MEDIATORS, CONTRACT MEN, AND COLONIAL CAPITAL

MECHANIZED GOLD MINING IN THE GOLD COAST COLONY, 1879–1909

CASSANDRA MARK-THIESEN

Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital

Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora

Toyin Falola, Series Editor
The Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities and University Distinguished Teaching Professor
University of Texas at Austin

Recent Titles

Ira Aldridge: The Last Years, 1855–1867
Bernth Lindfors

Population, Tradition, and Environmental Control in Colonial Kenya
Martin S. Shanguhyia

Humor, Silence, and Civil Society in Nigeria
Ebenezer Obadare

Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning
Wale Adebanwi

The Rise and Demise of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Atlantic World
Edited by Philip Misevich and Kristin Mann

The Power of the Oath: Mau Mau Nationalism in Kenya, 1952–1960
Mickie Mwanzia Koster

Cotton and Race across the Atlantic: Britain, Africa, and America, 1900–1920
Jonathan E. Robins

Islam, Power, and Dependency in the Gambia River Basin: The Politics of Land Control, 1790–1940
Assan Sarr

Living Salvation in the East African Revival in Uganda
Jason Bruner

On Durban's Docks: Zulu Workers, Rural Households, Global Labor
Ralph Callebert

A complete list of titles in the Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora series may be found on our website, www.urpress.com.

Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital

Mechanized Gold Mining in the Gold Coast Colony, 1879–1909

Cassandra Mark-Thiesen

University of Rochester Press

First published 2018

University of Rochester Press
668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
www.urpress.com
and Boydell & Brewer Limited
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
www.boydellandbrewer.com

ISBN-13: 978-1-58046-918-0
ISSN: 1092-5228

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mark-Thiesen, Cassandra, author.
Title: Mediators, contract men, and colonial capital : mechanized gold mining in the Gold Coast Colony, 1879–1909 / Cassandra Mark-Thiesen.
Other titles: Rochester studies in African history and the diaspora ; v. 77.
Description: Rochester : University of Rochester Press, 2018. | Series: Rochester studies in African history and the diaspora ; v. 77 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017050185 | ISBN 9781580469180 (hardcover : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Gold miners—Recruiting—Ghana—History. | Gold miners—Effect of technological innovations on—Ghana—History. | Labor supply—Ghana—History. | Industrial relations—Ghana—History. | Great Britain—Colonies—Africa—Administration—History. | Ghana—History—To 1957.
Classification: LCC HD8832 .M37 2018 | DDC 331.042234220966709034—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017050185
This publication is printed on acid-free paper.
Printed in the United States of America.

To my grandparents
and other teachers, farmers, housekeepers, and labor organizers

Contents

Illustrations

Figures

Maps

Tables

Acknowledgments

In the course of carrying out the underlying research for this book, I was able visit various parts of Ghana and the United Kingdom. I am thankful to the Janggen-Pöhn Foundation in St. Gallen (Switzerland), the Beit Fund of Oxford University, and St. Cross College for enabling this research. I also changed institutions and am grateful for the support of colleagues at both Oxford University and the University of Basel, especially the late Jan-Georg Deutsch and the late Patrick Harries.

Parts of this book have been presented in a number of forums: Gold Rush Imperialism Conference, Rothermere American Institute and Oxford Centre for Global History; Workshop on Wage Labour, Capital and Precarity in Global History and Africa, International Institute of Social History and African Studies Centre, Leiden; Roundtable on Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Perspectives from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe, University of Cologne; re: work the Summer Academy of re: work (or the IGK Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History at Humboldt University Berlin) at State University of Campinas; Tenth International Conference on Labour History, V. V. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida, India; International Conference on Forced Labour, Ho, Ghana; Research Seminar in African History, University of Basel; Masterclass of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; Fourth European Conference on African Studies, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala; African Economic History Workshop, Geneva; Graduate Workshop in Economic and Social History, University of Oxford; and St. Cross Colloquia, University of Oxford. Many thanks to the organizers of these events and to members of the audience for their indispensable feedback.

I discovered source materials used in this book with the help of archivists and members of staff at a number of archives: the Ghana National Archives in Accra and Regional Archives Sekondi; archives of the University of Ghana, Legon; the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana; University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa; Rhodes House Library; Cambridge University Archives; Public Record Office, London; London Metropolitan Archives; archives of the School of Oriental and African Studies; British Library Newspapers archive, Colindale; and the Basel Mission Archives.

Thanks also go out to those who have accompanied and encouraged me along the way, especially Peter Alexander, Gareth Austin, Kofi Baku, Rana Behal, Benjamin Brühwiler, Sarah Kunkel, Rouven Kunstmann, Enrique Martino, Deborah Mason, Heike Schmidt, and Julia Tischler. At the University of Rochester Press, I wish to thank the peer reviewers of my manuscript, as well as Toyin Falola and Sonia Kane and her colleagues, who were great to work with.

Special thanks go out to the members of my family, who make it worthwhile, and without whom this book would never have materialized: including my Edith, Yves, and Alex; Althea, Emmanuel, and Michael in Basel; Malaika, Carl, Zoë, and Miles in Tallahassee; Peter and Michaela in Hamburg; Tamara and Jürgen in Bad Oldesloe; Arlene W. in Sacramento; and Shirley M. in London—the list goes on.

Introduction

By 1910 the port of Sekondi in the western protectorate of the Gold Coast had already been serving as an entrepôt between Wassa and the expansive Atlantic world for several centuries. Dutch officials initially took an interest in the location because it possessed a good landing beach that was fairly well sheltered from strong winds and because of its close proximity to Wassa, which was known to be a rich source of gold. Although initially only land and water trade routes led to the gold-producing interior region, under the British colonial administration a government railway was constructed, reaching Tarkwa[1] in 1901, Obuase in 1902, Kumase in 1903, and Prestea in 1911. Unlike the cocoa and palm oil trade that determined the success of colonial ports in the eastern protectorate, to the west, the gold trade stood above all else, putting Sekondi in a dominant position as neighboring ports fell into a state of decay. It was a place of comings and goings, not just in trade (other primary exports included timber and rubber) but also in people. When the mechanized gold mines were established in the 1870s, miners from Britain, Australia, and the United States landed there in large numbers by way of a surfboat on their way to Wassa, as did most Liberian contract workers, for whom it was safer to travel along the coast by sea. By the turn of the century, Sekondi began to attract a growing number of migrant workers traveling on foot as well. Although some undertook the risk of a solo voyage, most of them arrived in Sekondi as part of a small gang led by an African labor agent. Sekondi was where agents serving the gold mines usually came to engage new recruits for contract work on the concessions or other types of wage work.

But if a port is the greatest signifier of a region's integration into the world economy, then the story that Sekondi told was one of haphazard incorporation. Although British officials had clearly invested time and money in the port city, its potential had simultaneously been tempered by mediocre expectations and missed opportunities. After a brief stay here during her travels through West Africa, the novelist Mary Gaunt described "a pretty place" straggling "up and down many hills."[2] Yet she could not help but notice how Sekondi's landscape was marked by a lack of planning and follow-through on the part of the British colonial administration, the port itself having only an "open roadstead" with "no harbor."[3]

The colonial state maintained a very lukewarm interest in the economic potential of the western protectorate, making it that much more puzzling to some observers when the railway was built from this southern port to stations in the mining districts to the north at the turn of the twentieth century. As it happened Britain's decision to build a railway from the port of Sekondi northward constituted a major turning point in the creation of a modern mining sector.[4] And yet, political friction between mining entrepreneurs and colonial officials continued to resurface. Sekondi's undone landscape aptly reflected their relationship during the early decades of mechanized gold mining. *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital* is a social and economic history of West African miners in West Africa's first mechanized mining sector, which developed rapidly in the context of the colonial state's laissez-faire economic policy. The tenuous and shifting relationship between state officials and entrepreneurs in the gold mines in West Africa, which contrasted dramatically with what was occurring on white settler frontiers, is a key part of the investigation, especially in consideration of the opportunities it created for African entrepreneurs in and around this emergent wage-labor market. As Raymond Dumett put forward in 2012, "in West Africa the indigenous populations played a much larger role as active participants in the mining process than did their counterparts in the North American West, both as entrepreneurs and company promoters as well as wage laborers, in the supposedly European-led gold rushes, as traditional peasant miners and as members of the labor force."[5] In 1904, African employees in the Gold Coast's gold mining sector outnumbered European mining men by 17,044 to 611.

Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital takes on an explicitly labor-centered approach to this history by focusing on the evolution and persistence of indirect labor between 1879 and 1909. It reconstructs the emerging colonial economic context, illuminating how human geography and the preexisting social conditions of work in West Africa shaped capitalist transformation during this period. It carefully highlights the dynamics of the highly fluid West African labor market during this early stage of colonialism, while still taking into account how historical, social, and economic particularities may have shaped how different social groups responded to the opportunity of regular and extended wage work in the mines. The multitude of ways in which male, and some female, laborers from the Gold Coast and its protectorates as well as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and other parts of the region engaged with the new colonial economy with its groundbreaking technology, modern transportation services, easy access to credit, regular availability of jobs, and reinvented political institutions will be a key part of the discussion.

The Wassa gold mines were far from being the model of an imperial scheme. Therefore, the contradictions and inconsistencies of what some would describe as a new state of economic modernity are also highlighted. In particular, due to the pervasiveness of indirect recruitment, much of the politics of labor exploitation remained vested in African individuals. Labor agents were crucial mediators in West African mining labor markets. Yet in Wassa these actors were not necessarily representatives of individual mines or chiefdoms, either. Many exhibited inconsistent loyalties (at best). These were marginal character with a pure economic drive in their interactions with the mines. These recruiters are a neglected group in the history of gold mining in West Africa. A history of the processes of labor mobilization for the Wassa mines necessitates a story of the interplay of social, economic, and political transformations at the local, regional, colonial, and imperial level.

Wassa Gold Mining: A Long Story

Gold production and the gold trade from the region of Wassa flourished for centuries before the European presence. Although it is not impossible to distinguish when the mineral was first uncovered in the region, there is research to show that gold from the Upper Volta region was one of the three main sources for the trans-Saharan gold trade from at least 1400 on. Knowledge of this form of extra-subsistence activity eventually traveled south to the southern Akan region in medieval times, supposedly by means of the migration of Mandingo people. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish a direct trade in gold with peoples from this region in the 1490s, although the location of the mines and means of production were shrouded in secrecy. The first European sources listing the states of Wassa, Denkyera, Akyem, Asante, and Gyaman as the sources of Akan gold stemmed from the eighteenth century. The entire region, roughly 1.5 times the size of Switzerland, begins approximately 54 kilometers inland from the southwestern coast and extends to the northeast for about 220 kilometers in a rectangular shape, through the center of the forest zone to the Kwahu Escarpment. Previous research by Dumett has highlighted indigenous small-scale and seasonal mining production in these areas, based on family and some slave labor.[6] Dumett has also shown that this traditional form of mining continued to be a leading revenue generator for Africans even after the establishment of the first mechanized mines, expanding as it did due to new sources of transportation and trade.[7] Indeed, a major conclusion of his 1998 work, *El Dorado in West Africa*, was that small-scale mining outperformed the mechanized mines in terms of the amount of gold exported during the first gold rush of 1879–85.

Labor Transformations and Colonial Commerce in African History

This study builds on and expands prior historical research examining how colonial commerce promoted the transformation of labor regimes on the African continent. As it periodizes the expansion of the wage-labor market, it challenges some of the prevailing theoretical and conceptual models that scholars have applied to the history of colonial mining, often the foremost symbol of capitalism in Africa during this period. In expectation of an industrial revolution, historians flocked to the study of mining labor in Africa, which already was gaining popularity in the early 1950s. The mines comprised a familiar work environment in which historians anticipated witnessing Africans contribute to the rise of the so-called growth economy. By the end of the nineteenth century, mechanized mining in the western protectorate of the Gold Coast had managed to recruit thousands (in the double digits) of African workers. On the face of it, this was a notable achievement when we consider the legal end of slavery in the Gold Coast in 1874. Many scholars interpreted such growth in the wage-labor market as the first step in an inevitable process of expansion through which African workers could become proletarianized.[8] As a result, they focused on locating features of class consciousness. Thus, important information detailing the ways in which the work and life cycles of the African worker diverged from those of the Eurocentric model of the ideal worker was overlooked.

From the very start, however, certain scholars were not convinced by the thoughts surrounding class formation. Whereas some pointed to the lingering financial ties between the miners and their family members back home, others looked toward the social linkages taking shape in the mines themselves. Studies of mining in the Gold Coast have concentrated on the issue of ethnic organization in the mines, perceiving it as an extension of colonial policies. Although some social groups had no history of ethnicity prior to the colonial era,[9] and others certainly did show similar, albeit more fluid, forms of association, they all took on an ethnic identities in this workplace. Nevertheless, although scholars generally explained the social organization of African populations during the colonial era by way of ethnicity, they had to come to terms with how and why such allegiances were reinforced from below, by the miners themselves. This study further historicizes the transformation of ethnic identity during the colonial period by demonstrating the temporary nature of some of these unions in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mining sector, though they were necessary for navigating the social landscape of the mines while the miners resided in Wassa during a roughly six-month period.

The Colonial State, African Authorities, and Labor Mobilization

This study has benefited from the increased caution taken by historians when making assumptions surrounding the relationships among the state, capital, and labor in the mines. Many historians of southern Africa have argued that the international finance networks of the mines were bolstered by their power in local government.[10] One important implication of such collusion was seen in the array of strategies the state used to mobilize labor for private firms, in addition to the men engaged to further its own expansionist ambitions.[11] As this and other studies show, the colonial government in the Gold Coast Colony also experimented with the recruitment of laborers for the gold mines.[12] At the same time, this study also illuminates the history of F. W. H. Migeod, the chief officer of the government transport office, and in particular disagreements between him and officials in Accra on the labor question, to forgo a monolithic view of the colonial state. On the whole, administrators were reluctant to identify with the Wassa mines in a formal and consistent manner.

Anne Phillips has shown that colonial economic priorities were more ambiguous in West Africa, due to the fundamental weaknesses of the colonial state.[13] There are, for example, few data backing the argument that colonial administrators intended to create an economic context favorable to the recruitment efforts of merchant capital on the West African coast when they made indigenous slavery illegal, as contended by Kenneth Swindell and Alieu Jeng.[14] Evasive behavior on the part of most colonial officials in the Gold Coast Colony in their dealings with the colonial mines in Wassa strengthens the argument that an ideological shift primarily informed the choice in favor of abolition. Even though enslaved Africans' access to work for missionaries, industries of scale, and the administration did add fire to the burning house of indigenous slavery, it was primarily the humanitarian ideals of missionaries, antislavery organizations and the public in the metropole that pushed the colonial state to pass the Emancipation Proclamation of 1874. The tenacity of enslaved men, women, and children forced colonial administrators to actually enforce the bill.

Nevertheless, most scholars have come to subscribe to the notion that the success of colonial commerce depended on one form or another of colonial intervention. Thus, the power of the colonial state cannot be ignored altogether, not even in non-settler colonies. Here, historians have given particular attention to the system of indirect rule in their discussion of labor recruitment for private firms[15] and government services[16] and the political constraints of African workers. Coercion has been primarily located in the combination of capitalist power and the persistence of social relations, which the state would not, and most likely could not, dismantle and managed to tap into through a variation of strategies. Such studies have shone a light on the colonial state's deep reliance on indigenous authorities, and especially the chiefs, who could mobilize their subjects in smaller or larger numbers.[17] However, in finding explanations for how African authorities were able to access the labor power of African workers during the formative years of colonial rule, most scholars have drawn on cultural history. Unfortunately, this highlighting of the exploitative power of the chiefs in the bulk of the literature leaves readers with an overwhelming sense that coercion by means of sociocultural power was the most pervasive tool of labor mobilization during the early colonial period. And these persistent references to social power alone run the danger of eliminating evidence of Africans as rational economic actors. Despite wide agreement that precolonial labor in West Africa was an economic as well as a social phenomenon, many labor historians of West Africa have only been writing sociocultural power into the history books.

Studies on the Wassa mines have tended to be more differentiated in their portrayal of indigenous authorities.[18] Scholars have, for instance, acknowledged the protective function of the chieftaincies where land rights were concerned. Others have contended that chiefs may not have had a great amount of say in responding to the labor demands of the state, nor did they draw great profits from such activities.[19] For the most part, this study breaks the focus on the chiefs by illuminating a moment in which an array of coexisting labor agents were attached to the mines. Moreover, it explores the economic factors encouraging, and sometimes forcing, men to work in the mines. These included the high wages offered by mining firms (relative to what could be earned in sharecropping) and gaining access to credit, although miners also made decisions about where to work based on factors such as the social scene and types of food available on particular concessions.

There is a need to move beyond oversimplified "push" and "pull" factors in our descriptions of African migrant workers and examine more closely the "in-between" logistics of such mobility. Although the work of some scholars has gone far to emphasize precolonial economic institutions, as well as modified versions of such, on the Gold Coast, researchers have missed important connections between rural and urban economic pursuits, respectively traditional and modern economic activities, which existed during the colonial period. This is where credit schemes have been receiving a growing amount of attention. The social securities provided by labor agents will also be examined.

The economic lives of African have been ignored or undermined in a number of economic studies in the past. Theories such as that of the "backward bending supply curve" gained prominence in the fog of habitual generalizations applied to indigenous economic activities and the ignorance that surrounded indigenous social and religious thoughts.[20] Followers of this theory posited that although wage rates acted as an incentive for many Africans, they could not be too high, because African workers had in mind specific earnings targets, which once met would prompt them to leave their jobs and return to idleness. This theory has been critiqued as presupposing that African workers were inherently lazy. It was this mindset that allowed certain colonial observers to defend low wages for African workers, for whom paid labor supposedly was a substitute for leisure activity. Missionaries on the Gold Coast also reiterated this idea when they described migrants from Liberia as "seeking a fortune wherewith to return home, purchase a wife or two, and settle down to a life of lordly ease."[21] In line with a number of recent studies demonstrating that wage rates in the Gold Coast Colony were generally high during the colonial period,[22] *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital* shows that employers in the mines had to offer high wages to attract and keep laborers. Most contemporary foreign employers did not bother to consider alternative explanations for why local laborers preferred to work in a flexible manner or remain in agriculture entirely. Yet, more recently Raymond Dumett has described a number of obstacles stood in the way of an expansion of the wage labor market in a "classic" way, that is, the mobilization of local laborers for permanent work. Among other things, low labor density in the Wassa region, local laborers' acute awareness of the danger of this kind of work, and a social stigma against underground mining played roles. Instead of conceiving of the transition to wage labor as strictly an exchange of labor resources from family-based subsistence activities (during the precolonial era) to hired labor (during the colonial era), this study attempts to take into account the ways in which preexisting, precolonial socioeconomic conditions in West Africa informed the growing wage-labor market during the colonial period, though in particular, as concerns former slaves, a neat transition is not always easily empirically drawn.[23]

Colonial Commerce and African Agency

In the context of growing numbers of wage-earning Africans in colonial mines, many scholars were also concerned with the brutality of capitalism. In consequence, many of them also designated the colonial mine as a centerpiece of social revolution. Usually using Southern Africa as an example, they demonstrated the extent to which African workers were subjected to the whims of capital, citing as evidence the introduction of pass laws, the totalitarianism of mining compounds and oscillatory migration. In parallel, they showed how workers' resistance to these conditions arose. This narrative has also been applied to research on the early colonial Wassa mines.[24] Although studies of this kind can be lauded for shining a light on the precarities faced by the global working class, they have also tended to erase, distort, or exaggerate the agency of African workers to fit this framework. More recent scholarship has challenged the image of the omnipotent employer in the mines, with an eye toward greater details in the behaviors of African mining men, as seen in the debate surrounding "cheap labor theory."[25] This study revisits some of this material with a microhistorical approach to provide new insights into the behaviors of African workers.

In addition, this study follows in the footsteps of a number of recent studies that present gold rushes during the colonial period in Africa as not necessarily European-led. In the state of Wassa, colonial infrastructure also helped to revive traditional forms of gold mining. And most local Akan laborers still preferred to pursue traditional mining in combination with a rural lifestyle during the first gold rush of 1879–85. In addition, African merchants and traders from the Gold Coast played an essential role in promoting the gold-mining area and conducting land transfers on behalf of mining companies. Indeed, these agents founded some of the first mining firms on the London Stock Exchange.[26] The uneven yet rapid spread of capitalism in the southwest Gold Coast created additional openings for indigenous actors as well, namely the African middlemen who aided in the mobilization of wage laborers. For the vast majority of individuals attracted to or lured, tricked, or coerced into wage work in nineteenth- and twentieth-century in Africa and large segments of the globe, an intermediary was likely involved. Therefore, *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital* also builds on the observation that the task of expanding the wage labor market for expatriate mining was neither "automatic nor inexorable."[27] Even more than in the major gold-mining centers of South Africa, the indirect recruitment of African contract men was crucial to large-scale production (even though only a minority of African workers opted to sign agreements for steady and extended work). Yet little information is available about the dynamics of bringing these several thousand largely male African workers to the mines each year on the individual level.[28] This study therefore demonstrates a fuller appreciation for the roles played by a range of African mediators in the expansion of the West African wage-labor market serving the Wassa mines. Although literature on these and similar figures in South Asia is quite rich, there have been fewer micro-level accounts of their activities on the African continent.

According to Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, a framework of analysis concerning intermediaries translates into the study of "people pushing and tugging on relationships with those above and below them, changing but only sometimes breaking the lines of authority."[29] These engagements, therefore, moved beyond a simple dichotomy of resistance and collaboration. This notion of "contested collaboration" is particularly useful, as it provides a more nuanced view of the colonial encounter. Several case studies have already demonstrated the great potential of this approach for a "new" colonial history In *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa*, Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard Roberts show that African intermediaries "held positions that bestowed little official authority, but in practice the occupants of these positions functioned, somewhat paradoxically, as the hidden linchpins of colonial rule."[30] Similar figures also emerged in the context of colonial commerce to help manage larger African populations on behalf of Europeans.

Where African intermediaries have featured in studies on colonial commerce in West Africa, they have generally been depicted principally as agents of foreign financial interests who facilitated the economic exploitation of other Africans. Alternatively, they have been conflated with village headmen. More needs to be said about those labor agents on the margins of society who were neither fully anchored in the mining hierarchy nor held a firm place in the political structures of indigenous society.

The narrow discussion of the notions of authority and honor relevant to labor agents has only been matched by the underplaying of "struggle factors" in the balance of power. Struggles and negotiations occurred both between African intermediaries and African workers and between African intermediaries and European employers, as in the image conjured by Burbank and Cooper, though granted, when looked at over a broad span of time, the authority of African intermediaries did generally decrease during the colonial period. The experiences of African labor agents and the larger population of African workers, the agents' relationship to mine managers and the colonial state, provides an interesting lens through which to understand how colonial domination was manufactured—and also how African actors managed to shape this process after their own needs and desires. The actions, demands, and conflicts of African workers are explored.

Global Labor History

The question of where the socioeconomic histories of Africa and Asia converge with that of the "global North" is currently being debated more heatedly than ever before. Scholars have proposed that there ought to be a more concentrated effort to open up the field of social history in the global North, which had left out over half of the world's population, thereby obscuring many "similarities, differences and interactions between regions and continents."[31] As a result, scrupulous comparisons are now increasingly being made in order to get a closer understanding of patterns of capitalist intensification in different parts of the world. In labor histories of both "the West" and "the Rest," scholars had a longstanding tendency to bundle the spread of capitalism and "free" wage labor. As a result, a spotlight was constantly aimed at the (male) "free" wage worker. (And as mentioned earlier, colonial mines were frequently presented as a forcing ground of class consciousness.) Yet this new field of study advocates that social and economic historians broaden their gaze to include all workers, including sharecroppers, the unpaid (e.g., family or household labor), and the coerced (e.g., slaves or indentured servants).[32] The worker (as well as what constitutes work) is now being conceived outside of a limited, unilineal ideal. For as Gervase Clarence-Smith observed in reference to the modes-of-production debate, although the handling of models has stimulated some interesting research questions, it is also important not to be blinded by the dogmatism of such lines of inquiry: "This in turn provides a channel for the real to re-enter the rational."[33] Dumett's earlier research on the nineteenth-century Wassa gold mines also moved away from the application of classic Marxist theory when discussing the transformation of the labor force, since the fluctuating and seasonal nature of the mining labor force did not fit into the theoretical framework of class formation.[34]

Global labor history considers Africa a fundamental part of a broader discussion of social and economic development and capitalist intensification, without diminishing the importance of the its local contexts.[35] The shift toward what has been termed "hybrid Marxism" has also triggered renewed interest among historians to investigate the history of industrial labor relations in Africa with loosened theoretical restraints[36]—this study being a case in point.

In accordance with this field of inquiry as I understand it, *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital* upholds the distinction of the *free* wage laborer, in the classic Marxist sense, and the *wage laborer*, as in someone earning a wage temporarily but not necessarily dependent on it for survival. A wage laborer in this sense could also be an *independent laborer* during other periods of the year. Nevertheless, this study does not reserve the title of *worker* for the permanently urbanized. A contract laborer with a six- to twelve-month term of service is also a *worker*, as far as this book is concerned.

The ramifications of indentureship also play into this topic. This study highlights the expansion of the wage-labor market in the western protectorate by way of voluntary (or choice-based) debt bondage; the incorporation of modified forms of traditional relationships of dependency into modern commerce. It does not discount African workers as workers simply because processes of choice-based indebtedness brought them into the wage labor market. Polly Hill, in particular, has warned against the standardization of a "colonial attitude to debt" in studies on African economics, which she states "was as moral as that of missionaries to adultery and polygyny."[37]

Indigenous economics and the endogenous factors shaping colonial capital in Africa have been studied from a variety of perspectives. And