumu." The Loango inhabitants have also had a curious onomastic history. Although they are today recognized as Vill (e.g. Martin, 1970), in the nineteenth century they were almost always referred to as "Loangos”. Martin herself uses this name in the form Maloango—with the plural prefix (ma) that is appropriate for bananas and leaves and not for people! Moreover, she also uses the name for the chief (or king) of that area.

4. Bentley's observations need confirmation from other sources, especially his claim that in the beginning of the Baptist missionary work "we had Kroo boys [from West
Africa], then Loangos were induced by us for the first time to leave their homes. Other people on the river profited by this to engage Loangos, and they became to a large extent the work people of the river." Since the people at Loango had been in contact with Europeans for centuries, it is inconceivable that the English-speaking missionaries were the first to have induced them to work in other areas. Bentley's claim cannot be applied to all Europeans. However, he may only have been comparing the Baptist hiring practice with that of the Livingstone Inland Mission, which was established at the Pool at the same time.

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