

approach seems to lie more clearly in deconstruction than in construction. In that respect, it seems to be no coincidence that the subtitle of a volume edited by Topik *et al.*, which appeared ten years earlier, is not repeated here. The arguments made in this volume largely steer clear of engaging in debates on the origins of the world economy, or the causal effects of luxury goods in this process. After finishing the book from cover to cover, it remains hard to say whether luxury objects and practices had an agency in the grand transitions that have beset the modern world in the last 400 years, or whether they merely offer the researcher a good vantage point from which to see those transitions reflected. Depending on what one is looking for, the refusal to be drawn into grand narratives can of course be considered either a good or a bad thing.

However, I could not escape the feeling that several contributions to the volume could have benefited from a clearer comparative engagement with the existing literature on commodity chains and luxury elsewhere in the world, including on Europe. Some of the conclusions reached regarding the uses of luxury as currency, or on the ambiguity of sumptuary laws, are presented as evidence of the inapplicability of European conceptions of luxury to non-Western consumption practices, while it would be just as easy to be struck by their basic similarity. What seems to be missing to arrive at a stronger argumentation is a more comparative perspective that could have provided a stronger underpinning (or refutation) of the perceived uniqueness of some of the cases presented here.

Despite this minor issue, this is a very stimulating and rewarding book. At the very least, the volume collects a stimulating collection of thought-provoking research on luxury goods and practices in previously under-researched areas of the world. Yet, it also makes a good case for the methodological merits of combining a “biography of things” approach with a “global commodity chains” perspective. And, finally, it offers several clues for challenging universalist approaches to the study of consumption history – even though on that matter the last word has clearly not yet been written.

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DOMINGUES DA SILVA, DANIEL B. *The Atlantic Slave Trade from West Central Africa, 1780–1867*. [Cambridge Studies on the African Diaspora.] Cambridge University Press, New York [etc.] 2017. xv, 231 pp. Ill. Maps. £75.00. (E-book: \$80.00).

The 1807 abolition bill passed by the British parliament saw the start of a prolonged campaign to end transatlantic slavery, which had, by that point, disembarked over eight million captive Africans in the Americas. Whether the motivations were moral, economic, or political have long been debated, but the impacts of the abolition campaign were substantial. Diplomatic and military pressure by the British, often in stark contravention of international law and seen by many as heralding Europe’s later colonial adventures, gradually put an end to a global system of trade in which coerced labour was acquired for the plantations

and mines of the Americas through worldwide commodity chains handled by a variety of European, African, and American traders. The impact of abolition on the states and societies in Africa with a stake in the transatlantic slave trade has a rich literature. However, for the English-speaking world this has mainly focused on the transition in West Africa from export economies based on slaves to ones dominated by so-called legitimate commerce. Far less has been written, at least in English, about the impact of abolition in the region known as West Central Africa, roughly analogous to the area between modern Cameroon and Namibia. This is significant as over half of the total numbers of captives disembarked in the new world in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were from this region, with important implications for the origins of people of African descent in the Americas today.

West Central Africa was never a single trading zone and, until 1807, the northern section, known as the Loango coast, was visited by ships from all European and American slave trading nations. However, in the wake of abolition, Portuguese and Brazilian traders came to dominate the export trade in slaves from both these regions as well of the parts of the Angolan coast, which they had always controlled. The consequence is that scholars of this region and period must rely on largely Portuguese language archival sources. This has meant that, with some honourable exceptions, a lot of important work on transatlantic slavery in post-abolition West Central Africa has been undertaken by Portuguese and Brazilian scholars working in their native language and therefore generally not available to English-speaking academics.

Domingues Robeiro de Silva's new book is therefore a welcome contribution to the literature on the impact of abolition on the economies and societies of the Atlantic trading zone. It provides a very useful and succinct overview of the period and charts the major academic debates that have dominated the research agenda over the last quarter century, in particular the work of Jan Vansina, John Thornton, and Joseph Miller, on the impact and consequences of Lunda state expansion of the supply of slaves. Secondly, it combines both rigorous quantitative data analysis and a careful use of qualitative sources. This methodological approach seems to be the most logical response to recent criticisms that an over reliance on data generated by European merchants, governments, and colonizers does not allow for the African side of the story to be told, without losing the undoubted benefits that such data can bring to the debate.

The book's main contribution, which is set out in Chapter one, is to question traditional narratives as to how slaves were acquired. The dominant view, based on the work of the scholars mentioned above, has been that the expansion of the slave trade south of the equator was largely driven by states in the interior, for whom slave trading was a means to finance and drive state expansion. This slave raiding or supply-side model was long seen as the means by which the majority of people were captured across the African coast, but recent scholarship has shown that most captives, especially during the apogee of the transatlantic slave trade, were instead enslaved through judicial proceedings and small-scale kidnapping. Da Silva's thorough analysis of a range of sources, especially from Brazil, Angola, and the British admiralty courts charged with dealing with captured slave traders, shows that the vast majority of slaves from West Central Africa came from more "stateless" areas closer to the coast and were enslaved or kidnapped by their own ethno/linguistic (but usually not lineage) groups.

This adds to recent studies of other important slave exporting regions, in particular the Bight of Biafra and on the Gold Coast, which argue that significant slave exports were not

dependant on the presence of centralized governments.¹ Furthermore, he convincingly argues that local actors were primarily driven by the desire for economic gain and therefore increasing demand from the Americas, not considerations regarding state building, drove slave exports. This demand was strongly driven by the increasing effectiveness of Britain's abolition campaign, which led to a frenzied period of panic buying in advance of treaties, bans, and acts of parliament, which strengthened the powers of the captains of the anti-slave trade patrols. This demand-side explanation for the expansion of export slavery aligns this book closely with the transformation hypothesis of Paul Lovejoy.

Chapter two provides an overview of the organization of the West Central African transatlantic slave trade. The focus is very much on trade south of the Congo River, especially through the port of Luanda, which was part of the Portuguese empire. Despite attempts by Lisbon to limit or control their activities, a relatively small number of wealthy Brazilian ship owners seemed to have dominated the transportation of captives to the Americas. Within Africa, the trade was controlled by brokers from a range of backgrounds, who regulated sales at the coast, and traders, who acted as middlemen between the coast and inland suppliers. Importantly for the book's central argument, the latter group seems to have acted independently of the Lunda and Imbangala states of the interior. The most important archival contributions are found in the following chapters. Using the records of the mixed commission courts, which took down details of all ships captured by the British anti-slave trade patrol and slave registers from Angola, Da Silva is able to cautiously identify the point of origin of around 7,600 West Central African captives. He argues, convincingly, that these suggest that the vast majority of captives came from regions relatively close to the coast and not from the interior. Chapter four examines the age and sex of captives and argues that despite nineteenth-century planter preferences for more women and adults, embarkation data indicates that males and increasingly children dominated. This, in turn, suggests that the types of slaves exported were primarily as a result of African, rather than European/American preferences.

Chapter five focuses on what brokers and traders were exchanging for captives. It is based on the Luanda customs records, which the author describes as "the best available for sub-Saharan Africa". They show that, as with other areas, textiles and apparel (originally Asian but increasingly from industrial Europe) were the most important items of trade. Brazilian produced alcohol and tobacco were also significant trade items, but imported metals were not as they were not able to compete with local products. Guns seem to have only made up around six per cent of the value of goods, perhaps reflecting their limited use in local (but still important) use in local warfare. More interesting is the analysis of slave exports and prices, which shows a very clear correlation between rising demand and increasing output. This strongly suggests that most slaves were captured and transported by people driven by considerations of commercial gain, rather than as by-products of war or state expansion.

Finally, in Chapter six the author focuses on qualitative sources that record the stories of ex-slaves and illustrate the means by which they were captured. The coverage is limited to a handful of people of West Central African origin interviewed in Sierra Leone in the mid-nineteenth century and stories put together from Angolan sources. Despite the relatively small number of sources, this is an important chapter as it helps support the conclusions

1. G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2010). Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, NY, 2014); Randy J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

reached through the author's quantitative analysis. The stories are not ones of war captives, but instead of individuals who found themselves in the holds of slave ships largely as a result of "trickery, judicial proceedings, or even voluntary enslavement". It is to be hoped that other scholars will be able to find further qualitative sources that can extend this analysis.

My main criticism of the book is with its claim to be an analysis of the West Central African slave trade. With the exception of Chapter one, which makes use of the author's contributions to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, the vast majority of the data and analysis is for the Angolan region and in particular on Luanda. This is, of course, driven by the availability of sources and the fact that there was a permanent Portuguese presence in this part of the coast means that there are far more sources available. However, far more research is clearly required for other parts of the West Central African coast, in particular the Loango coast. This caveat aside, this will be an important book for those looking to better understand the history of the transatlantic slave trade in West Central Africa in the era of abolition and its impact on the people, politics and societies of the region.

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CHOPRA, RUMA. *Almost Home. Maroons between Slavery and Freedom in Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone*. Yale University Press, New Haven (CT) [etc.] 2018. viii, 313 pp. Ill. Maps. \$35.00.

This is an impressive book. Inspired by Mavis C. Campbell's three separate books on the Trelawny Town Maroons of Jamaica, who were deported to Nova Scotia, Canada, in 1796 and relocated to Sierra Leone in West Africa in 1800,¹ Ruma Chopra takes up Campbell's "challenge to put the Trelawney [sic] Town Maroons' migrations within a single framework" (p. 199) and admirably succeeds in her goal. The Trelawny Town Maroons, descendants of enslaved people from Africa, were the largest community of escaped slaves (about 660 persons) in the British plantation colony of Jamaica, and Chopra situates their serial migrations within the complexities of slavery and the anti-slavery movement in the colonial British Atlantic context, giving them a place in global history.

The book is divided into three sections, on Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone, with an Introduction and Epilogue. The Introduction provides an overview of the Trelawny Town Maroons and the argument of the book. Chopra argues that following the 1738–1739 treaties between the planters and the Jamaican Maroons, "the Maroons served as a buffer between the slaves and the planters, preserving white freedom and black slavery" (p. 1) by

1. Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655–1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal* (Granby, MA, 1988); Mavis C. Campbell, *Nova Scotia and the Fighting Maroons: A Documentary History* (Williamsburg, VA, 1990); Mavis C. Campbell, *Back to Africa: George Ross and the Maroons from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ, 1993).