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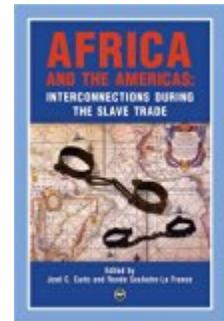
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jose C. Curto, Renee Souldre-La France, eds. *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections during the Slave Trade*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004. 312 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-59221-272-9.

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The Black Atlantic Revisited

Africa and the Americas: Interconnections during the Slave Trade, edited by José C Curto and Renée Souldre-La France, is a collection of essays that redefines and analyzes the Atlantic world between 1600 and 1850. At the heart of this volume is an emphasis on the multidirectional relationships and dialogues that occurred during the slave trade. Early in the introduction, Curto and Souldre-La France refer to the seminal works of John Thornton and Paul Gilroy—*Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (1998) and *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1993), respectively—as much-needed departures from Eurocentric analyses that render Africans, on both sides of the Atlantic, as humans without agency and power; they specifically point to the work of Bernard Bailyn as an example of this form of Eurocentrism. However, the editors also critique Thornton and Gilroy as well: they contend that Thornton’s work is unidirectional and primarily focuses on Africans in the New World; and they assert that Gilroy’s analysis is not only Anglo-centric but also based upon evidence beginning after the slave trade (post-1850). Thus, Curto and Souldre-La France argue that Thornton and Gilroy, like the others, do not privilege the continuous and multifaceted interconnections among Africans across the Atlantic and that they focus their attention on what Curto and Souldre-La France call “the northern Diasporic perspective,” i.e., the relationship between the United States or Britain and Africa.

Curto and Souldre-La France consider their volume

to remedy this oversight because its approach to analyzing these relationships in the Atlantic world is multidirectional, interdisciplinary, and most importantly, privileges the role of Africans. It is important to note that this volume is organized around West African and Brazilian perspectives. However, several chapters do consider the slave trade in Spanish America and the Caribbean, and the influence of “Mozambiques” in and outside East Africa. These chapters, according to the editors, further establish the impact of Africans in post-independence societies and in eastern Africa as well.

The first, and longest, section of the volume concentrates on the slave trade itself (with an emphasis on the Portuguese slave traders), on “Mozambiques,” creolization, religious and nonreligious communities, and African agency in Brazil. In the first chapter, David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, and David Richardson add to the literature about the slave trade as a national enterprise as they reconsider previously published work and consider newly discovered Portuguese, Spanish, and Brazilian archival papers. The authors assert that the Portuguese (as well as the British, of course) played a central role in the transatlantic slave trade and that the vast majority of Africans who were enslaved by Europeans were trafficked to Brazil. The other chapters in this section analyze the cultural, social, and religious ramifications of the Portuguese slave trade of Africans to Brazil. First, Edward A. Alpers seeks to counter prevailing notions about the unimportance of East Africans in the New

World by focusing on the experience of “Mozambiques,” a moniker given to East Africans, in Brazil. Alpers points to linguistic, written, and artistic examples that demonstrate the presence of East Africans as actors in Brazilian society and within the slave communities. Like Alpers, Luis Nicolau Parés endeavors to raise the profile of another group of Africans in Brazil, the Jeje from the Gbe-speaking area of West Africa. Specifically, Parés states that the Jeje and their *voduns* (deities) had more of an influence in the shaping of Candomblé than they are given credit for. His historical analysis of the development of the pantheon(s) of deities in Candomblé attempts to redistribute or reconceptualize how scholars understand the development of this religion. Elizabeth W. Kiddy focuses on “blacks” as agents through a consideration of the phenomenon of black lay religious brotherhoods across Brazil from 1750-1830. Kiddy surmises that these brotherhoods were dynamic institutions that underscored the strategies employed by both free and enslaved Africans, and that these groups mirrored the Portuguese and reflected African principles regarding hierarchical relationships. In the next chapter, Dale T. Graden also concentrates on African agency through an analysis of Africans’ actions at the end of the slave trade. Graden concludes that African rebellions and protests were integral aspects to the development of the abolitionist movement in Brazil. The last essay in this section by João José Reis contemplates the relationship of street laborers, *ganhadores*, with their guilds or *cantos*. According to Reis, these *cantos* at the end of slavery, were not racially or ethnically based in their hierarchical structure, but class based, reflecting the early formations of an Afro-Brazilian identity.

The second section of the volume focuses on Africans in other parts of the Americas. Thus, Jane Landers compares maroon communities across the Americas, including settlements in Ecuador, Columbia, Peru, Florida, and Brazil with their disparate and diverging models of leadership. These leaders’ principles of authority included emphases on kinship networks, military might, religious power, and political hierarchy. Monica Schuler concentrates on another aspect of African survival and ingenuity in the New World, notably: astral and aquatic imagery associated with ritual “returns” to Africa. Her chapter demonstrates the ways and means by which Africans coped with their situations in the New World and created mechanisms for survival and community-building. Terry Rey’s work, like Schuler’s, centers on the role of African principles in the development of religious themes and concepts of resistance in Haiti. According to Rey,

Kongolese Catholic “root experiences” were foundational influences of the prophetic movement that propelled the Haitian Revolution.

The last section of the volume returns the reader to Africa in its examination of Afro-Brazilian communities in Ouidah and Lagos and the relationship of Mozambique with Brazil. Elisée Soumonni’s chapter compares two Afro-Brazilian communities and their experiences as they attempt to integrate themselves into their larger communities. While Afro-Brazilians in Ouidah and Lagos both assimilated relatively easily into their respective societies, Soumonni notes that each community had divergent experiences. Afro-Brazilians in Ouidah were better off than their counterparts in Lagos. The last topical essay in the volume highlights the relationship between two Portuguese colonies during the slave trade: Mozambique and Brazil. Politically, economically, and ideologically, Mozambique was influenced by its relationship with Brazil, with a particular flow of information, people, and politics occurring in the early to mid nineteenth century. Colleen Kriger concludes the volume and tackles the methodological challenges in studying African culture both in Africa and the Americas. She confronts the complex nature of describing culture in the Atlantic world, particularly for historians. In her critiques of the work of such major scholars as Melville Herskovitz, Sidney Mintz, Richard Price, and John Thornton, Kriger calls for more innovative and unconventional approaches to studying cultural history and culture change that privileges Africans in Africa as actors and agents of their own history and the history of the Atlantic world during the slave trade.

Africa and the Americas, edited by Curto and Soulodre-La France, is a significant addition to the scholarly corpus that traces and retraces the relationships among the peoples, cultures, and nations participating in the Atlantic slave trade. As a whole, the volume complicates, revises, and at times supplants prevailing notions about creolization, African agency, and the multidirectional relations between Africans in Africa and Africans in the New World. However, the focus here is on the relationships between Brazil, Portugal, and West Africa. If Gilroy had an Anglo-centric emphasis in his work, this volume has a Lusophone emphasis that barely skims the surface of the experiences of Africans during the slave trade in New World countries other than Brazil. A deeper exploration of the phenomenon of slavery elsewhere in the Americas would add another dimension to the volume, and perhaps raise or inspire different questions and approaches to researching the slave trade. Notwithstand-

ing this critique, Curto's and Soulodre-La France's collection of essays expands our understanding of the linkages among various actors—powerful and weak—during the slave trade, and how the notion of power in analyzing the slave trade needs to be further problematized.

Lastly, the editors as well as the authors in this volume further dismantle existing discourses that were grounded in conceptions of African “survivals” and “retentions” in the New World.

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