Abstract:

In order to gain an insight in the dynamics and effects of the transatlantic slave trade, we looked at the progress of the slave trade from a long-term, global perspective, since it has enabled us to observe the phenomenon as a whole and to avoid the fragmentation caused by a regional or national perspective. We therefore reconstruct an overview of the various takes on slavery throughout the Atlantic, including the approaches to the treatment, deployment and eventual abolishment of slavery. Furthermore, we analyzed the various agencies behind the transatlantic slave trade to better understand its consequences on culture and economy in the world.

Key words:

Atlantic, slavery, transatlantic, abolishment, global history, macro history, historiography.

Introduction

The Portuguese were the first to initiate the African slave trade through the Atlantic in the mid fifteenth century. Around 235 slaves were captured on the West African coast in 1444. On the 7th of June 1494, an agreement was reached between Castile and Portugal confirming the Treaty of 1479 at Alcáçovas, concerning the rights of the navigation, commerce, fishing and establishments
in the Canaries and coast of Africa. The Spanish differentiated themselves from the Portuguese as they favoured conquest over commerce. With the exception of Brazil, the Portuguese operated with a vast network of islands as fortified, commercial posts, rather than true colonies. The Portuguese thus saw a major commercial expansion which they managed to monopolise between 1450 and 1600. In 1580, when the debate surrounding the rights of the American Indians was somewhat settled, Europe saw the acquisition of Portugal by the Spanish Crown. By 1630, 50 percent of the labor force in the colonial jurisdiction of the Atlantic was made up by African slaves. Brazil truly changed the face of the slave trade with the takeoff of slave plantation economy, which set the region apart. “The sugar plantations in the New World were expanding rapidly and had an apparently limitless hunger for slaves”\(^1\). The use of African slaves would not be out of sheer convenience but would by then become a key part in the production quality of the sugar industry. The Iberian strength in the Atlantic was overwhelming and their monopoly on the slave trade would eventually last until the early 17th century.

**The Dutch in the Atlantic**

The rise of the Dutch West India Company in 1621 marked a difference in the way nations were involved in the slave trade. The well-armed Dutch vessels were run as a business rather than an empire such as was the case with the Iberian powers. Because of this, “protection costs were brought within the range of rational calculations instead of being in the unpredictable region of the acts of God or the king’s enemies”\(^2\). The WIC would nevertheless take on a hybrid identity as it would serve as both an instrument of the state policy and a commercial enterprise. The Dutch Protestants sought to protect a limited form of sovereignty and liberty when it came to trade. Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius advocated for the abolishment of the Iberian Mare Clausum in replacement for a Mare liberum, an open sea free for all to trade. Overall, the Dutch main goal was to bring down the Iberian status quo. The Dutch eagerness to enter the Atlantic was driven foremost by their increased interest and knowledge in the lucrative sugar and tobacco trade. The number of sugar refineries in the city of Amsterdam would see a rise from three in 1598 to twenty-nine in 1622. The objective was to take over the New World by adopting a strategy of plunder and retreat rather than one focused on seize and control. The WIC, which was influenced by the East India Company in various ways, would eventually follow the VOC and adopt a code to regulate the slave enterprise. In 1624, the VOC dispatched a fleet of eleven vessels to the Indian and Pacific

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whilst the WIC sent out an expedition of a sizeable force of twenty-three vessels to capture Bahia, the capital of Brazil. After the Dutch occupation until 1625, Bahia was relieved as the Peninsula sent a large force to counter the Dutch. Nevertheless, from this point on, the Iberian forces were at the defence, “concentrating all its resources on convoying silver fleets of diminishing profitability”.

The Dutch focussed their next attacks on the Spanish silver fleet in Cuba in 1628 and a renewed assault on Brazil in 1630. After a weak defence, the Dutch managed to successfully capture Recife and Olinda, major ports in the colony. “Madrid wished to avoid the charge that they had neglected the defence of Brazil, but they were desperately short of funds and faced threats on many fronts”.

Dutch Brazil was reinforced in 1637 when Prince Johan Maurits of Nassau was appointed by the WIC to consolidate and extend the territory in the North and North East of Brazil. By 1630s, the recorded number of African slave imports coming through Recife totalled around 2000 a year. Several trading posts on the African coast would face imminent attacks from the Dutch and the increased presence of the WIC. The Dutch for instance successfully managed to drive out the Portuguese from Luanda and Benguela in 1641. The mounting conflicts in the Atlantic and the rising debts and taxes coming from the increased competition in trade resulted in increased tensions between Portugal and Spain. Prior to 1580, the Portuguese had managed to refrain themselves from the European theatre of conflict. With the decreasing Spanish power in the face of increasing Dutch attacks, there was little reason for Portugal to share the previously established links with Spain. “In 1640 Madrid invited the Portuguese military nobility to assist in the suppression of the revolt in Catalonia. Instead, it seized the opportunity to reject the rule of Spanish Habsburg and to proclaim the Duke of Braganza King John IV of Portugal”.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the Portuguese proclaimed their independence and sought truce with the Dutch. However, by then, the WIC’s resources were almost depleted due to their efforts of breaking the Iberian status quo in the Atlantic. The transatlantic trade commerce was deemed unprofitable in comparison to the Netherland’s European and Eastern trade. Hence, the Dutch colonisation effort was rather limited in terms of commitment and strategic direction. In 1649, the Portuguese strengthened their hold on the Brazilian trade by implementing Father Vieira’s convoy system which levied taxed on the exports, mainly sugar. The WIC would eventually be defeated in both Brazil and Angola. Finally, the Dutch further limited their colonial efforts and doubled down

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5 Ibid, 196.
on the trade commerce and eventually, slavery. Above all, the rise of Dutch in the Atlantic helped spread the promotion of plantation economy. With the occupation of Pernambuco, the Dutch had encouraged the sugar industry in the region. “Emigré planters and their slaves helped greatly to boost the sugar industry of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, which managed to out produce Dutch Pernambuco even at its height”. By 1700, the conditions were set for the full exploration of the slave and plantation trade.

**The English in the Atlantic**

One can arguably link the prosperity in the metropolitan with the increase in colonial slavery. Disasters throughout the 17th century led states to implement more welfare policies in reaction to the crises, this shift from warfare to welfare made a crucial difference in the West’s escape from a Malthusian world. Historian Kenneth Pomeranz has argued that the availability of new, workable land in the New World enabled Europe and mainly, Great Britain, to free themselves from land restraints and escape a potential malthusian trap. Remarkably, Ireland would become the first English settlement as Englishmen and Scots established the plantation of Ulster in 1609. “The English could defeat the Irish in battles, but could not then fix and exploit them as peasants”. In short, the Irish were unsuitable as a slave labour force. Some Englishmen were therefore focussed on sailing into new peripheries such as the Atlantic.

Attempts were made by the Virginia Company in 1609 to colonise Virginia and the fertile island of Bermuda. In 1620, both the French and English had established their first settlement. Although both the Dutch and the French imported tobacco from the region, England was soon to become the biggest tobacco market. By 1630, the English adopted the notion that “slavery was lawful for persons who were ‘strangers to Christianity’, but urged the colonists to abstain from further purchases, since a growth of slave numbers would pose a security threat and deprive free colonists of gainful employment”. As the the Dutch seemed rather disinclined to move to the New World, which was one of the reasons for their weak hold on the Atlantic to begin with, the English seemed eager to emigrate. It has been recorded that up to 225 000 emigrants left the British Isles for the New World between the years 1610 and 1660. Many would find their way to work in the tobacco and sugar industry, which were booming in Europe due to the triumph of popular pleasures. This

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6 Blackburn, 1998, 199.
8 Blackburn, 1998, 222.
9 Ibid, 226.
however, would only result in small settlements with a limited slave labour force. It was the rise of
the plantation economy which flourished in Virginia and the Caribbean that eventually drove the
rise of English colonial slavery.

Although at first English servants were working on the newly established plantations overseas, the
principal labour force was soon to exist mainly out of African slaves. There was a general easing
of the law when it came to the use of slave labour by the mid-seventeenth century. The settlers on
Barbados for instance drew up the Master and Servant Law in 1652 which would, at least on paper,
safeguard the relationship between master and slave. Furthermore, in 1667, the English Parliament
passed a resolution to regulate the negroes on the Plantation. In Jamaica for instance, the number
of slaves grew from 500 in 1661 to 10 000 in 1673. By now, plantation work was overwhelmingly
driven by slave labor. “In Barbados, 61 percent of all slaves in 1679 were attached to plantations
with a hundred acres or more and an average crew of 104 slaves and 2 indentured servants”\textsuperscript{10}. By
1669, with a production value of over 15 million pounds, the English colony of Virginia was the
largest tobacco supplier in the Atlantic.

In 1676, the ‘Bacon’s Rebellion’ highlighted the increasing tensions between small and large
planters which faced increasing competition from each other due to the declining tobacco prices.
By settling Carolina in 1670 the English hoped to duplicate the slave plantation system of the
Caribbean to produce sugar, a process that had been very lucrative for the Empire\textsuperscript{11}. Unfortunately,
Carolina soil was deemed unsuitable for the production of sugar as well as tobacco or silk. It would
eventually take another forty years before rice became the staple commodity crop. The Spanish
Franciscans did establish a permanent settlement, San Agustín, in La Florida in 1565. However,
their presence in the region never exceeded the focus of missionary activity. Furthermore, with the
Treaty of Madrid in 1670, the English claim on Carolina was recognised. By 1686, the officials in
San Agustín grew impatient and a series of attacks were launched against South Carolina.\textsuperscript{12}. This
strategy however never led to a strengthening of the Spanish position in the region. Attacking the
English rather than establishing a stronger foothold by extending networks and increasing trade,
would continue to disfavour the Spanish, who for instance did not manage to create favourable
relationship with the natives. The English in turn did on occasion, manage to make use of the
native populations such as the Yamasees, to divide and conquer. For example, in 1707, a force of

\textsuperscript{10} Blackburn, 1998, 253.
\textsuperscript{11} A. Dubcovsky, Informed Power, communication in the Early American South. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2016)
4-8.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid
more than 100 Indians armed by the English overcame the small Spanish troop stationed in Pensacola. Both African and Indian slaves would furthermore be used to extend a network of information, which would eventually assist in strengthening the colony. These networks of information, largely oral networks, were enabled by interactions between traders, enslavers, spies, scouts, missionaries and many other agents. Both the Spanish and English would eventually adopt strategies to extend their network of influence by offering favourable agreements with various local Indians and African Slaves.

Spain and England would eventually wage war with each other in 1739. The English made an unsuccessful attempt at capturing Spanish Florida. In 1742, when Florida officials launched retaliatory raids against the English, a former South Carolina slave used his knowledge of the land and language to trick a small English regiment into disembarking from their piraguas. In the end, Spanish Florida managed to yield off the English invasion and retain its position within the region. We can argue that communication and shared information with the natives were key for the success of the colonies in Carolina.

**Slavery and war in Virginia**

The founding father and draftsman of the declaration of independence, Thomas Jefferson, once said that “we have the wolf by the ears and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go”. Jefferson did not believe that different races could live together. Although he eventually dreamed about slave emancipation in Virginia, he could only envision a wide scale deportation of blacks across the Atlantic as colonists of Africa. Jefferson had labeled the slaves as alien and perpetual enemies. Many would come to view them as the “internal enemy” that could turn against them in their sleep. “They insisted that their own safety and prosperity required defusing the threat of their internal enemy through the sale and migration of slaves westward”. William Duane, Irish born American journalist who would eventually become US Secretary of the Treasury in 1833, strongly disagreed with these sentiments of distrust. “The American born blacks, even in the Southern states where slavery is yet suffered, feel a sentiment of patriotism and attachment to the US”. He

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14 Dubcovsky, 2016.
concluded that the slaves wanted equality and opportunity rather than revenge. Between 1751 and 1831, the legal court in Virginia only convicted 148 slaves for killing a white person.

By 1765, Virginians argued they had more than enough slaves to cover their labor needs but far too many to safeguard them from potential revolts. In 1774, the crisis in Britain had imposed higher taxes and stronger regulations on the American debt payers. Jefferson, who inherited debts himself, complaint that they “had become hereditary from father to son for many generations, so that planters were a species of property annexed to certain mercantile houses in London”\(^\text{18}\). Virginians urged they could only safeguard their personal freedom by keeping the blacks enslaved.

The Patriots slowly began to anticipate the idea of a English invasion to enforce imperial control by means of slave recruitment and rebellion. British colonial governor in America, Lord Dunmore, doubled down on the perceived white fear and black danger by intimidating and threatening the planters. His plan backfired as this eventually led the Virginians to take up arms in full force and join the New Englanders in pleading for a war for independence. In 1775, a year before the declaration of independence on July 4th, Dunmore in turn, offered freedom to slaves who would help defeat the Patriot rebellion. By early 1776, “about 800 enslaved men, and an equal number of women and children, flocked to Dunmore’s encampments and ships”\(^\text{19}\). Rumours were spread about how the King of England would set the slaves free from the American oppressors. Most runaways escaped from riverside farms and plantations in small, stolen boats or canoes from their previous masters. To discourage new runaways, public hangings or brutal beatings would be inflicted upon the slaves to set examples. The Virginians released wishful propaganda that warned the slaves of the possibility of being sold by the English to the West Indies, where they would be met by far worse conditions. It is remarkable that in the end, “Dunmore did not sell any runaways to the West Indies, but the vengeful Patriots did as punishment. Others they sentenced to a short life of hard labor in the mines of Fincastle County, where the prisoners dug the lead that became bullets for the Patriots to fire at Dunmore’s men”\(^\text{20}\).

Eventually, in 1781, “Cornwallis surrendered his army to Washington. That military disaster led the British government to negotiate a peace treaty that recognised American independence in early 1783”\(^\text{21}\). During the war, around 6000 Virginia slaves had fled to Britain, out of which one third


\(^{19}\) Taylor, 2013, 24.

\(^{20}\) Ibid 25.

\(^{21}\) Ibid 28.
would see freedom. However, the decline of slave numbers during or after the war were neglectable from an economic perspective as there was a sufficient influx of slaves numbers derived from births. It is indeed remarkable how the focus on American liberty did not transfer onto the consideration to offer liberty to others. That said, there were some remarkable people who went out of their way to protect their slaves. In 1782, a new legislature enabled masters to voluntarily sell their slaves, a legal process which would become known as ‘manumission’. Masters with a sizeable debt would sell their surplus slaves as a means to gain economic stability. One of the greatest liberators at the time was Robert Carter, who liberated around 509 slaves from 1791 until 1812. Manumitters were clearly seen in the light of the English, the enemy of the country, a threat for those who wished to safeguard their slaves. Freed blacks would become condemned and quickly earned the reputation of being vicious and drunk. From the slave holders’ perspective, any criticism of slavery threatened the freedom of the white man. In contrast to manumitting, there was an increase in the renting of slaves as a means to profit from surplus slaves without turning the friendly neighbouring slave holder against oneself. By 1790, Virginians were horrified by the idea of a slave revolt. “Although the Virginians had declared revolution a universal right for the oppressed, they shuddered when the enslaved claimed that right”\(^{22}\). Besides the contradictions, it is furthermore fascinating to contemplate the idea that Jefferson eventually favoured emancipating slaves by means of deportation. However, most rejected this plan for emancipation and relocation due to the high cost attached.

Changes in transferability of wealth, the abolishment of entails in 1776 and primogeniture in 1785, introduced for the first time a system of increased equal division of land among the children, next in kin. Furthermore, heirs would become free to manage their properties as they deemed correct. By enabling both an increased sense of freedom and responsibility, Virginians would eventually become a more integral part of the labor cycle, a transformation which might have been important for the eventual abolishment to take place. However, as there was more freedom regarding the selling of property, the reformed inheritance laws increased the sale of slaves as many sought to pay off their debts. An unfortunate consequence of the reformed laws was that an increasing number of slave families were broken up by sales divided among multiple heirs. Especially children and women were now seen as the most valuable asset for sale. Jefferson claimed “a women who

\(^{22}\) Taylor, 2013, 42.
brings a child every two years is more valuable than the best man on the farm. What she produces is an addition to capital, while his labor disappears in mere consumption”\textsuperscript{23}.

During the Napoleonic wars, besides the declaration of war, the United States of America angered the English by allowing the French trade across the Atlantic to continue to prosper, thus defying Britain’s naval blockades. The war would eventually lead to the British invasion of Washington in 1812 which resulted in the burning of the White House in 1814 on August the 24th. By 1812, English naval raids provided the opportunity for the enslaved to escape. Many would eventually enlist in the British service as marines or nurses. “About 3,400 slaves fled from Maryland and Virginia to British ships during the War of 1812”\textsuperscript{24}. Peace negotiations began in the same month with the Treaty of Ghent signed on December the 24th. It is remarkable that both parties then negotiated a price or return of the slaves which crossed sides during the war. It is peculiar as both Britain and the United States had passed legislation banning the slave trade in 1807 and 1808, several years before this event. This arrangement was arguably seen as an exception due to the war. Then again, it would take another 57 years and a civil war before the Americans would finally emancipate their slaves under the 13th Amendment of the U.S Constitution, which went into effect in 1865.

**Abolitionism**

The British took the lead in the fight against slavery in 1808 although it did not liberate the 600 000 slaves which were already operative in the British West Indies at the time. After 1800, with the treat of Napoleon in Europe, which reintroduced slavery in 1802, the British arguably sought to abolish the slave trade at the expense of the French. “Saint Dominguans landed a heavy first blow in 1804 by successfully concluding a massive uprising and permanently closing the huge traffic to their shores”\textsuperscript{25}. In the face of the revolt in Haiti which ended in 1804, the British argued that a halt in the slave trade would ameliorate slavery and protect the British West Indies from collapse. Participation of certain influential figures such as politician William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson were crucial in bringing the abolitionist debate to the mainstream public in Britain and thus, raise awareness regarding the transatlantic slave trade. Descriptions of the horrors surrounding the slave trade were released and distributed in detail by the Abolition Committee. In the Spanish empire, between 1765 and 1789, under the reign of Carlos III and in the light of “free

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 46.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 3.
commerce’, a wave of liberalisation regarding the slave commerce started to manifest itself. Eventually, Spain would undergo several phases when it came to fully abolishing its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

It is clear there exists some degree of disagreement as to the actual factors, reasons that led the European powers to abolish slavery as it is rather difficult to determine the agency, the driving forces behind change. British Historian Robin Blackburn has argued that there are several factors which led to the abolishment of slavery such as the impact of the Revolution in Haiti which ended in 1804 and arguably had a profound influence for future independence movements in the Atlantic. Similar to Blackburn bringing up the importance of the revolution in Haiti, Seymour Drescher argues that “the slave revolution in St Domingue and the anti-British emancipation rhetoric in Paris helped to identify antislavery with rampant violence and propaganda. Despite this, even in the 1790s, anti-slavery was too seeded in Britain’s own national agenda not to out last the French Revolution”26. Then again, the rise of the abolitionist movement in France started even before the concept of liberty became strengthened under the context of Belgian independence and the French Revolution between 1831 and 1833. The first French abolitionist movement, “La société des amis des noirs”, was founded as early as May 1788 and became increasingly active until June 1790.

Scottish Economist Adam Smith furthermore offered a peculiar insight when arguing that “the work done by free men comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves”27. Anti-slavery sentiments were on the rise in both the colonies and the metropolis. Between 1810 and 1820, the percentage of slavery was reduced by 92.2 percent. “Madrid had agreed to extend the mutual right of search to the southern hemisphere after it abolished the slave trade in 1820, but in June 1835 it bent to British pressure and signed a right of search agreement that allowed the seizure of any Spanish vessel found with the equipment of the slave trade”28. This initiated various changes at sea in regards to the antislavery operations conducted by the Royal Navy, as it enabled warships to search Spanish vessels upon suspicion of participation in the transatlantic slave trade.

Drescher moreover talks about a model of ‘continental abolitionism’. Drescher argued that the focus should lie on the change in politics such as the increase of liberalism. However, the slow rise

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27 A. Smith, An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations: Volume One. (London: 1776) Book 1 Ch 4
of liberalism started as early as the 16th century with the debate between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in Valladolid in 1550, placing the rights of the American Indians at the heart of the Spanish empire. Hence, the renaissance and the protestant reformation arguably opened up the path towards increased humanist discourse. The laws of Burgos were set in December 1512, depicting a set of laws for governing the behavior of Spaniards in the New World. Then why was this totally neglected when it came to the rise of slavery? Did the Africans not fall under the concept of Natural law? Indeed, it seems that the Africans were seen as an exception. Las Casas for instance, “found the enslavement of Africans in the early period acceptable, and proposed in a text of 1516 that the colonists should be permitted to introduce Africans in place of Indians”29.

It were possibly the effects of liberalism on the economy, the free market principles, which drove the abolishment movement, rather than the effects of liberalism on social and moral philosophy, the principles of equality and individuality. It furthermore enabled new mobility of workers. In Brazil for instance, the number of immigrants rose whilst the numbers of slaves was going down due to the abolishment movements. Economics and Politics have always been intertwined and it was thus difficult to change the status quo when policy makers were benefiting from the lucrative business of the colonial enterprise. In fact even by the 1830s, Spanish and Antillean elites had formed an imperial system, founded on bonded labour, that would continue until the final few decades of the nineteenth century30.

Furthermore, due to the rise of modernity, different means to create or acquire wealth were made feasible, making slavery less of a core enterprise. Change is implemented when there is a potential benefit. The factory bell thus safely replaced the whip. Economic and political power became more horizontally spread and thus took power away of those who were comfortably benefiting from the imperial practices abroad. As was the case in Spain in 1872, “Colonial and metropolitan conservatives mobilised to defend colonial slavery and challenge the revolutionary regime that had created the political climate favourable to radical abolitionism”31. Near the end of the transatlantic slave trade, as local markets of manufacturing and agriculture were growing rather slowly, many demanded protection from the Spanish state against more competitive foreign goods. Protectionism thus shifted from pleasing those lucrative businesses abroad to safeguarding and

29 Blackburn, 1998 135.
31 Ibid.
doubling down on local markets as a means to supplement and eventually take over the core markets. Perhaps the rise of the middle class weakened the colonial enterprise and Atlantic slave trade. From this perspective, we can place it in the light of Karl Marx’s theory of class struggles. It enabled an increase in the distribution of wealth and the liberalisation of both economy and politics. Furthermore, the technological improvements probably altered the intensity of labor which paved the way towards the creation of a bigger and more diverse, legal workforce.

Regarding the involvement of the Church, depending on which literature one reads, the Church seems to have either condemned slavery or justified it. It is however remarkable to wonder why the Catholic Church was so late as to step in when slavery was such a big part of the Christian world. Then again, the Christian scriptures are full of stories depicting and furthermore romanticising the practice of slavery. The Pope initially legitimised the conquest of the New world in the name of Christianity. The Catholic church, through the means of the Jesuit order and various other puppet organisations, managed to legitimise the spread of imperialism as a means to evangelise the world under the singular umbrella of Christian monotheism. As the lucrative ness and public consensus around slavery changed, the Church simply had to follow. We can observe the same trend of opportunism in the 20th century when the Catholic circles chose to side with the rising fascist regimes in Europe.

We can conclude that the process of the abolishment of slavery was not set in motion consciously but was a rather positive consequence of the long and deep process of transformation of life in combination with certain short-term tipping points which accelerated the process. Numerous factors and variables of change, both social and economical, have led to a shift in global dynamics when it comes to the transatlantic slave trade. That said, the continuous resentment of slavery by the slaves and the abolishment movements around the globe were surely significant when it came to doubling down on antislavery for it to become a practicality with policies of change. As it was reported in the case of Cuba, “by the late-eighteenth century, slaves who complained about abuses of various kinds frequently requested authorities’ assistance to change owners”32. External pressures from anti-slave trade lobbyist were also significant in the abolishment of slavery in for instance Brazil. Hence, the abolishment movements can be seen as a means to reach the abolishment of slavery rather than being the actual drive behind the anti-slavery sentiment. In the end, modernisation accelerated the shift from an extensive growth model to an intensive model of

growth, focused on efficiency by means of risk management, diversification and specialisation. It becomes clear that there were several waves of abolitionism. It was a rather non-linear path towards the abolishment of slavery on a global scale, mainly due to the non-linear and varied, approaches to slavery to begin with. It was probable that the more a nation was involved with the slave trade, the harder it was to step out due to the economic dependency and national interest. As Portuguese missionary Luis Fróis has argued, “the Atlantic slave trade was a fundamental link in the insertion of Africa in the world market. Suppressing it would endanger Portuguese overseas control and break the chain of exchanges set up in the Atlantic”\textsuperscript{33}. It is therefore not surprising that slavery became abolished in for instance Denmark as early as 1792, Holland as early as 1814 and in Spain, as late as 1835. As we shall see, unfortunately the transatlantic slave trade did not disappear completely in the face of abolishment.

The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”

“All those words from the sellers but not one word from the sold”\textsuperscript{34}. In 1927, cultural anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston traveled to Plateau Alabama to visit and interview the eighty-six year old Cudjo Lewis, an African ex slave who is known to be the last to have crossed the Atlantic. Cudjo talked about the inescapable fact that “my people had sold me and the white people had bought me”\textsuperscript{35}. Although it is not clear how significant some African tribes were in their contribution to the enslavement of Africans, it has been noted that the Europeans had adopted a strategy of outplaying several African tribes against each other as a means to both weaken the tribes and acquire slaves in the end. Furthermore, it has been noted that some were more eager to work with the slave holders than others. The Dahomey seemed to have embraced slavery as their core enterprise, constantly waging wars on neighbouring tribes in order to maintain their supply of slaves. The Dahomey have been called the Black Spartans for their forcefulness and focus on war, industry and agriculture were not encouraged\textsuperscript{36}. Therefore, the Dahomey seemed to increasingly depend on the slave machinery in order to sustain themselves. “444,700 slaves were deported from the Bight of Benin, which was controlled by Dahomey”\textsuperscript{37}. Cudjo, originally part of the Akia’an tribe, retells his fascinating but tragic story about his capture by the fierce Dahomey,

\textsuperscript{34} Z. N Hurston. Barracoon: The Story of the last ‘Black Cargo’. Typescripts and handwritten draft. Box 164-186, file 1. Alain Locke Collection, Manuscript Department, (Morland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, 1931.) 1.
\textsuperscript{37} Hurston, 2018, 7.
female warriors who raided his village at dawn. The elders were slaughtered and decapitated, the young were tied up and sold to the slave market in Ouidah at the coast of Benin.

The survivors of the massacre were yoked by forked sticks and tied in a chain. If they survived the middle passage, the long and dangerous journey from inland to the coast, they would be placed in barracoons, barracks or huts which detained the Africans until the arrival of the galleons, a phase of the transatlantic slave trade which saw the imminent death of many and was labelled the ‘coasting’ period. Cudjo was then “loaded” onto the Clotilda vessel as “cargo” together with some hundred other Africans. When they finally arrived in the New World, the captives burned the Clotilda and moved the Africans out of fear of being arrested by the government. They then hid them on a small transport to be taken through the Alabama River and swamps. Finally, Cudjo would fall into the hands of two brother named Cap’n Burns Meaher and Cap’n Tim. Apparently the women would work on the fields in the plantations and Cudjo and the men would either load and unload cargo, mainly wood, or pump out water from the leaking boat. As Cudjo recounts in his southern accent, “When we at de plantation on Sunday, we so glad we ain’ gottee no work to do. So we dance lab in de Afficky soil. De American colored folks, you unnersand me, dey say we savage and den dey laugh at us and doan come say nothin’ to us”

Eventually, in 1861 the civil war broke out. “De war commences but we doan know ‘bout it when it starts: we see de white folks runner up and down. Dey go in de Mobile. Dey come out on the plantation. Den somebody tell me de folks way up in de North make de war so dey free us. I lack hear dat. Cudjo doan want to be no slave. But we wait and wait, we heard de guns shoot sometime but nobody don’t come tell us we free. Se we think maybe dey fight ‘bout something else.” Since his captivity, Cudjo worked as a slave in Alabama for five years and six months from 1860 until he eventually got liberated by Union soldiers when they told him he was free. Cudjo, instead of returning back to Africa, would spend the remainder of his life in Africa town, a town he helped found and build in the same region, Plateau Alabama, where he was previously held captive.

The part which makes this story so unique, besides the fact that we here have a personal account of the journey from a voice of the enslaved, is the fact that Cudjo Lewis was brought to Alabama some 50 years after the slave trade was officially outlawed. It can indeed not be neglected that the lucrativeness of the enterprise of human trafficking together with the general easy of both

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38 Hurston, 1931, VII.
39 Ibid.
obtaining slaves and finding buyers, led some Europeans, American and Africans alike, to continue the slave trade, illegally.

Illegal Slavery

Although slavery was beginning to become abolished as early as the nineteenth century, it is clear, as for instance Cudjo’s story highlights, that the slave trade and slavery in general was still a practice to reckon with long after the abolishment was made public. In 1817, the Kings of Spain and Britain made a compromise to continue the slavery. A bilateral, diplomatic agreement centred around the transnational slave trade was signed. Followed closely by a second agreement, two different tribunals were established. The tribunals were set in Sierra Leona in Africa and Havana in the New World. Vessels needed to report to the tribunal prior to being allowed to sail across the Atlantic. Because of this secretive agreement, the growing abolishment of slavery coincided with the reemergence of the slave trade in three vast regions in the New world, being Brazil, United States and Cuba. A total number of 547 288 African slaves have been reported to have disembarked illegally in Cuba between 1821 and 1866.

The network of the illegal slave trade was made up by a vast number of diverse people. “One of the regions most closely associated with nineteenth century slave trading was Catalonia”40. There are numerous reports of the involvement of Catalan individuals in the illegal slave trade, from big bankers such as Jaime Badia Padrines, to real estate owners in the city of Barcelona. Spanish or rather, Cuban factories, were built in the coast of Africa in order to continue and at times even accelerate the transatlantic slave trade. For instance the Catalan Jose Vidal Ribas, who operated under the name of Domingo Mustich, was a Spanish agent for a Barcelona firm who in 1847 owned a slave factory at Little Popo, In the southeastern part of Togo. It is interesting to note that the slaves came from the Dahomey, the same tribe which took Cudjo to Ouidah to be shipped to Alabama. “The slaves who were embarked from Little Popo in this period came from Dahomey via Ouidah, from where they were transported in canoes along the lagoon”41. In this case, the slaves were hidden for the British navy in canoes as to increase flexibility and swiftness to avoid detection, similar to the way Cudjo was being taken through rivers and swamps. It furthermore highlights the risk and genuine discomfort which characterised the entire ordeal.

When it comes to the rise and fall of the Atlantic Slave trade, it becomes clear that the attraction or distain of European traders was highly dependable on the demographic, social and economical situation in the colony and the metropolis. Together with the changes in politics, culture, economy and technology on both a micro and macro level, the conditions within the colony and metropolis determined the level of opportunism and effectiveness of the slave trade. Some found it easier to make a shift away from the slave trade as they found new means to prosper, whereas the Spanish, arguably the Catalan entrepreneurs, were too involved to suddenly back out. Various businesses highly depended on slavery and thus found it harder to get out of the business. Even those who would stop their involvement with slavery and the slave trade directly, still sought opportunities derived from the continuation of the trade, such as some American shipyards which specialised in making vessels to transport slaves.

Others have arguably never imagined themselves doing the slaves work or furthermore, never imagined a world without slavery as much as some slaves could never image their freedom. As a result, many slave traders and slaveholders moved around to other areas as to continue their practices where possible. Last but not least, we should wonder whether there ever was a widespread criticism coming from the abolishers regarding buying products which were produced under slavery? Most of the products in Europe which were new and thus increasingly popular at the time, were derived from the New World and associated with slavery and the slave trade. The fact that there was still a market for the goods produced under a model of slavery meant that the slave trade and slavery in general was being kept alive. Abolishers who went to coffee-houses and drank coffee with sugar, arguably contributed to the cause they were fighting against. Eventually, pirates took over illegal slavery around 1866, making slavery even more of a criminal activity.

The complexity of life accelerated during the Industrial revolution, which arguably had negative short term but positive long term effects on the slave trade. The short term, negative effect being the intensification, diversification and specialisation of slavery. For the long term, the positive effect being the replacement of slaves with middle class, factory workers. Technological advancements furthermore improved the working conditions which weakened the need to use force upon one's subject. Efficiency was gained and the shift from an extensive growth model towards an intensive, energy reducing growth model was made. Besides the antislavery movements who claimed to care about the sovereignty of the individual due to the increase of liberal thought, we can argue that the shift in working conditions together with the lucrativeness of a wide range of products which were non-slave related, are the more deterministic factors which underline the shift towards antislavery and eventually led to the abolishment of the transatlantic slave trade.
The Rise of Capitalism in Cuba

Nineteenth century Cuba offers us a peculiar case of slavery as it marked a period of increased innovation and entrepreneurship regarding the transatlantic slave trade. Cuban entrepreneurs took ownership of the slave trade into their own hands and consequently, away from foreign influencers. “Slowly but steadily they started fitting more and more slave vessels and sending them directly to the coast of Africa, effectively breaking down the traditional triangular trade that had been typical during the eighteenth century.”\(^42\) The Cuban entrepreneurs, by taking up ownership and responsibility for the fostering of their plantation economy, were able to incentivise and innovate. “During the Cortes of Cadiz in 1811, the extraordinary power of the Cuban planter class was manifested when it successfully torpedoed liberal attempts to ban the slave traffic and thus ratify the demands of Spain’s principal ally against Napoleon, Great Britain.”\(^43\) Instead of market monopolies controlled and supported by the state, the power shifted towards an increasing number of individual firms and entrepreneurs. “Between 1809 and 1815, the Cuban slave trade became an almost exclusively Iberian trade. One of their major breakthroughs was to set up factories and agents along the coast of Africa, from Upper Guinea in the North to the Angolan coast in the South.”\(^44\) Instead of indirect and intra-Caribbean trade, direct African trade to the island had the upper hand by the mid nineteenth century. The increased focus on the abolishment of slavery in Europe, especially Britain with its decision to prohibit the slave trade in 1807, meant that the establishment of an transatlantic slave trade was becoming increasingly difficult. Eventually, an internalised network of independent agents enabled the Cubans to continue the slave trade during the illegal period between 1835 and 1877.

Subsequent diversification of business operations and trade can be seen as means to reduce risk and foster specialisations and innovations. “Additionally, they also diversified by investing in human trafficking of Spanish migrants, free labourers from Africa, and Chinese indentured workers, or by resorting to acts of piracy.”\(^45\) It has indeed been reported that over 150 000 Chinese coolies had been sold to Cuba, the majority of which having been shipped from Macau. By 1840, the British Royal Navy was pursuing slave traders in Africa, Atlantic and the Caribbean. Nevertheless, technological innovations such as lighter vessels enabled the Cubans to stay ahead of the tide. The new Baltimore-built clippers were fast and light as to penetrate deeper into the

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\(^{42}\) Barcia, Manuel, and Effie Kesidou. “Innovation and entrepreneurship as strategies for success among Cuban-based firms in the late years of the transatlantic slave trade.” *Business History* 60.4: 542-561, (2018) 6


\(^{44}\) Barcia, 2018, 10.

\(^{45}\) Barcia, 2018, 16.
African interior. In 1850, a shift towards large merchant vessels was made as to enable the transportation of an increased quantity of slaves. The close relationship between Cuban entrepreneurs and their slave trade enabled Cuba to adapt a level of risk which was previously unseen on this scale. Cuban based firms were forced to rediscover the slave trade through trial and error. We can argue that risk management and diversification enabled opportunities to innovate both technologically and operationally.

**Second Slavery**

Second slavery attempts to view the new frontiers of slavery in the light of the nineteenth century world economy, which was fuelled by capitalism due to the continuous industrialisation and modernisation of both the metropolis and the colonies. The concept suggest that the new zones of slave concentration such as Cuba or Brazil, were part of the transformative cycle of both economic and geographical expansion of capitalism during the nineteenth century. “The development of each zone at once structures and is structured by the world division of labor. Thus, their emergence and development cannot be understood outside of that of the capitalist world-economy as a whole”\(^{46}\).

It seems that nations were able to make a trade-off, a balance between two desirable but incompatible features, abolishment and economic prosperity. Many European countries were embroiled in the debate over free trade through the 1850’s and 1860’s as Great Britain aimed to extend its markets. That said, there is arguably no such thing as free trade. It is nothing more than maintaining a balance between an amount of liberalisation and an amount of non-discrimination. “While intellectuals and civil servants throughout Europe organised in associations, such as Spain’s Asociación para la Reforma de los Aranceles de Aduanas or Belgium’s Association Belge pour la Liberté Commerciale, to press for free trade, the developing manufacturing and agricultural sectors fought to protect their local markets against foreign competition”\(^{47}\). The British trade-off was reflected in its continuous engagement with slavery after the abolishment such as the case of Cuba, and their protectionism reflected in their continuous bombardments on African factories along the West coast. What follows from establishing a relation between capitalism and slavery is the idea that modern nations would not have been what they are today without the lucrativeness of the slave trade.

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\(^{46}\) Tomich, 2018, 3.

\(^{47}\) Schmidt-Nowara, 1998.
Impact of the Atlantic Slave trade on Africa

From a socioeconomic and demographic point of view, the slave trade and subsequent abolition had a significant impact on the continent of Africa and the African people. Historian Paul Lovejoy points out the unequal balance between genders and the various demographic displacements which arguably had further effects on the economic, social and demographic growth. “The European slave trade across the Atlantic marked a radical break in the history of Africa, most especially because it was a major influence in transforming African society”48. Economic Historian Nathan Nunn brings up the genuine culture of mistrust which derived from the oppressive and violent climate, a sentiment which is still present in Africa today. “Slavery was corruption, it involved theft, bribery and exercise of brute force”49.

There still exists general disagreement about how significant the impact of the transatlantic slave trade actually was for the course of African history. For instance when placing the transatlantic slave trade in the light of a more global and deep history, scholars including Historian David Eltis have suggested that the transatlantic slave trade did not stand out significantly enough as to drastically influence the course of African history. Lovejoy has critiqued Eltis’ famous interpretation arguing that the economic costs of the slave trade in African economies and societies were indeed severe50. Lovejoy concluded there was no economic advantage in importing slaves. Moreover, the scale of the trade was large enough to have a significant impact on demographics. Lastly, Africa saw a relative decline in its position in world trade. However, did the culture of mistrust start with the arrival of the Europeans? How impactful was the enslavement in ancient Africa or for instance the several thousand blacks and Berber slaves who were brought to Spain and especially, Seville, in the fifteenth century? What about the impact of the actual colonisation of Africa after the Berlin conference in 1884? How to factor in the climatological factors which favoured the development of Europe or the intense period of conflict during the middle ages which arguably accelerated growth and innovation in Europe and left Africa in an inferior economic state?

Nathan Nunn has concluded there is a strong relation and effect between the slave trade and the economic development of Africa. Not only are the regions where the most slaves were exported

50 Lovejoy, 1989
the most ethnically diverse today, they are also the most economically and culturally affected. “If Africa’s slave trades had not occurred, then the countries in Africa would, on average, have the same level of income as other developing countries in the world”\textsuperscript{51}. Besides the culture of mistrust, Nunn concludes that the transatlantic slave trade explains 30 percent of the income gap between Africa and the developing countries today. However, from a global and evolutionary perspective, events are interconnected by mechanisms of change which go beyond time and space. Hence, it seems almost impossible to make use of a spotlight and isolate a certain event outside the scope and context of global change.

**Slavery and the Culture of Guilt**

It is important to acknowledge that all empires on earth have participated in the act of slavery in one way or another. However, Historians have arguably minimised the significance of slavery in the undocumented empires such as Ancient Greece, Egypt or Rome, whereas the significance of more contemporary, documented events surrounding slavery are often magnified. Slavery has therefore become widely associated with Europe and European imperialism. Even though slavery is clearly visible in the outer corners of the world today, people tend to see it as a conflict between whites and blacks, continuing to reduce slavery as a European 15th century invention. Although it were arguably Muslim traders from North Africa who brought new techniques for labor and production to the West, it is hardly productive to reduce the discipline of history to name calling. Nevertheless, when pointing at slavery in, for instance the Middle East today, the notion that it would have been derived outside the influence of the West seems to be controversial and almost inconceivable. Why is it controversial to look at slavery outside the scope of European imperialism?

Today, we may ask whether the focus in the 21st century on fighting racism might have led us to undermine postcolonial poverty alleviation in Africa. Even though we can more accurately quantify how to lower the death rate and improve life standards in Africa, by focusing on anti-malaria or deworming initiatives, we collectively focus on the concept of racism. It is arguable that in order to elevate the poor in Africa, we do actually need to focus on racism but it has yet to be demonstrated. In 2001, the United Nations concluded that poverty is both the cause and a product of human rights violations. As racism is defined as a human rights violation, the UN concluded that the fight against racism is a means to eradicate poverty. However, it is not clear at all how

\textsuperscript{51} Nunn, 2010
much focus there should be or more importantly, how to even measure the economic effects of racism or the violation of a human right in general. We can argue that the focus on racism in the West today, rather than slavery and poverty in the East or Africa, is partly due to the eurocentrism and the focus on the transatlantic slave trade. As Nathan Nunn talks about the culture of mistrust in Africa, one could call attention to the culture of guilt created in the West. We need to recognise what happened and place the events within our collective thought for prevention based on rational thinking. However, we should question the value of the concept of guilt and the effects it has on placing it upon future generations. The culture of mistrust is arguably holding back the economic development in Africa by weakening trade relationships and networks of information. That said, the culture of guilt is possibly reducing concepts such as slavery and racism to a ‘European construct’. It is furthermore presenting a potential difficulty for the objective representation of history and the complexity of life.

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