Resistance as Baseline: Kongo, Co-opted Elites and the Psychopathology of “African Complicity”

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that African resistance, not “African complicity,” is the baseline pattern in the history of Atlantic deportations and their afterlives. Using the Kingdom of Kongo as a primary case, it shows that systematic violence, racial dehumanisation and explicit contempt for Africans were present from the start of European expansion. These conditions made equal “trade” and shared ideology impossible. Collaboration by African elites therefore has to be read as a survival strategy and a profile formed under power imbalance, not as proof of innate anti-self racism.

I combine four strands of evidence. First, Afonso I’s letters, Kongo oral traditions and archaeological studies reveal a kingdom that experienced and resisted depopulation, and that remembered Mpanzu a Nzinga as a kind, legitimate ruler overthrown in what can be read as the first Western-backed coup in Kongo memory. Second, demographic reconstruction from Paper 1 shows several million people removed or killed from the broader Kongo catchment, far beyond the 1.8 million documented in surviving Portuguese records, which must be treated as a censored minimum. Third, psychological theories of the Dark Tetrad, moral disengagement and dehumanisation, applied at institutional scale, help explain why European actors turned domination into a moral entitlement and why they cultivated co-opted elites. Fourth, comparative cases from other African kingdoms, apartheid South Africa and non-African contexts illustrate that similar patterns of structural violence, elite capture and scapegoating appear wherever one group strips another of basic humanity.

We differentiate servitude and captive incorporation in African and other societies from racialised chattel slavery and systematic invasion. They differ in scope, in effects and in philosophical and psychological foundations. The paper integrates these threads into a simple principle. Resistance is the norm where human beings face organised dehumanisation. Collaborators and their profiles are products of asymmetrical power and deliberate engineering. Treating them as proof that “Africans did it to themselves” is only possible once Africans have already been stripped of full humanity in the eyes of the observer.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phrase “Africans sold Africans” still shapes public and academic debates. It appears in school textbooks, documentaries, online arguments and even policy discussions. The sentence seems simple. It suggests that Africans chose to sell each other and that European actors mainly supplied ships, markets and “demand.” In that view, what happened was a form of rough but mutual trade between rational partners.

The Kongo material tells another story. Afonso I’s letters complain that Portuguese traders kidnap freeborn subjects, including nobles and members of his own family, and that this depopulates the kingdom. He begs the king of Portugal to send only priests and teachers and explicitly writes that he does not want his kingdom to be “a place for the trade or transport of slaves.” Kongo oral traditions remember abandoned villages, scattered tombs and a sense that the land was “emptying.” Archaeological work in Kongo’s historical territory finds dense clusters of old graves and former settlements that thin out in later layers, which fits that memory.

At the same time, the European side did not operate with neutral ideas about equal partners. Early modern apologies for transatlantic slavery present Africans as naturally suited for bondage, morally inferior and closer to animals than to Europeans. Racialised slavery and plantation codes developed together and fixed blackness as a permanent marker of enslavability. This combination of mass violence and racial ideology contradicts any idea of a fair, shared “trade.” It creates a context that resembles organised crime and structural sadism, not open markets.

This paper sits in the middle of a larger quintology on the entitlement cascade and the psychopathology of empire. Paper 1 reconstructs Kongo’s demographic collapse with Monte Carlo simulations that treat European numbers as a floor. Paper 2 analyses narrative asymmetry and shows how “African complicity” language functions to protect metropolitan guilt. Paper 3 develops Puppet Syndrome and explains how externally aligned elites predict strategic decline. Paper 4 explores decolonial therapeutics. Paper 5 exposes numerical gaslighting and the psychology of lowballing. This paper is a spin-off from the narrative asymmetry strand of the quintology.

Here, I add a specific thread: a resistance-centred reframing of the ‘African complicity’ narrative, using Kongo as a primary case. I read collaborators as structural products of pressure and ideological capture rather than as proof of an “anti-self” African instinct. I then open the discussion to other African kingdoms, apartheid and non-African examples with known psychiatric profiles to show that this pattern is general. I end by distinguishing clearly between forms of servitude and captive incorporation and the specific system of racial chattel slavery and invasion that devastated Africa.

Note for the Reader: I use ‘Atlantic deportations’ instead of ‘slave trade’ to emphasise coercion and racial chattel logic rather than commerce.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Resistance and refusal in African histories

Work on the Atlantic deportations and related trades often mentions African resistance but quickly returns to collaboration. Yet the record shows many cases of clear refusal. Mossi states resisted participation in Atlantic deportations for centuries and refused to sell captives to European traders. Studies of West African societies identify polities such as the Fante, Benin, Jola, Baga and others who either rejected slave trading or restricted it sharply, sometimes expelling European traders or defending villages against raids.

Within Kongo itself, historians and African scholars have documented continuous efforts by rulers and communities to control or block the export of people. Afonso I’s letters are one example. Later records show that by the end of the eighteenth century every freeborn Kongo risked kidnapping or entrapment and that the elite itself was under pressure to participate in this economy. This does not describe a neutral trade zone. It describes a population besieged by a violent system, with pockets of coerced and ambivalent collaboration.

2.2 Early modern racism and the logic of chattel slavery

Recent work on early modern philosophy and racialisation shows that many European thinkers actively justified the enslavement of Africans as a special case. They treated Africans as naturally suited for labour in harsh conditions, less rational or less human, and built these assumptions into legal codes that tied race to permanent slave status. This was not just a private prejudice. It underwrote plantation economies and colonial law and made blackness itself a sufficient reason for ownership.

Historians of racism trace current stereotypes about African inferiority and barbarism back to these justifications. The same texts that defended the Atlantic system also popularised the image of Africans as lazy, violent or childlike. These ideas travelled with missionaries, administrators and settlers and shaped the European “mind” long before formal colonialism.

2.3 Servitude, captive incorporation and chattel slavery

Many societies, including African ones, practised forms of servitude and captive incorporation. In these systems, war captives and some criminals could be enslaved, but they were usually incorporated into the kinship structure over time, could marry, and their descendants did not always remain in a permanent slave caste. They could also become free or even elite in some cases.

This is different from transatlantic chattel slavery. Chattel slavery in the Americas rested on three pillars. First, it treated

enslaved people as movable property for life. Second, it tied slave status tightly to African origin and skin colour. Third, it combined this with racial doctrines that defined black people as inherently suited for slavery. This system required constant violence, surveillance and legal reinforcement. It also required dehumanisation at scale.

Conflating African forms of captivity with transatlantic chattel slavery hides these differences. It allows observers to say “slavery existed everywhere” and then imply that what happened in Kongo and the Americas was just a difference of degree. That move erases both the scale and the racial logic of what African societies faced.

2.4 Dehumanisation, moral disengagement and elite pathology

Psychological research on dehumanisation shows that people who see others as less than human find it easier to inflict and justify harm. Work on moral disengagement describes how language, metaphors and group narratives allow perpetrators to reframe violence as necessary, deserved or trivial. Studies of racism show how social systems can normalise these attitudes and behaviours over generations.

The Dark Tetrad literature identifies four traits that make individuals more likely to engage in such behaviour: narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy and everyday sadism. When institutions reward these traits, they produce elite groups that can manage and rationalise large-scale harm. In earlier work, I applied this to empires and argued that we need to recognise “trait profiles” at the level of regimes.

Putting this together with the history of Kongo and other African polities gives us a clear picture. A violently racialised system, managed by institutions with high Dark Tetrad profiles, cannot be read as a free partnership. It is a structural assault. Resistance is the obvious norm in such a context. Collaboration becomes a profile that emerges under extreme pressure and specific forms of ideological capture.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The central concept is the entitlement cascade. This is a process in which actors move from occasional harm to a sense that domination is a basic right. External pressure and economic desire push in one direction. Racial ideology and institutional routines push in the same direction. Over time, perpetrators no longer see themselves as doing something exceptional. They think they are simply exercising a natural entitlement.

Each stage of the cascade has a psychological and institutional component. Exceptionalisation positions one group as superior. Narcissism and Machiavellianism dominate here. Normalisation makes harm routine. Psychopathy plays a larger role. Moralisation justifies harm with positive narratives such as civilisation, religion or security. Everyday sadism, in particular, thrives here and seeks rationalisations. Epistemic locking fixes these narratives in archives, laws and statistics.

The collaborator spectrum and Puppet Syndrome Index allow us to describe African elites within this environment. A coerced collaborator acts under threat and tries to limit harm. An ambivalent collaborator moves between refusal and complicity. A converted collaborator internalises the perpetrator’s ideology and gains from it. Puppet Syndrome summarises this: external alignment, erosion of sovereignty, dependence on foreign validation, internal cruelty and disconnection from the population.

In this paper, I add one more layer. I treat resistance as the default baseline. African societies had their own forms of justice, servitude and war, but they did not start from a belief that mass export of citizens as racial property was acceptable. In Kongo, oral traditions and early responses to Portuguese contact support this. Nzinga a Nkuwu eventually rejected missionary presence and Christian influence. Mpanzu a Nzinga fought to defend traditional institutions. Afonso denounced kidnapping and depopulation, even while he centralised power through Christianity.

Collaboration that does appear is therefore a deviation from that baseline. It is shaped by the entitlement cascade on the European side and by ideological and material pressure on the African side. It is also selectively recorded by an archive that the perpetrators largely controlled.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper synthesises material rather than presenting a new dataset. The method has four steps.

First, I treat Kongo as a core case. I use Afonso’s letters, African oral traditions and archaeological work on deserted settlements and tombs. I treat letters as demographic evidence, not only as moral or political texts. When a king writes that “each day traders are kidnapping our people” and that the land is “entirely depopulated,” this is a primary observation. Oral sources that recall widespread loss and moved communities corroborate this. Archaeological traces of abandoned villages and reduced settlement density give a third line of evidence.

Second, I link this to the demographic reconstruction from Paper 1. That paper defines low, medium and high population scenarios for Kongo around 1480 and uses Monte Carlo simulations with parameters for under-documentation and pre-embarkation deaths. It finds that the documented 1.8 million captives from Kongo-linked ports are consistently a floor. The total removals and associated deaths likely reach several million, with plausible ranges around 8 to 12 million and credible upper bands near 15 to 18 million for the broader catchment.

Third, I integrate African perspectives on leadership. I treat Mpanzu a Nzinga as a legitimate ruler in Kongo memory. I read his fall as a Western-backed coup that removes a kind, widely supported king and installs a more externally aligned elite. This parallels the later evolué system under Belgium, where a small Western-trained class is selected to manage colonial interests and to absorb blame for crises.

Fourth, I broaden the scope. I draw on work on other African kingdoms that refused to participate in deportation, on apartheid and on non-African cases of racialised domination. I use psychological research on dehumanisation and racism to show that similar patterns of elite pathology and scapegoating appear in these contexts.

The method is qualitative but anchored in clear criteria. I only attribute traits and profiles when there is documented behaviour and institutional evidence. I keep the collaborator spectrum and Puppet Syndrome in a hypothesis-generating role. They organise interpretation and suggest testable patterns. They do not replace empirical work.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Kongo’s rejection spectrum and the coup against Mpanzu

Kongo’s early contact with Portugal did not produce automatic collaboration. Nzinga a Nkuwu’s baptism in 1491 was a trial. He explored the new religion and its political possibilities. Late in life, sources and oral traditions describe him abandoning Christianity, expelling most missionaries and returning to Kongo spiritual practice. This is the opposite of unconditional acceptance. It shows that early collaboration remained conditional and reversible.

Mpanzu a Nzinga is remembered in Kongo and wider African traditions as a kind, legitimate ruler who reigned de facto from about 1502 to 1509. He defended ancestral norms, including polygamy and the role of the mfumu council, and resisted the concentration of power around a Christianised claimant favoured by Portugal. In these narratives, the decisive battle near Mbanza Kongo is not just a civil war. It is a Western-backed coup. Portuguese military support, including firearms and tactical advice, tips the balance. The result is the first co-opted elite configuration in Kongo’s archival memory.

Afonso I emerges from this conflict as king. He is not a simple traitor figure. He combines deep Christian conviction, centralising reforms and genuine concern for his people. His letters show that he understood the depopulating effect of kidnappings and objected strongly to the way Portuguese traders ignored his rules. At the same time, his reliance on Christian legitimacy and on foreign recognition eroded some of the older checks and balances.

When we superimpose the demographic simulation results on this political sequence, we see that the consolidation of an externally recognised elite coincides with the period of steep demographic decline. The coup against Mpanzu opens the door for deeper integration into the Atlantic system. The entitlement cascade on the European side now has a reliable local hinge.

5.2 Systematic violence and overt racism in the Kongo–Portugal relationship

Afonso’s letters and Portuguese documentation show systematic violence and contempt. Traders kidnapped freeborn people, including nobles and

relatives of the king. They undermined royal policies, bribed officials and organised raids far beyond official limits. Afonso complains that even members of his own court are not safe and that his authority is being destroyed.

These acts took place in a wider ideological environment that already portrayed Africans as naturally fit for slavery. European theological and philosophical writing of the time frequently used language that described Africans as inferior, closer to “beasts,” and more suitable for hard labour and discipline. The Portuguese began regular slave raiding on the African coast in the 1440s. Even before Kongo’s formal Christianisation, European actors had developed a pattern of violence and capture.

In practice, this means that Kongo did not face a neutral trader. It faced a racialising, sadistic system that combined armed force, religious claims and commercial appetite. When African elites engaged with this system, they did so under threat and within a mental universe that denied their full humanity. Any talk of “shared ideology” in this context is misleading. The only coherent ideological overlap was the thin space where Christian vocabulary and Kongo spirituality tried to coexist. On the European side, the deeper conviction that Africans were lesser beings remained intact.

5.3 Collaboration as survival strategy, not proof of anti-self racism

Within this environment, some Kongo elites participated in trade. They captured war prisoners, sold criminals and, over time, became more involved in the export of people. The key question is how to interpret this behaviour.

The collaborator spectrum and Puppet Syndrome provide one answer. Many elite actors operated close to the coerced and ambivalent zones. They tried to maintain local norms, restricted who could be sold and resisted kidnapping of freeborn people. A smaller subset shifted into the converted zone. They internalised aspects of European ideology and adapted their ambitions to the external system. All of them operated under real threat. By the end of the eighteenth century, as Heywood notes, every freeborn Kongo risked enslavement and “every member of the elite, from the king” had incentives to participate in some way.

This is survival in a collapsing field, not proof of an essential African drive to self-destruction. It is similar to patterns seen in other extreme contexts. In ghettos, camps or occupied zones, some people accept roles that involve collaboration with a dominant power. Psychological studies show that these choices often stem from a mix of fear, trauma, coerced loyalty and defensive rationalisation. They do not imply that the victims share the oppressor’s worldview. They reflect an attempt to manage harm under impossible conditions.

To claim that “Africans did it to themselves” in Kongo or elsewhere, one must ignore the racism, violence and structural pressure described above. One must treat African actors as fully free agents in a field where they clearly were not. That is only possible if one has already stripped Africans of their humanity

in one’s own thinking and reduced their behaviour to a flat cultural defect.

5.4 Evolués, apartheid and non-African analogues

The pattern that begins with the coup against Mpanzu repeats under other colonial regimes. In the Belgian Congo, the evolué system raised a small class of Western-educated Africans who enjoyed limited privileges and symbolic status in exchange for loyalty to the colonial order. They were trained to internalise European norms, to distance themselves from the wider population and to act as intermediaries. When independence movements grew, colonial powers blamed them for “corruption” and instability, even though the structural extraction and racial hierarchy came from the colonial system itself.

Apartheid South Africa offers another clear example. State policies built a system of Bantustans, pass laws and separate development that dehumanised black Africans and other racial groups. The regime needed some black elites to administer these structures. It cultivated chiefs, administrators and professionals who served the system while living under its constant threat. Their presence did not make apartheid a partnership. It simply gave the regime more tools and more plausible deniability.

We see similar logics outside Africa. Colonial and settler projects often produce local intermediaries who are then blamed for the harm the system causes. Palestinians, for example, face ongoing erasure of their history and identity and are sometimes framed as responsible for their own dispossession, while the wider structure of settler colonialism remains in place.

These analogues confirm that collaboration under asymmetric domination does not prove shared ideology. It confirms that dehumanising systems always try to recruit local profiles that can buffer and deflect anger.

5.5 Criminality, delinquency and online harassment as downstream effects

When legitimate, protective leadership is removed and co-opted elites are installed, the social fabric suffers. People witness that care, integrity and resistance lead to exile, assassination or symbolic destruction, while opportunism, cruelty and external alignment bring status and survival. Over time, this damages basic trust.

In such an environment, everyday criminality and delinquency become predictable. Young people see that the state does not protect them, that the legal system is biased and that economic extraction favours external actors and their local allies. They learn that violence is rewarded at the top. This can shape their own choices. They may engage in theft, fraud or gang activity, not because their culture is defective, but because the system has taught them that norms of reciprocity and care have no protection.

The same dynamics now appear in digital spaces. Online harassment and trolling often target Africans, women, queer people and other marginalised groups. Many perpetrators describe this as “just fun” or “debate.” This trivialisation mirrors historic forms of dehumanisation, where cruelty is reframed as entertainment or

teaching. The entitlement cascade now operates through algorithms and comment sections.

If we ignore the structural and psychological roots of this behaviour and treat it as a simple generational or cultural defect, we repeat the same mistake. We strip victims of context and hand perpetrators a narrative that removes their responsibility.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Main findings

The first finding is that African resistance is the baseline. Kongo’s early rejection of missionaries, Mpanzu’s defence of ancestral governance and Afonso’s repeated protests all show that mass export of people was not accepted as normal. Other African polities, such as the Mossi and several coastal groups, refused to participate or sharply limited participation.

The second finding is that European actors operated with an already racialised and dehumanising ideology. They saw Africans as suitable for perpetual slavery and built legal and economic systems around that belief. Their behaviour in Kongo and elsewhere reflects this mindset in practice: kidnapping, depopulation, disregard for African authority and systematic lowballing in records.

The third finding is that collaboration by African elites is best read as a profile produced under asymmetric pressure and ideological capture. It appears when external powers remove or weaken protective leaders like Mpanzu and cultivate co-opted figures like Afonso or later evolués. These elites share some of the external ideology but live in a double bind. They are structurally unable to protect their populations and are later blamed for the damage.

6.2 Characteristics of these findings

These findings are integrative. They span demography, political history, psychology and pedagogy. They are also reparative. They do not only expose harm. They restore the visibility of resistance and place blame where it belongs, in structures and elite profiles, not in an imagined African essence.

They are consistent with what we know about other cases of domination. Wherever we find large-scale violence and organised racism, we also find internal resistance and co-opted intermediaries. The pattern is robust.

6.3 Relation to existing work

The idea that Africans resisted deportation is supported by historical studies. The role of Mossi and other refusing kingdoms is well documented, even if often under-emphasised. The racialised character of plantation slavery and its philosophical justifications are also well known.

What this paper adds is the explicit combination. It brings together Kongo demography, African oral memory, early modern racism, Dark Tetrad theory and postcolonial examples to produce a continuous line. It shows that the story “Africans did it to themselves” rests on

selective reading and on internalised dehumanisation.

It also differentiates servitude and captive incorporation from chattel slavery in a way that many generic statements do not. It insists that we cannot treat all forms of unfreedom as equivalent and then draw moral conclusions from that equivalence.

6.4 Implications and examples

Implication 1. Pedagogy must separate servitude from racial chattel slavery and centre African resistance.

Example 1. A secondary school curriculum that teaches Kongo’s history with clear distinctions between internal servitude, war captives and racial chattel slavery will prevent students from accepting “slavery was everywhere” as a moral shortcut. It can use Afonso’s letters and oral traditions as primary sources and present the demographic ranges as evidence of catastrophic depopulation that went far beyond any internal practices.

Example 2. A university module on empire can include a comparative section on Mossi refusals, Kongo’s internal conflicts, evolués and apartheid elites. This will give students a framework for understanding collaboration as a structural position rather than as a racial trait. It can include psychological readings of moral disengagement and dehumanisation to show how elites justify their actions.

Implication 2. Policy and clinical work must treat Puppet Syndrome and elite pathology as central risk factors.

Example 1. Regional organisations such as the African Union could incorporate a simplified Puppet Syndrome Index in leadership assessments. High scores on external alignment, epistemic capture and internal cruelty would signal increased risk for strategic decline, youth delinquency and social fragmentation. This would shift policy from vague “bad governance” explanations to more precise structural diagnosis.

Example 2. Mental health and community programmes can design group interventions that include historical material on Mpanzu and other resistors. Participants can map how co-opted elites shaped their communities and how that still influences trust, crime and solidarity. The interventions can use this to help participants reframe their anger and shame, and to build new protective structures.

Implication 3. Research must integrate resistance metrics and “afterlives of dehumanisation” into studies of crime and digital behaviour.

Example 1. Criminology projects in African cities can pair crime statistics with historical and political indicators such as the presence of heavily co-opted elites, structural adjustment histories and external resource control. Rather than reading high crime as cultural failure, they can model it as a response to structural betrayal. They can also incorporate measures of trust and perceived institutional legitimacy.

Example 2. Studies of online harassment that involve African or diasporic users can track how often dehumanising language draws on old colonial stereotypes. They can also document how users resist and counter these narratives. This would

connect daily digital experiences to the long history of racialised dehumanisation, as described in work on slavery’s afterlives.

6.5 Wider scope: other African kingdoms, apartheid and non-African cases

The Kongo case is one node in a larger pattern. Other African polities such as Benin, some Fante groups and Jola or Baga communities refused to participate or took active measures to protect people from raids. These cases show that resistance was not a marginal or heroic exception. It was widespread. The places where collaboration appears in more concentrated form often match areas of strongest external pressure, military imbalance and missionary focus.

Apartheid South Africa and other modern systems of racial domination confirm that the combination of dehumanisation, elite capture and scapegoating is not unique to Atlantic history. Non-African cases such as settler colonial projects in the Americas and Palestine show similar processes. Target populations resist. Some local elites collaborate. Observers later use that collaboration to argue that the victims shared responsibility.

Psychiatric and psychological research supports this account. Dehumanisation and moral disengagement are known predictors of cruelty. Structural violence and betrayal by leaders are known predictors of trauma, aggression and internal conflict. The Kongo case, evolués and apartheid do not require exotic explanations. They fit what we already know about how people and societies react to organised contempt and harm.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has extended the work of the quintology in three ways. It has shown that African resistance, not “African complicity,” is the baseline when we read Kongo and other cases carefully. It has demonstrated that European actors involved in Atlantic chattel slavery operated with explicit racial dehumanisation and institutionalised violence, which rules out any narrative of equal partnership. It has argued that collaboration by African elites is best understood as a profile produced under asymmetric power and ideological capture, not as evidence of an innate willingness to betray one’s own.

The distinction between servitude and captive incorporation on the one hand and racial chattel slavery and invasion on the other is central. Without it, observers can pretend that all societies share equal blame. With it, we can see that the scale, philosophy and psychology of what happened to Africa is specific and requires specific responses.

The next steps for this project are clear. The Resistance Codex appendix will list Kongo episodes and other African and global cases with their resistance patterns, elite deviations and restoration insights. Future empirical work can test the predictive power of Puppet Syndrome and resistance metrics for outcomes such as strategic decline, crime and digital violence. Educational and clinical programmes can use Mpanzu and similar figures as anchors for decolonial healing.

Only by stripping Africans of their humanity can one say “Africans did it to themselves” and mean it. When we restore that humanity in our methods, our data and our language, another picture appears. People faced overwhelming racist violence and a system that treated them as property. Most resisted in the ways available to them. Some elites broke under pressure or chose capture. The task now is not to repeat the blame. It is to understand the patterns, repair the wounds and prevent their repetition.

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Annex 1. Anticipated Criticisms and Pre-emptive Responses

This annex is designed to function as a methodological and ethical shield, addressing key critiques that may be leveled at the core arguments. It provides detailed responses to concerns regarding the use of oral traditions, the integrity of the demographic reconstruction, the application of modern psychological models, and the interpretation of African elite collaboration.

1. “You rely too much on oral traditions and political letters.”

Critique. Oral traditions are flexible and retrospective. Royal letters are political. They cannot be used as demographic evidence or as proof of resistance as a “baseline.”

Response.
I do not treat oral tradition or letters as perfect records. I treat them as one line of evidence in a triangulated system. Letters from Afonso I are contemporary documents that describe specific processes: kidnappings of freeborn subjects, including nobles, depopulated villages, and the erosion of royal authority. They are not neutral, but they are direct observations by a ruling actor who has an interest in being believed by his European counterpart.

Oral traditions in Kongo communities preserve named places, abandoned villages and family histories of flight or loss. Archaeological surveys in Kongo’s historical territory identify dense clusters of old tombs and settlement traces that thin in later periods. This material pattern fits the narratives of “emptying,” not a story of slow, stable population.

Methodologically, I only draw strong conclusions when at least two independent lines converge:

- Afonso’s written complaints.
- Oral memory of loss and abandonment.
- Archaeological evidence of reduced settlement density.

Where they diverge, I mark uncertainty and offer ranges, not point estimates.

2. “Your demographic reconstruction is speculative and politically motivated.”

Critique. The ranges you give for Kongo’s population loss and total removals depend on assumptions about under-documentation and mortality. This could be driven by activism rather than data.

Response.
The demographic reconstruction in Paper 1 uses Monte Carlo simulations to explore parameter space rather than to produce a single “true” number. Every assumption is explicit and conservative relative to what we know about similar violent systems.

- European shipping data are treated as **censored minima**, not as “complete truth.”
- Under-documentation factors sit in ranges consistent with archival loss in other historical cases.
- Pre-embarkation mortality ratios use bands comparable to what we know from later systems of violent extraction (for example, Congo Free State rubber exploitation, World War forced labour).

The results are filtered through reality checks: simulations that imply impossible outcomes (for example, more than 100% loss of initial population, or near-zero loss despite strong evidence of depopulation) are discarded. The output is a set of plausible bands, not a fixed number.

This is the opposite of numerical propaganda. The most political move would have been to repeat “1.8 million” as if it was a precise, neutral total. The choice to show ranges and to highlight uncertainty is a scientific and ethical requirement, not an activist embellishment. The code and parameter ranges are available to academic or community researchers on request so that they can test alternative assumptions.

3. “You downplay African responsibility and romanticise resistance.”

Critique. By insisting that resistance is the baseline and collaborators are shaped by power imbalance, you minimise the agency of African leaders who participated in deportations and war.

Response.

I do not deny that some African elites participated in, profited from, and even expanded systems of deportation and violence. I insist that their behaviour is interpreted with the same structural and psychological tools that we routinely apply to elites in other contexts.

The collaborator spectrum distinguishes:

- Coerced collaboration: direct threats, depopulating violence, no safe exit.
- Ambivalent collaboration: partial alignment combined with refusal, internal conflict, and attempts to limit harm.
- Converted collaboration: deep ideological capture and material benefit from the system.

This is not an absolution. It is a classification. Many Kongo elites sit in the coerced or ambivalent zones. Some move closer to converted. Afonso himself is ambivalent: centralising through Christianity while denouncing kidnapping and depopulation.

I also bring forward African polities that resisted completely, such as Mossi and others. This is not romanticisation. It is correcting the balance in a literature that has heavily foregrounded complicity and often ignored refusal. “Africans did it to themselves” is only possible if we erase resistant polities and treat co-opted elites as representative of the whole.

4. “You impose modern psychological models on pre-modern actors.”

Critique. Concepts like the Dark Tetrad, moral disengagement or everyday sadism did not exist in the sixteenth century. Applying them to early modern actors is anachronistic.

Response.
I do not claim that sixteenth-century actors had “Dark Tetrad scores” in a psychometric sense. I use these models as interpretive tools that describe patterns of behaviour and institutional culture, not as retrospective clinical diagnoses.

The behaviours described in the historical sources – systematic kidnapping, depopulation for profit, racial contempt, and the enjoyment of coercion – fit well with what modern psychology calls moral disengagement, dehumanisation and everyday sadism. The fact that the language is new does not make the behaviour new.

I also scale the models to the institutional level. The entitlement cascade does not say “Afonso is a psychopath.” It says “this configuration of external pressure, racial ideology and institutional interests produces a pattern where harm becomes perceived as a right.” That pattern can then be compared across periods and geographies.

5. “You treat European archives as worthless and dismiss empirical data.”

Critique. You criticise Portuguese and other European records as biased and incomplete. Does this not amount to rejecting the main quantitative sources?

Response.
I do not dismiss European records. I decentre them.

Their value is clear:

- They provide minimum counts of embarked captives.
- They record dates, ports, and some ship details.
- They allow us to identify temporal clusters and regional flows.

Their limits are equally clear:

- They were produced by one side in a violent system.
- They survived selective destruction, loss and neglect.
- They do not record deaths in raids, marches and holding camps.
- They do not reflect African perceptions and experiences.

Good method uses these records as **one stream among several**, recognises them as censored, and builds models that allow for what is not recorded. Treating them as complete and objective is unscientific. Treating them as minima and cross-checking them with African evidence is the only responsible way forward.

6. “You conflate different kinds of slavery and ignore that ‘slavery existed everywhere’.”

Critique. You criticise the Atlantic system but admit that forms of slavery or servitude existed in African societies. So why is this case special?

Response.
The paper is careful to separate:

- Local forms of servitude and captive incorporation, where captives could be absorbed into lineages, marry, and have descendants who were not necessarily locked into slave status.
- Racialised chattel slavery in the Americas and related systems, where Africans and their descendants were permanently classed as property based on skin colour and origin and where laws and theology defined blackness as enslavable.

These are different systems, both in scale and in philosophical foundations. The fact that “unfreedom” existed elsewhere does not erase the specific harm of a system that ties humanity itself to ownership status along racial lines.

7. “Your cross-case selection is biased and confirms your thesis.”

Critique. You choose cases – Kongo, evolués, apartheid, Palestine – that fit your pattern of elite capture and dehumanisation.

Response.
This is a first theoretical mapping, not a completed meta-analysis. I choose clear cases because they make the pattern visible. The annexes and methodological sections explicitly invite further work on counter-examples.

For example, one could:

- Examine African polities that maintained more autonomy for longer and test whether Puppet Syndrome scores are lower.
- Study postcolonial regimes with lower external alignment and compare crime and trust outcomes with regimes that show strong elite capture.
- Analyse digital platforms where harassment is less normalised and test whether entitlement cascades are weaker.

The model is falsifiable. If there are many cases where high external alignment and dehumanising ideology do not lead to elite profiles and social outcomes I describe, then the framework needs revision. I make that clear and welcome such studies.

8. “The tone is normative and may alienate positivist readers.”

Critique. You use moral language and speak of wounds, betrayal and repair. This may be seen as activism, not scholarship.

Response.
The subject matter is mass racialised violence and its afterlives. Neutrality at the level of vocabulary often hides normative choices rather than removing them. Choosing not to name dehumanisation and structural sadism is also a moral position.

What I do is separate two layers:

- Analytic: clear definitions, explicit assumptions, documented sources, falsifiable claims, transparent modelling choices.
- Normative: explicit stance that racialised chattel slavery, apartheid and their continuities are wrong

> and that scholarship has a role in repair.

The analytic layer is designed to stand on its own in a positivist review: ranges, cross-checks, explicit caveats. The normative layer is not hidden. It is stated clearly so readers know how values and methods interact.