Sudan: The False Promise of Slave Redemption

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The humanitarian effort to buy the freedom of Sudanese slaves has produced indeligible images in newspapers and on television. A firsthand report suggests that it has also bolstered the slave trade.

SUDAN is Africa's largest country and its saddest case. Every ancient scourge lives here: war, famine, disease, pestilence, rape, mutilation, and slavery. Starvation and violence have cost some two million lives and displaced some five million people since 1983, according to Freedom House, a Washington-based human- rights organization. Robert A. Seiple, until last summer the president of World Vision United States, a relief and development group, has asked, "Is there a name for a million square miles of suffering? Yes. It is called Sudan." The United Nations and, indirectly, the United States government have since 1989 airlifted millions of tons of food to starving people in southern Sudan, the epicenter of a civil war. But it is the emergence of modern-day slavery that has seized the world's attention.

Entering southern Sudan, one sees the names of dozens of international agencies, nonprofit groups, and religious organizations plastered on Land Rovers and compound gates. There is no shortage here of good intentions. But far from the airstrips and offices, some Africans say that Westerners are a large part of the problem: nearly everything the activists do makes matters worse. And the issues of slavery and starvation are joined in an unexpected and overlooked way that ensures the continued failure of humanitarian efforts. Still, the battle against slavery in Sudan can be won, if international officials have the sense to try a different, more hardheaded approach-one that does not include the much- publicized practice of redeeming slaves for money.

DOCUMENTING THE PROBLEM

THE evil of slavery, which had been virtually eliminated by the British during the First World War, returned to Sudan in 1989, when the fundamentalist political party known as the National Islamic Front took control of the government in Khartoum and decided to arm Baggara tribesmen so that they could fight the rebellious Christian tribes of the south in Sudan's widening civil war. That war, which has raged intermittently ever since the country gained independence from Britain, in 1956, pits the educated, technologically superior Muslim north against the poor, undeveloped, and populous Christian and animist south. The Baggara are a Muslim people who in the past enslaved their neighbors, the cattle-herding Dinkas. Re-armed, the Baggara resumed the slave raids that the British had ended. They were aided and encouraged by the Khartoum government, which supplied auxiliary troops, known as the Popular Defence Forces, and also provided horses, guns, and ammunition. The government allowed slave markets to open in Khartoum, Juba, Wau, and other cities it controlled. Thousands of Dinkas, mostly women and children, have been seized in raids and taken north on foot or by train, over hundreds of miles of

rocky, arid wasteland, to be sold, sometimes for as little as $ 15 apiece. Family members are often separated as they are parceled out to different buyers. Their Muslim owners, who do not speak the slaves' language, consider it a traditional right to enslave southerners; their word for a southern tribesman, abd, is synonymous with "slave." The slaves have been put to work as cooks, maids, field hands, and concubines. Some teenage males have been forcibly circumcised; a number of females have been ritually mutilated. Many are fed and kept like cattle, often sleeping beside livestock that their owners consider far more valuable. Like cattle, they are branded, sometimes just below the eye, with the Arabic name of their owner.

By the early 1990s reports of slavery's return began trickling out of Bahr al Ghazal, a Dinka region in southern Sudan, to relief and development groups helping Sudanese refugees in Uganda and Kenya. At first the reports were hard to believe, and aid workers accepted the Sudanese government's adamant denials. But new eyewitnesses kept coming forward. If their reports were true, aid workers wondered, how could the situation be brought to the world's attention?

The answer was provided by John Eibner, an official at Christian Solidarity International, a group based in Zurich that had been founded in 1977 to fight the persecution of Christians and religious minorities in the Soviet Union and else-where. CSI, now also dedicated to assisting victims of war and famine, has played a major role in shaping the response to slavery in Sudan. In May of 1995, defying the Sudanese government, Eibner chartered a plane and flew deep into Sudan's "no go" area. There he met dozens of Dinka mothers who told him about their abducted children. He could no longer doubt that the resurgence of slavery was real.

Upon his return to Switzerland, Eibner persuaded reporters from around the world to make the dangerous and illegal trek into Sudan to document the slave trade. He led journalists from The Baltimore Sun and other newspapers to the open-air slave markets. "Witness to Slavery," a series that the Sun published in June of 1996, shocked Western officials and human-rights advocates. The Clinton Administration imposed comprehensive trade and economic sanctions on Sudan in 1997. Still, economic leverage was limited: all direct U.S. aid to Sudan had been cut off years earlier, owing to the 1989 coup d'etat. In 1993 the United States had added Sudan to the list of countries it believes sponsor terrorism, further reducing the prospects for international aid. Other industrialized nations publicly condemned the Sudanese government's tolerance of slavery. Not surprisingly, world outrage did nothing to diminish it.

How widespread is slavery in Sudan? It must be said that hard numbers of the sort Americans are accustomed to do not exist. There is no question that scores of raids occur every year, and many thousands of people now live in captivity. There are many accurate local statistics: villages keep fairly complete lists of their people who have been killed or captured. But no reliable national data exist to provide a complete picture of the crisis. The chaos of civil war makes comprehensive data collection difficult, and only sporadically do the village reports reach county governments, or county lists reach the rebel command in Nairobi. In some regions, such as the Nuba Mountains and Darfur, records have been destroyed in the intense fighting or are no longer kept. Steven Wondu, the Washington representative of the rebels' Sudanese People's Liberation Army, offered 20,000 as a very rough estimate of the number of slaves in Sudan. Whatever the precise figure, local reports and the personal experience of Western aid workers and journalists are sufficient to

conclude that slavery is a persistent threat.

John Eibner came up with the idea of Westerners' buying back slaves, building on a practice already used by local people. As Eibner relates, "On previous visits we heard about the efforts of local people to get their loved ones out of bondage through a retrieval mechanism that had been established as part of a local Dinka-Arab peace agreement, which was signed in 1991." By the fall of 1995 Christian Solidarity International was in the business of buying slaves in large batches and setting them free. The organization called the process "slave redemption."

Within the past eighteen months raising money for slave redemption has become a focus of well-intentioned activity in many public schools and evangelical churches. In these supposedly apathetic times the plight of Sudanese slaves has inspired countless institutions and community groups across the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. Dozens of nonprofit agencies, relief groups, and missionary organizations are raising hundreds of thousands of dollars a year for "freedom funds."

Barbara Vogel's fifth-grade class at the Highline Community School, in Aurora, Colorado, was the first public school class to raise money for slave redemptions. The effort began in February of last year, when Vogel read her students an article from The Rocky Mountain News about the plight of Sudanese slaves. "Nothing hit my kids like this did," Vogel told me recently. "They cried. They all agreed we had to do something." By selling lemonade, T-shirts, and old toys, the Aurora students raised more than $ 1,000 within the year. Media attention, including a feature on the CBS Evening News, brought in donations from across the country, ultimately totaling more than $ 50,000. Many other schools have followed Vogel's lead, including the Damascus Middle School, in Oregon, where fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-graders raised $ 2,500 on their own.

Christian Solidarity International, which says it has freed almost 8,000 slaves since 1995, is by far the largest of about a dozen groups that buy slaves out of bondage. In what was billed as the largest single slave redemption to date, in January of this year CSI bought 1,050 slaves for the equivalent (in Sudanese pounds) of $ 52,500-$ 50 each. In April, CSI broke its record, freeing 1,783 slaves. Meanwhile, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a London-based group headed by Baroness Caroline Cox, redeemed 325 slaves. Cox, a member of the House of Lords, has attracted her own following, including a number of donors in the United States.

James Jacobson, at the time the vice-president of the National Right to Read Foundation, a literacy group based in The Plains, Virginia, became CSI's Washington representative in November of 1995. At first he was a loyal supporter of slave redemption. During the next few years CSI was beset by internal differences that resulted in the breakaway of the British, Austrian, and American offices, among others. The American operation achieved independence last year, as Christian Freedom International, with James Jacobson at its head. Vowing to pursue the same objectives as CSI, but handicapped by his lack of firsthand experience of Sudan, Jacobson made a trip to the war zone. He traveled to remote villages and met former slaves who were scarred from beatings. "I felt satisfied that slavery was real," he said, "but I began to realize that there was also the potential [in slave redemption] for abuse." As media reports and the number of redemptions by an increasing assortment of groups multiplied rapidly, so did Jacobson's doubts and fears.

Subsequent visits to Sudan gradually revealed what Jacobson regarded as the consequences of good intentions gone awry, and after his most recent visit to Sudan, on which I accompanied him, he has reluctantly turned away from slave redemption as a tactic. Though his organization is still actively involved in Sudan, shipping clothing, tools, and school supplies, Jacobson identifies three problems with current humanitarian efforts there. First, the financial incentives of slave redemption are so powerful in Sudan, one of the world's poorest nations, that they encourage the taking of slaves. Second, even when the incentives don't promote slavery, they can promote hoaxes. Third, the way the United Nations distributes food acts as a magnet for slave raiders.

ENCOURAGING THE SLAVE TRADE

THE per capita income in Sudan, according to Sudanese embassy estimates, is about $ 500 a year. In the war-torn south it is much less. A small amount of money injected from the outside can create a powerful dynamic. Selling slaves back to their families for $ 50 to $ 100 each-with the financial assistance of Westerners-is far more profitable than selling them for about $ 15 in the northern slave markets. "We've made slavery more profitable than narcotics," Jacobson says. Recently I asked Manase Lomole Waya, who runs Humanitarian Assistance for South Sudan, a group based in Nairobi, what he thought about slave-redemption efforts. "We welcome them for exposing the agony of our people to the world," he said. "That part is good. But giving the money to the slave traders only encourages the trade. It is wrong and must stop. Where does the money go? It goes to the raiders to buy more guns, raid more villages, put more shillings in their pockets. It is a vicious circle."

Slave redeemers enrich every element of the trade: raiders, owners, and traders. Once, the main objective of roving militias and Baggara raiders was simply war booty: goats, cattle, and other valuables, with a few slaves taken to make a little extra money on the side. The price of a slave rose to $ 300, however, and slaves became the focus of the raids. By the mid-nineties supply had outpaced demand, and prices began to fall-to about $ 100 in 1995 and then to $ 15 in 1997. Plunging prices threatened to put the traders out of business: paying and arming raiders, and feeding and watering their horses in a dry region, is very expensive.

What seems to have kept the slave business afloat is the high prices paid by the slave redeemers. Though redemption prices also fell, they stayed far above the $ 15 paid in slave markets. CSI, according to its publications, paid the equivalent of about $ 100 for each freed slave from 1995 to 1997 and since then has paid about $ 50. In effect the redeemers are keeping prices high and creating a powerful incentive for raids.

Some slave-redemption proponents argue that they must pay a risk premium-a sum sufficient to encourage dealers to bring slaves back to the south. CSI suggests that the premium is necessary to cover the costs of food, water, and armed guards to transport the slaves. "Traders incur substantial costs & serious risks for their own security," a CSI report from October of 1997 concludes. Fair enough-but no matter how the price for redeemed slaves is justified, the simple fact is that redemption makes the trade much more lucrative.

Another indication that slave redemption has spurred raids is that the size of a typical raiding party has grown from roughly 400 attackers in 1995 to more than 2,500 this year, according to figures compiled by the Sudanese Relief and Rehabilitation Association, the rebels' civilian arm.

Why, in an era of falling prices, did the raiders more than sextuple their overhead? To garner more of the slave redeemers' bounty. It seems certain that without redemption, the raiding parties would have diminished.

A number of Dinka leaders, along with Macram Gassis, one of Sudan's eleven Catholic bishops, strongly support slave redemption, and some seek to make CSI the sole redeemer. However, the Dinkas I spoke with, all of whom live in villages that have been victimized by the raiders, strongly oppose redemption altogether on the grounds that it promotes raids. In February the Akoch Payam settlement was attacked by more than 2,500 horsemen and foot soldiers. Thirty- six people were killed and another seventy were taken away as slaves (along with food and thousands of animals). "Redemption is not the solution," Longar Awic Ayuel, Akoch's executive chief, told me a few days after the raid. "It means that you are encouraging the raiders."

The official spokesman for the Akoch district government, Adelino Rip Goc, emphatically agreed with Ayuel. "It is common sense not to pay the men who kill your father and steal your brother, or they will return," he said. "I don't know why the redeemers do such a thing."

As I spoke with Goc, a crowd of villagers encircled us. Does anyone here support slave redemption? I asked. No one did. One man said that I should talk to Machar Malok Machar. In a previous raid on Akoch, Machar was captured and marched into the desert. Before sunrise on the second day he crawled away and hid. He waited for hours until the Muslim slave raiders departed. Then he walked home, with his hands still tied behind his back, to find his wife and family missing, his hut burned, his cattle and goats gone. After I heard his story, I asked him about slave redemption. "It is bad," he said. "They do these terrible things to put shillings in their pockets. They are crazy for the money. Why would you give it to them?"

A number of human-rights organizations concerned with Sudan are also skeptical of slave redemption and its unintended consequences. UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, has called the practice "intolerable,"because "the buy-back program implicitly accepts that human beings may be bought and sold," as Paul Lewis, a reporter for The New York Times, explains. "This could also encourage slave-taking for profit."Reed Brody, the advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, says that although redemption is understandably welcomed by many abductees and their families, it poses a "real danger of fueling a market in human beings."To date neither organization has issued an official report condemning slave redemption.

Redemption reduces any incentive for owners to set slaves free. Prior to 1995 about 10 percent of slaves, mostly old women and small children, were allowed to escape or even told to go home, because they cost too much to feed; some of the younger female slaves were let go because they made the owners' wives jealous. Though this meant a dangerous and lonely trek across the desert for the manumitted slaves, it helped to keep the size of the slave population in check. Today many northerners consider their slaves an investment. Acutely aware of the redemption money available, they sell their human chattels to middlemen, who take the slaves south.

Redemption also rewards slave traders. Many entrepreneurs who sold a variety of contraband goods prior to 1995 now deal solely in slaves. It is more profitable. As in many businesses, the man in the middle stands to make the most money. Raiders may earn $ 5 to $ 15 per slave;

traders can earn several times as much. The trader, that vital link, is the worst person to enrich. Without him the typical raider has no market for his captives-he can hardly resell them to their families, and he has no personal access to buyers in the north. In contrast, the trader moves easily between the two worlds. Thanks to the redeemers, who treat them as business partners, traders are richer than ever and, indeed, enjoy a measure of legitimacy as the linchpin of the redemption chain. This is not the result that the redeemers intended.

INCENTIVES FOR HOAXES

THE money available to redeem slaves has attracted the attention of people other than "legitimate" traders. No one can say how widespread slave-redemption hoaxes may be, though even John Eibner concedes the possibility of fraud: "I have at times refused to cooperate with people who have asked CSI to provide money for slave redemption when I have not been convinced that sound ethical standards are being strictly adhered to," he says. Eibner believes that he has adequate safeguards in place, including a determined effort to match the names of retrieved slaves with those on local lists of abductees.

I witnessed an attempted slave redemption that was unquestionably problematic during a recent visit to Nyamlell, a large settlement about fifty miles south of the Bahr al Arab River, in southern Sudan. Nyamlell has been the location of many slave redemptions covered by the U.S. media. The night before my visit officials from the local branch of the Sudanese Relief and Rehabilitation Association in Lokichokio, Kenya, asked for a meeting with James Jacobson, who had been hoping to redeem the slaves in Nyamlell. After half an hour of small talk the officials got down to business. "How much money are you bringing for slave redemption?"

"Four thousand dollars," Jacobson said.

"Ah, that is very helpful. There are forty slave children to be redeemed."

"Forty children? That would be a hundred dollars each. Don't other groups pay fifty dollars each?"

"No. Everyone pays a hundred."

"What about Christian Solidarity International?"

"Ah, they are different. They buy in much larger quantities."

Though the overwhelming majority of rebel officials are honest, it would be unsurprising if a few used their access to well-intentioned redeemers and desperately poor village leaders to make money. One scam is said to work as follows. Corrupt officials set themselves up as bankers and insist that redeemers exchange their dollars for Sudanese pounds, a nearly worthless currency. (People in the south almost always use Ugandan and Kenyan shillings or U.S. dollars.) The officials arrange by radio to have some villagers play slaves and some play slave-sellers, and when the redeemers arrive, the Sudanese pounds are used to free the slaves. When the redeemers are gone, the pounds are turned back over to the corrupt officials, who hand out a few dollars in return. Most of the dollars stay with the officials, who now also have the Sudanese pounds with which to play banker again.

Jacobson exchanged no money, but two mid-level SRRA officials insisted on accompanying him and me to Nyamlell. When we landed on the dirt runway, a local commissioner named Alev

Akechak Jok met our plane. He refused to make eye contact with the SRRA officials, and was adamant about meeting privately with Jacobson and me. A guard with an AK-47 barred the SRRA officials from joining us in the compound. The commissioner offered tea and an admission: "There are no slaves here for you to buy." He was happy to elaborate on the problem of slave raids-a real menace in his part of the world-but he would not say why there was no one in Nyamlell to be redeemed, only repeating that there was no one. Hadn't the SRRA radioed his village the previous day and learned that there were forty children to be freed? He shook his head no.

As we returned to the airstrip, the SRRA officials rejoined us. One said that he had just found a trader and ten children to be redeemed. Jok suddenly became angry and pulled me aside. The officials could not hear us over the whirling propeller. "You must leave now!" he demanded. Are the children slaves? I asked. "No," he said, "they are the children of the village. We do not want you to do this thing. We are Christian people. We do not want the world to turn its face from us." Jokhas since been removed from his post, probably in retaliation for his honesty.

As Jok's example suggests, honest villagers often refuse to play along. A few days before the incident in Nyamlell, Steven Wondu, of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, and Caroline Cox waited for two days in the district of Turalei for some traders who were supposed to arrive with slaves to redeem. None came. The village leaders repeatedly told Cox and the journalists she had brought along that there had been no slave raids in Turalei for more than a year, and that there was no one to redeem. Cox, with the dejected reporters, flew out on the morning of the third day. "Why are you disappointed?" Wondu asked.

CREATING A TARGET

LOKICHOKIO, just inside the Kenyan border with Sudan, is a settlement that has grown up around relief efforts. It is the site of a UN-controlled airstrip and the local headquarters of the UN's World Food Program. From Loki, as it is called, giant Hercules cargo planes carry tons of food and medicine to distant airstrips where the hungry wait in the shade of mud huts.

The World Food Program, which here takes the form of Operation Lifeline Sudan, has made it very easy for the Sudanese government to coordinate slave raids and food drops. Before every airlift of food UN officials notify Khartoum-whose forces have largely created the famine, in pursuance of a policy of starving the southerners into submission-exactly where and when they plan to deposit the food. No relief planes are allowed to leave the ground without Khartoum's explicit permission. Not surprisingly, in Bahr al Ghazal, Khartoum-backed raiders often arrive in time to seize the shipment and enslave enough locals to carry it. "That's the cycle," one cynical pilot says. I encountered the aftermath of just such an episode in the village of Akoch.

To appreciate how a policy with such counterproductive consequences can be maintained, one must understand the atmosphere of utter bureaucratic indifference in Lokichokio. After the attack on Akoch, several family members brought out a gravely wounded woman named Anchor Ring, a grandmother of perhaps sixty, and put her under the wing of our plane. A horseman had slashed her head with a machete, leaving a wound deep enough to expose the yellow membrane surrounding her brain. Could we take her to the hospital in Loki? her family asked. The plane was half empty. The pilot radioed Loki's UN compound. The response came in the form of a question:

"Does she have a valid passport and visa for travel into Kenya?" We were in rebel-held land, hundreds of miles from electric power, running water, or government offices. "No papers?" the voice said. "Tell her the hospital is full."

DENIAL AND DEFLECTION

IN the course of many conversations I have had with them, the supporters of slave redemption have been unwilling to address the issue of perverse incentives directly. They have countered obliquely with three arguments: slave redemption draws public attention to the tragedy in Sudan; it chips away at the slave trade one person at a time; and it ends the personal suffering of slaves and their families.

Publicity is perhaps the most frequently cited rationale for slave redemption. Certainly the on-camera manumission of a modern-day slave presents a powerful image for broadcast television. But surely the shocking reports of slave raids and the painful stories of former slaves are dramatic enough in themselves to hold the public's attention. Redemption alone doesn't provide any special public-relations benefit-and it may contain the seeds of a public-relations disaster. Of course, it is a powerful fundraising tool. I do not believe that any of the redemption groups have other than noble motives; but the "success" of slave redemption may blind some activists to its unintended consequences.

Does redemption chip away at slavery? Undeniably, individual slaves have been given their freedom. But as the raiding parties have grown in size, the number of slaves taken has also grown. Sitting beneath color charts on food production and hand-drawn spreadsheets quantifying the deaths, injuries, and stolen livestock in southern Sudan, Erib Gaetano Felix, an SRRA statistician, observes matter-of-factly that slave raids have "gotten much worse every year since 1995."

Anti-slavery activists, including Michael Horowitz, of the Hudson Institute, and Charles Jacobs, of the American Anti-Slavery Group, explain the increase in slave-taking since 1995 in terms of the growing intensity of the Sudanese war. But although war is the context for the slave trade, it cannot be the main cause. The Khartoum government, which promotes the trade, has been retreating. Since 1995 the rebels, often driving captured government trucks and tanks, have seized an increasing share of Bahr al Ghazal, where most raids take place. So why is slave-taking on the rise? The raiders are essentially privateers; if the raids did not pay for themselves, the raiders would stay home. That is why they take slaves and other booty, while the main government force focuses on the destruction of strategic assets. The raiders pose a continuing threat because their bands, though sizable, are still small enough to find openings in the rebels' lines. And high prices make the risk worthwhile.

What about the humanitarian case for redemption? Activists screen emotional videos of former slaves and ask viewers to imagine that a spouse or a child had been enslaved. Wouldn't they pay for redemption? "When you personalize it like that, the answer is obvious," an abolitionist pastor told The Oregonian. But public policy requires a focus on the larger interest. With good reason, the U.S. government does not negotiate with terrorists or pay ransom to kidnappers. Presented with this argument, activists simply sidestep it. Michael Horowitz says, "[Redemption] may not be the answer to the problem, but it is the answer to many mothers' prayers."

A POLICY THAT WORKS

DECIDING that it is better not to buy individuals their freedom needn't mean turning our backs on the people of Sudan. But the economic rewards for slave trading must be eliminated.

The United Nations and the U.S. government should require that all organizations, governmental and nongovernmental, forswear slave redemption as a condition of working in Sudan. Operation Lifeline Sudan must be reformed or suspended so that it does not indirectly aid the Khartoum government. The UN should cease notifying Khartoum about the timing and cargo of its flights.

James Jacobson's organization, confronting redemption's perverse incentives, has decided to stop redeeming slaves. Jacobson has mailed letters to more than 6,000 donors, offering to return their money or to redirect it to other humanitarian efforts. Those other efforts could include some unorthodox approaches to fighting slavery in Sudan. One idea is the provision of used trucks and jeeps. Slave raiders arrive on horseback; owing to the flat, treeless landscape, they can be seen for miles. "With trucks you can head off the raiders and stop them from taking slaves, or you can chase after them and rescue people," Jacobson explains.

He also wants to put slave rescuers on salary. The rescuers could be recruited from the nomadic Rizeiqat tribe, whose members move freely in the north and even now often help to find enslaved people in exchange for the right to water their cattle on Dinka land. The Rizeiqat could be sent north with lists of people known to have been enslaved. Most hamlets in Bahr al Ghazal keep detailed lists of the missing, more than a few of which I have seen. These lists give the full name of each abducted person, his or her age, and the approximate date of capture. The lists could be collected and consolidated into a database. A rescuer who found a person on the list could help him or her to break out of captivity and return home. This would cut out the middlemen who make the slave trade possible. It would also curb hoaxes.

Policymakers, meanwhile, should focus their attention on what anti-slavery activists call the "train of death." This train, which runs between Khartoum and the city of Wau, a southern stronghold of the government, is the primary means of transport used by the slave raiders. Without it they would not be able to transport large numbers of slaves north or provide enough water for their horses. Virtually all raids occur within a two-day ride of the rail line. Severing that rail link would at a stroke curtail slavery in Sudan. But the rebels lack the tools-and outside governments lack the will.

Crafting a successful abolitionist foreign policy has never been easy, as the long British experience suggests. Beginning in the 1820s, the British sought to end slavery throughout their empire. With their powerful army and navy they shut down most of the slave markets in the African colonies within a decade. Yet pockets of slavery kept emerging for another hundred years. Throughout the nineteenth century the British government dispatched soldiers to kill or disarm slave raiders, and sent warships to crush the warlords who sheltered slave traders. Not until the first decades of this century did their campaign succeed. Even so, they had to remain vigilant lest slavery break out again. "If the colonial government were standing for election, I would vote for them," a Nairobi schoolmaster told me recently. "They gave us more than sacks of grain and kind words." One does not need to accept this wistful vote for colonialism to take the point that fighting slavery is not a task for sentimentalists.

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