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Slavery, Enslaved Labour and Forced Labour in Mozambique*

Review of Eric Allina, *Slavery by Any Other Name. African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012, xiii+255 p., bibl., index, ISBN 978-0-8139-3272-9 (Series: Reconsiderations in Southern African History).

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THIS IS AN IMPORTANT book on the social history of colonial Africa, not merely on colonial Mozambique or Portuguese Africa. Although the field and archival research deals with the rule of the longest lasting chartered company in Africa, the Mozambique Company, under indirect Portuguese rule, the purpose is to study (and denounce) the perpetuation of “slavery by any other name” under *modern* colonial capitalism, up to 1945-47 in the English, Belgian and French empires, and until 1961 in the Portuguese one. The reader is dealing with first-hand research: even though not having “discovered [the] long-lost collection of the papers of the Mozambique Company”, as Frederick Cooper enthusiastically states on the back cover, Eric Allina was definitely the first scholar to dive into the recently discovered archives and work with this incredibly rich material. One part of the Company’s archives was available from the mid-1990s at the *Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique* in Maputo; later, the other part of the archives was released at the *Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo* in Lisbon—it included the papers of the executive board, as well as a huge number of copies and other field documents and a rich online photo library. What is more, Allina tells the story of the archives’ discovery—no doubt, as Cooper writes, one of “those rare treasure-troves of archival research”.

*I do thank Rosie Westerveld for having edited my English. A far shorter review of the same book is to be published in *African Affairs*, January 2014.

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The book is a fundamentally rewritten version of Allina's PhD thesis (2002) and brings to the broader readership a territorial case study of forced labour—a "case" covering 133,822 square kilometres and representing over 1.45 times the size of Portugal. From 1892 to 1942, the Mozambique Company ruled the *Território de Manica e Sofala*, that is to say, all south-central Mozambique, from south of the Rio Sabi to the Zambezi. When created, it was not an exception, but it became one, since it endured into the middle of the twentieth century and therefore had fifty years to build a true system of governance and exploitation. Allina's aim is to tell "the history of people who, for the most part, left no written record of their experiences" (p. 15) and to document "how the Portuguese empire ushered in a vast forced labor system" (p. 4). But he is very cautious in avoiding the construct of a horrendous "exceptionality" of the Portuguese colonial empire, mentioned in Nevinson's *Modern Slavery* of 1906 and by other scholars far later. If Portugal was "exceptional", it is not because of the "extraordinary brutal" degree of forced labour exploitation (p. 180): it is not a question of the "violence of the weak," but has to do with the perpetuation of a dictatorship *in Portugal itself*, which explains why forced labour remained entrenched until 1961 and colonialism until 1974-75.

Portugal is the only colonial power to have remained a dictatorship so long, since Spain had virtually lost all of its African empire, just as fascist Italy lost it in 1943, while Pétain's France never succeeded in controlling the whole French empire and, in any case, ruled only five years. In the Introduction as well as the Conclusion, Allina forcefully challenges what he calls an "orthodoxy in the social sciences", *i.e.* the notion that "weak states must rely on violence while strong states rule through the cultivation and imposition of hegemonic discourse" (p. 180 and p. 288 n15): firstly, because Portuguese colonialism was not weak—"Africans who lived under colonial rule, whether in Mozambique, Malawi, or Mali, were unlikely to view the brutality of their colonial masters as an expression of weakness" (p. 13), and secondly, because the "history of colonial rule does not support a conclusion that institutionalized violence to extract African labour was a peculiarly Portuguese approach" (p. 180), if we consider the Belgian Congo, French West and Central Africa, the two British Rhodesias, the Gold Coast, Nyassaland and white independent South Africa.

Allina does not follow a chronological path in the book (except for Chapter One, which deals with the origins of the system), and this allows him to present a wealth of details regarding practices and law (Chapter Two), the critique and defence of “Modern Slavery” (Chapter Three), the widespread African resilience or (more rarely) open resistance (Chapter Four), traditional chiefs (Chapter Five), the changing relationship between elders and the young (Chapter Six), the system of labour control (Chapter Seven), and the very restricted upward mobility (Chapter Eight). This layout, however, also involves some limitations, as the reader might end up with an impression that the situation remained the same throughout the first years of the Company’s existence, corresponding to the end of the nineteenth century, and in 1900, 1928, 1932, or 1942 (for example, p. 82-83). Allina’s pages overflow with detail, quoting examples and illustrating all the different contexts as if they were indistinguishable. It is only when he deals with the Great Depression that he clearly pinpoints a regression of forced labour and the completely unexpected problem faced by the Company—an *excess* of African manpower, since the natives had to pay the hut tax and thus desperately sought even misery wages in order to deal with this financial obligation (p. 151-153). In other words, the book lacks periodization. But, this lack of periodization still allows the author to spotlight detail, and it ends up being a positive aspect, all told. Allina *wants us* to “enter” the exploitation system, to “live” beside those who could not convey written records of their experiences ... This was a methodological challenge—trying to give a voice to the voiceless by means of the research documentation contained in the Archives, where 99% of the “voices” are the colonial ones. From this viewpoint, Allina wrote a beautiful subaltern study. He even interviewed a hundred often very old interviewees who are thus directly “present” in the book ... yet even they cannot outweigh the weight of the written sources.

On this specific count, it is puzzling why Allina “gave [his] assurance that each individual’s identity [of interviewees] would be kept confidential; thus [he does] not include interviewees’ names or ages or birthdays” (p. x of the preface and p. 230 of the bibliography). It is difficult to understand the purpose of such anonymity. In the independent Mozambique of 1997, where does there remain any threat to former forced labourers reminiscing about Portuguese exploitation? This highlights another issue, linked to the one of

absent periodization. Since forced labour involved the male population from 14 to 60 years, the “youngest” interviewee (a fourteen-year-old teenager in 1942, the last year of the Company rule) was almost seventy in 1997. If the majority of the interviewees were about 80 in 1997, they were 25 years old in 1942 and 14 in 1932, in the post-Depression era. This is one of the crucial sub-periods. But that is not all: since, from 1942 onward, the country was under direct rule by the state, and forced labour expanded considerably in the Manica e Sofala province as well as elsewhere in Mozambique, it is quite likely that the aged interviewees got their memories mixed up between the Company period and the state period. The anonymity, “agelessness” and “no-where-ness” of Allina’s witnesses (although we know they came mainly from the Manica district) do not let us engage critically with the oral material. The testimonies appear as a mere illustration of the archival sources.

Slavery by Any Other Name is very convincing when it comes to certain matters which might appear contradictory. Indeed, the Mozambique Company was a mainly English-capital-owned society, with French minority holders and only very limited Portuguese participation. It had an office in London (and another one in Lisbon). Would this mean that the *Território de Manica e Sofala* was a British enclave within a Portuguese colony, as possibly suggested by the fact that it had its own local pound (£) currency? The entire scenario is far more complex. First of all, the governor of the *Território* was always a Portuguese, and secondly, the great majority of the civil servants in the “state” company apparatus were Portuguese as well. Going further, beyond these two aspects, the *politics* of the Company were also Portuguese. One striking example involved religious policy: the American Board for Foreign Missions (ABFM), that is to say the Congregational Church, had been active in the region since the last third of the nineteenth century, and wanted to develop its own school in Beira, the *Território*’s capital city. Allina shows that these attempts were countered by harassment or open violence, because the Company preferred Portuguese Roman Catholics. He attests that the desperate ABFM father wrote to the *British* Inspector General of the Company, who answered: “We are here to get labor from this lazy people. We are going to force them to do it if necessary. You will make trouble [...], we do not intend to have you or your work here” (p. 167, see also p. 161).

Savage capitalism and Portuguese nationalism happened to be very good partners ...

More generally, this prompts us to think in terms of the Portuguese empire's dependency on Great Britain. The famous Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos developed a theory classifying Portugal as a country of the "semi-periphery"; which makes its empire a subsidiary empire of Great Britain. This might raise problems regarding the identity of the colonized—they would not necessarily know who their colonizers were. Reality was completely different. Although Portugal's dependency is obvious, in Africa the interests of Portugal and those of Great Britain were always antagonistic, and foreign companies in Portuguese colonies knew they had to accept Portuguese sovereignty in their own interest. As regards the Africans, they had no doubts about the identity of their colonizer. Allina's book helps to restore a more nuanced vision: for its own good, the mainly British-owned Mozambique Company had to become a Portuguese local power fully respectful of Portuguese law. There were no close relations between the Mozambique Company and Cecil Rhodes' British South African Company, the neighbouring enterprise on the other side of the border. Sometimes, Allina goes too far, forgetting that the Company was also English, and he writes as if the forced labour system in the *território* was "only Portuguese", when it was primarily capitalist, orchestrated by a British-owned firm, in a peculiar context which was ... Portuguese.

Another very interesting aspect is the description of the Company's hesitant approach, beginning with four-month-long labour "contracts" (a euphemistic term for forced labour), developing into a six-month-contract, turning in 1927 in a one-year contract and then reverting to a six-month contract throughout the Great Depression (six months was to be the normal length of a "contract" after the *território* returned to direct rule by the Portuguese state in July 1942). The observations, however, often present themselves out of context because, as already stressed, the book lacks a clear periodization. The history of the heterogeneity of the district officers who faced the task of organizing forced labour recruitment is fascinating, yet a bias possibly creeps in: Allina was paying particular attention to those officers who criticized the forced labour system, because it is in their papers that one finds the most information on and the deepest understanding of the forced labour system. Doubtless a great majority of the Company's district officers applied the

forced labour laws without any soul-searching—but it is clear that a few of them were very critical. It is interesting to note that such critics were not at all “anti-colonial”, neither were they “pro-native” (with perhaps *one* exception). They considered that forced labour recruitment for private companies or petty white colonists did not serve the interests of the chartered company as such.

In any case, although there was no linear trend, the actual drift was toward a great expansion of forced recruitment. At the very beginning (*i.e.* the end of the nineteenth century and during World War I), even though great violence was applied, or sporadically from time to time, recruitment levels were not huge: several thousand. Just before the Great Depression or again at the end of the 1930s and during World War II, the figures reached *c.* 150,000 *contratados* for the *Território*, that is to say the totality of the male population aged 14 to 60. These levels were to remain almost constant from 1942 to 1961, a very systematic degree of organization before computerized technology ... It is a pity that Allina, given that he stopped his research in 1942, did not notice that the worst forced labour period *began*—now at the scale of the entire colony—in 1942, with the infamous Circular 818/D-7 of 7 October signed by the Governor-General of Mozambique, José Tristão de Bettencourt. Allina writes that, with this circular, “there had been no change in the Africans’ obligation to work” (p. 178). On the scale of the whole colony, this observation is erroneous, since the circular set up an open and violent direct intervention by the state apparatus in the recruitment of forced labourers. To be more exact: the state did not recruit *per se*, but arrested the “vagrant” Africans, taking them to a place where employers were waiting for them, and where the Africans could therefore exercise their right to freely chose their employer ... From that date forward, and in an enduring fashion, recruitment levels remained very high. The book lacks clear statistics allowing the reader to visualize the overall trend. Perhaps the Company’s archives do not lend themselves to such calculations, which only become possible after World War II?

Although the book obviously focuses on the *Território*, it would have been useful, where possible, to offer some information about the rest of the colony. Indeed, some aspects are described as if they were a peculiarity of the *Território*, or constituted a pioneering forced labour policy introduced by the Company, when the exact same was occurring in areas under the direct rule

of the Portuguese state. This is the case, for example, with the *cadernetas* (pass books) imposed on any native from 1926 onwards (p. 66), or with the “assimilation” process (allowing a very narrow strata of natives to become Portuguese citizens, Chapter Eight) or yet again, with the regulation establishing that half of the contract wages be paid while the worker was at work and the balance due only on the worker’s return to his home district (p. 42 and p. 196 n159). Let us highlight this last point. The *pagamento diferido* (deferred payment) must be understood as one of the very foundations of the forced labour system: it forced the Africans to return to their homes, avoiding their permanent proletarianization. Indeed, after several six-month or one-year-long “contracts”, with the resulting destruction of their families, African males might be tempted to become permanent workers. But such a trend was always vigorously resisted by the Portuguese state as well as by the great majority of the colonists and colonial enterprises, because the proletarian African would thus have to be paid at the value of his social reproduction (if not, he would die, not having any other income), whilst the maintenance of linkages to domestic agriculture saved by the hard work performed by the women allowed the colonists to pay the worker below social reproduction value. Under ultra-peripheral capitalism, it was far more profitable not to proletarianize than to do so! It is also why the one-year contract (although employed in Angola after World War II for very long distance *contratos*—for instance, southern Ovimbundu people were brought to coffee plantations in the far North) directly negated the viability and profitability of forced labour. As Allina shows quite clearly, under “the six-month labor regime [...] African families could lose the labor of their adult and adolescent male members at a time of year when it was very much in need, but under the twelve-month contract, that possibility became a dead certainty, threatening the survival of agrarian African households” (p. 99 and also pp. 135-136).

Another point where a comparison would have been useful between the *Território* area and the rest of the colony has to do with policies concerning the very small rural African elite. Allina devotes several pages to explaining the situation of these “African farmers” (p. 163-166, p. 173) who withstood the Great Depression far better than petty white colonists. Such *indígenas* (natives) were exempted from forced labour because they were able to sell three tons of maize to non-native (usually Indian) merchants. This was in

fact explicitly foreseen in the Labor Code and Native Labor Regulation of 1926 and 1928. Was the Company pioneering here, in laying down local provisions regulating this peculiar economic activity before the rest of the colony? It would have been interesting to know more about this issue, especially in the light of the fact that the Portuguese state subsequently draughted a special statute for such economic actors (*Estatuto do Agricultor Africano*) in 1940.

Allina probably paid a price for his main source—the archives of the *Território's* administration by the Mozambique Company—becoming a little too much dependent on it: indeed, there is a great deal of data here on mistreatment, on petty white colonists, on medium-size mining companies, *etc.*, but the book makes few references to the conditions prevailing at plantations operated by the Company itself, or within the main sub-companies (*Companhia de Buzi, Sena Sugar Estates, etc.*—only one example is given for the *Bank of Beira*, p. 51). Reading *Slavery by Any Other Name*, one is plunged deep inside the *Território*, well inside the Native Affairs department, but seldom does one move within the ambit of Company as such, even though the main aim of the book—allowing the reader to grasp in great detail the Portuguese forced labour system “know-how”—is accomplished with great success.

At this point it seems essential to delve into the main theoretical issue of *Slavery by Any Other Name*: was the forced labour system slavery, or even “slavery by any other name”? Allina clearly sees the difficulty and argues his point of view with care. First, he considers why the League of Nations completely failed to fight against forced labour. By not contesting the global values of colonization and European superiority, it restricted the definition of slavery to the ideal type of old chattel bondage. For Allina, one reason why some scholars (with the exception of Nevinson) did not call forced labor “slavery” was exactly because that chattel bondage ideal type had vanished:

Scholars [of the colonial era] who studied this history nourished the idea that ‘real’ slavery or ‘slavery proper’ meant only chattel bondage, total ownership of the body and the laborer. Even critics who attacked colonial labor policy in Mozambique and elsewhere in Africa failed to expose the creation, and maintenance, of a new form of enslaved labor. [They] did not view colonial innovation in servitude as a form of slavery because such servitude did not resemble the ‘ideal type’ so commonly associated with slaveholding in the US South (pp. 10-11).

None the less, a difficulty becomes obvious when one considers the substantial number of different expressions that Allina uses to describe the phenomenon: “slavery”, “chattel bondage”, “enslaved labor”, “servitude”, “slaveholding” (p. 10-11), “new forms of coercion”, “modern slavery” (p. 8) ...

The difficulties involved in identifying forced labour as a perpetuation of slavery can be accounted for, according to the author, in terms of a gap between law and practice. Indeed, the law upheld the principles of “full liberty” and “absolute freedom” in terms of work. But here, it seems, Allina fails to go beyond a superficial reading of the law: the law namely was *applied fully*, neither subverted nor betrayed! While the law (of the State as well as of the Company) upheld the freedom of choice of work, the concept of “work” was carefully defined as an activity *completely integrated into the monetized colonial economy*. That meant that an African native cultivating his fields, or fishing and hunting, *was not* “working”—more exactly, his economic activity was not considered relevant—, and since he was not “working”, he was a lazy and vagrant person, and the State (or the Company) therefore had the right to impose on him “the moral duty of work”. Except for the tiny minority of legally recognized “African farmers”, the “absolute freedom” only meant the right to choose which European colonist, or company, or state body the African would work for, during a six-month or a year-long contract. The concept of ownership also helped to *apply* the law. When the Portuguese representative to the Temporary Commission against slavery at the League of Nations said “if natives were willing to *work* on their *own fields* or to take service with individual *employers*, he did not think they should be compelled to *work* in other ways” (my emphasis, p. 78-79), he was not exactly lying: he was combining the restrictive meaning of “work” with the fact that in 99.99% of cases, within indigenous society, Africans did not have individual control over their “own fields”—therefore they had to work for an employer who was not a native (except for the very rare case of an officially recognized “African farmer”, 226 individuals in Manica in 1937, p. 165). Clearly, what was a cynical play on words around the notion of “work”—but above all a civilizational supremacy affirmation of what constituted “work”—, may have misled some, particularly those reading only the legal texts in the *Diário da República* in Lisbon without paying attention to the *Regulamentos* and the *Circulares* in the colonies. But anyway, analyzing such a situation as a gap between law and reality results in a misunderstanding-

ing, given that the Lisbon law established what would be considered “work” as opposed to vagrancy.

Another awkward issue is the one of considering forced labour as the *continuation* of slavery (by any other name), as if there had been a transition (smooth or not) from one situation to the next. Some confusion hovers over the book, as if in Mozambique there had been huge estates worked by slave manpower. In the first page of the introduction, Allina writes that “Enslavement of Africans by Africans was diverse, unlike the more uniform chattel bondage of the Caribbean and the Americas [...] Slaveholding by European settlers in Africa began in the mid-seventeenth century in the hinterland of the Cape of Good Hope, where the Dutch East India Company established a settlement at the continent’s southernmost point, *and in the Zambezi Valley where Portugal founded large landed estates*” (my emphasis). Allina is obviously referring to the *prazos*, a very specific kind of seigniorial system, which was, by that time, increasingly Africanized. There obviously were slaves in the *prazos*, but mostly as a scattered subaltern population within the *colono* population (in the *prazo* system, surprisingly, *colono* designated the free *black* African) and not in plantations, and the *prazeiros* (owners of the *prazos*) had their own slaves, particularly the famous *achicundas* (slave-soldiers). But the way in which Allina presents the situation suggests that the *prazos* included a slave plantation complex. Fortunately, he adds: “Still such slaveholding was relatively small scale”, albeit this clashes with the image of “large landed estates”.

It is necessary to stress that in Portuguese Africa, with the important exception of São Tomé e Príncipe, there never was a plantation complex. When slave trade came to an end in Angola (later in Mozambique) thanks to the Brazilian ban on importing new slaves, in 1850, and when slavery was officially abolished in 1878, Lisbon’s politicians hoped that the slave population that was no longer being exported would form a strata of wage workers at plantations, but these plantations still had to be created and, generally, slave traders were not qualified to do so. Large landed estates were created mostly between the very end of the nineteenth century and World War I, by people and firms from the metropole and from abroad, newly arrived in the colonies. With some very interesting individual exceptions, there was no transformation of the slave trader strata into a plantation entrepreneurial strata in Angola and Mozambique (not to mention Guinea and Cape Verde).

Even though the Zambezia Company, the Boror Company in the Zambezia province (under state rule) and the Buzi Company (in the *Território*) took former *prazos* at the moment of their creation as a base for their landed estates, and attempted to use the specific variations of slavery existing there, the imposition of forced labour was a new and very violent tragedy for Africans (including former slave-soldiers) and there never was any continuity with the old system, or a smooth transformation. Moreover, the prehistory and early history of the Mozambique Company illustrates that, given that the Portuguese founder failed to stabilize it (whoever the founder was, it still was a new company) and thus only paved the way for a modern foreign capitalist enterprise.

There was thus no continuity between, on the one hand, old African slavery (completely different from chattel bondage) and the slave export trade, and, on the other hand, the new generation of forced labour. Socially and economically, these were completely different systems—and even chronologically a huge gap is evident, since the proliferation of forced labour occurred only at the end of the 1930s and during World War II, even though forced labour legislation was in place since 1899-1900 and above all since 1926-1928. This gap between the end of African slavery and slave exports, and the forced labour boom stems from the *creation* of a new system, after the effective conquest of the territory. It seems that the Mozambique Company was a pioneer in creating such a new system in its *Território*, just like the Boror and Zambezia Companies in Zambezia, but without any smooth transition from the supposedly old slave plantation complex to the modern reincarnation.

Allina develops two key arguments to justify qualifying forced labour as “slavery”: first of all, as mentioned previously, the fact that the new forced labour system does not exactly correspond to old chattel bondage does not mean it is not slavery; secondly, at the level of day-to-day native life, forced labour was just as bad as slavery, sometimes even worse (p. 13). One may very well agree with these arguments entirely—without necessarily agreeing with the conclusion that forced labour is a form of slavery. Indeed, it is not only because the new forced labour system does not fully match old chattel bondage that it cannot be considered slavery. And, yes again, forced labour was sometimes worse than slavery. Former slavery (as in the slave trade) did not involve all Africans— it depended on alliances between the Europeans

or Arabs or Swahilis on the coast, and the African kingdoms—forced labour, however, touched the entire male population. Working conditions were, in particular before the 1950s, often worse than they would have been at slave plantations: in the details of day-to-day life, there was a gap between law and practice, since meals, working hours, and housing seldom corresponded to what was clearly set out in the Portuguese bureaucracy's regulations. The problem is: what kind of differences are there between chattel bondage and forced labour?

The differences are huge, but it all comes down to colonial capitalism. Slavery (for export or even for local use) extracts a population from its own economy, whereas forced labour can be profitable only if the natives remain, part of the time, embedded within the domestic economy in order to reconstitute it, which makes it possible to pay them below the value of their social reproduction. This is why forced labour is a specific (very authoritarian) articulation of modes of production: it cannot endure if the domestic mode of production fails to survive. European slavery was, in Angola and Mozambique, above all for export, whereas afterwards forced labour became a very distinctive kind of primitive accumulation of capital,* since Portuguese imperialism was an economic form of imperialism, just like the other ones (French, English, Dutch, *etc.*). To be sure, forced labour is not exactly the capitalist mode of production relying on a large proletarianized population such as already existed in Europe and in North America. It prevailed in the colonial periphery precisely because the centre of capitalism itself had already transited into the era of a mature capitalist mode of production—it is worth noting that capitalist expansion from the sixteenth century onward mainly took place without any expansion of the capitalist *mode of production* properly speaking.

Allina might of course agree with all these explanations yet remain true to his point of view, since his objective is to demonstrate, using all the details and sources at his disposal, that, at the level of the natives' appalling quality of life and from a moral point of view, forced labour was an *enslaved labour*, being a new kind of slavery, and still slavery by any other name. Even if he is obviously not the first to demonstrate the "qualities" of the forced la-

*Strictly speaking, this was not a primitive accumulation of capital, since the huge colonial companies were already broadly capitalized. But the colonial context gave them the opportunity to act as if engaged in such accumulation.

bour system in Africa, his book plays a pioneering role with regard to the *Território*, while the moral point of view surely also needs to be highlighted by historians. *Slavery by Any Other Name* excels in this sense, along with the works of M.J. Penvenne, A. Isaacman, V. Zamparoni or J. das Neves, for example. None the less, history as a social science requires precise concepts. Otherwise, along the same lines, one might say that the birth of the proletariat at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth took place in conditions fully as bad as the ones that characterized serfdom during the Middle Ages: the proletariat would thus constitute a population plunged into new serfdom. But being a proletarian cannot be considered being a serf, we are dealing with different times, different societies, contradictions, and revolutions.

To conclude this review, let me emphasize that if I have chosen to discuss so many aspects of Allina's book, it is because the publication is worth it! A historian's first aim is to retell history—including history's narratives—and to demonstrate how all the elements connect and produce a system, using the largest available body of sources. Although I disagree with the theoretical aspects of *Slavery by Any Other Name*, Allina certainly succeeded in retelling the appalling history of a specific Anglo-Portuguese cooperative venture. It is only to be hoped that the book is translated into Portuguese as soon as possible.

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