

The South Atlantic and Transatlantic Slave Trade: Review Essay

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Abstract

This essay will review two recent books on the transatlantic slave trade, which privilege the Southern Atlantic dynamics of this trade. Centred on the common contributions of both works, this article will address two main issues: firstly, it will reflect upon the southern directions that the study of transatlantic slave trade is experiencing, focusing on the importance of ‘trans-regional’ and ‘trans-national’ approaches, and on the importance of African agency; secondly, it will address the operational capacities of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database to the field, thoroughly used in both volumes, which will serve as an excuse to briefly reflect upon the importance of Digital Humanities as a whole.

Keywords

Transatlantic slave trade, South Atlantic, Digital Humanities.

Resumo

Esta reflexão historiográfica recenseará dois livros recentes sobre o tráfico de escravos transatlântico que privilegiam o Atlântico sul. Focado principalmente nos elementos que os dois livros têm em comum, o artigo tratará de dois temas: em primeiro lugar, reflectirá sobre a atenção que o Atlântico sul tem recebido pela parte dos estudos sobre o tráfico de escravos transatlântico, focando-se na importância das abordagens ‘trans-regionais’ e ‘trans-nacionais’ e na importância da agência africana; em segundo lugar, tratará das capacidades operacionais que a Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, abundantemente utilizada em ambos os volumes, tem trazido a este campo de estudos, o que servirá de pretexto, por sua vez, para pensar brevemente sobre a importância das Humanidades Digitais.

Palavras-chave

Tráfico de escravos transatlântico, Atlântico Sul, Humanidades Digitais.

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David Richardson and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva (ed.) (2015), *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange: Slave Trading in the South Atlantic, 1590-1867*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Dale T. Graden (2014), *Disease, Resistance, and Lies: The Demise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade to Brazil and Cuba*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

1. Introduction

This essay will review two recent works on the transatlantic slave trade that pay special attention to the South Atlantic dynamics of this same trade: David Richardson and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva's *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange: Slave Trading in the South Atlantic, 1590-1867* (2015), and Dale T. Graden's *Disease, Resistance, and Lies: The Demise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade to Brazil and Cuba* (2014). These are two works that differ widely in their nature, but which share a number of features in common.

First of all, while Graden's is a single-authored book, Richardson and Silva's book is an edited collection resulting from the European-funded project "Slave Trade, Slavery Abolitions and their Legacies in European Histories and Identities,"² and, as a co-edited book, it brings together a vast array of texts by different authors and covers a broad time period, from the late sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. In turn, Graden's monograph is his second book on this subject, an important complement to his first book, "From Slavery to Freedom in Brazil: Bahia, 1835-1900" (2006), where he again demonstrates his expertise in the study of abolitionism throughout the nineteenth century.

Being a collection of essays written by several scholars, the range of topics addressed and the diversity of sources and archives used throughout Richardson and Silva's volume are very wide-reaching, but this does not mean that the broader objective of delivering a coherent collection of essays on the subject of the transatlantic slave trade in the South Atlantic is not achieved quite consistently. Graden's book, on the other hand, focuses on a narrower subject and time period, but the study by the University of Idaho scholar is no less relevant to the field, since, by resorting to a vast array of sources and archives, Graden presents his arguments coherently and effectively. While Richardson and Silva's volume has a more economic and cultural approach, Graden's monograph adopts a perspective that is more political and social. Historiographically speaking, both volumes rely on an extensive bibliography.

² See www.EURESCL.eu.

Regardless of the differences between the two, both books reveal the dynamic interest that the study of the transatlantic slave trade is currently experiencing.³ This review essay will focus, in particular, on the common contributions of the two works, seeking to address the main inputs of them both, not only to the vibrant field of the history of the slave trade, “the largest forced movement of peoples in history” (Morgan 2009: 224), but also to Atlantic history as a whole. The two books have several aspects in common, but, for the sake of internal coherence, this historiographical reflection will concentrate on only two. First of all, apart from confirming the focus on the southern hemisphere that the field of slave trade studies has been experiencing for a while, the two books illustrate very clearly how transregional and transnational approaches may enrich the study of the South Atlantic dimension of this international institution. It is precisely because of these combined approaches (transregional and transnational) that, as the two volumes also demonstrate, it is possible to paint a full picture of the leading role played by all the actors and agents (not only European or American, but also African) involved in the tragic story of the transatlantic slave trade. Secondly, the two books also richly exemplify the remarkable operational capabilities of the “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database,” a digital tool that has become essential for any work on this multidimensional subject. Hence, after briefly presenting the contents of each book, as well as their internal organization, this review essay will reflect upon each of these elements separately.

2. Contents and Internal Organization

As its title points out, Dale T. Graden’s book is centered on the demise of the transatlantic slave trade in the South Atlantic. Graden’s study is, as mentioned above, a single-authored work and focuses on a very specific period and topic: the final decades of the transatlantic slave trade to Brazil and Cuba from roughly the early nineteenth century until the late 1860s, when this traffic was suppressed in Cuba (1867). Without ever overlooking the impact of British diplomatic endeavors on the evolution of abolitionism after the suppression of the slave trade, Graden underlines the influence of two additional elements, namely the threat of infectious diseases brought by slaves coming from Africa,

³ This review essay addresses several aspects related with the slave trade, slavery, the African diaspora, Atlantic history, etc.; all areas of study that have already been extensively dealt with by historiography. See, for instance, the review articles by Patrick Manning (2003b) or Kenneth Morgan (2008). Thus, the references that will be cited are not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, they are simply designed to exemplify some of the most relevant works for each of the topics.

and the threat of slave resistance, which gradually took on the dimension of a broader collective movement.

Graden's arguments are explained quite convincingly throughout the book's seven chapters. In the first chapter, the US involvement in the slave trade with Cuba and Brazil is examined, particularly the way in which US actors (not only investors or ship captains and crews, but also, for example, American diplomats in Brazil or Cuba) evaded British and American laws after the slave trade to the US was suppressed. Chapters 2 and 3 address the way in which the fear of infectious diseases and epidemic outbreaks carried by ships disembarking African slaves in Cuba and Brazil fuelled public and medical opposition to this trade. As for Chapters 4 and 5, these deal with the effects of the slave and free black resistance movements on political debates and on popular public opinion regarding the slave trade, and the way in which the fear of rebellions contributed to the eventual suppression of the slave trade in both societies. In Chapter 6, Graden turns his attention to the role played by interpreters and translators, both Atlantic Creoles and Europeans, in keeping the traffic going, and in exerting "subaltern pressures" (Graden 2014: 177) on the international abolitionism movement that began to evolve from the late eighteenth century onwards. The last chapter is dedicated to the final years of the slave trade in Brazil and Cuba.

In turn, since it is a collection of essays, Richardson and Silva's book brings together scholars from different academic backgrounds and historical traditions who have been actively engaged in studying slavery and the slave trade for the past few years. Such institutional and profile diversity is to be noted not only in academic terms (professors, senior researchers, postdoctoral researchers, etc.), but also in geographic terms (United Kingdom, Netherlands, Brazil, Portugal, United States, and South Africa), which allows for a complementarity of approaches and knowledge, mainly archival and language-based, that is always welcome in academia. Since these authors have each been working on different chronologies, bringing them together here also allows for the coverage of a much larger time frame, 1590-1867, something that the volume as a whole delivers quite consistently. Simultaneously, this combination of authors also allows for the analysis of several topics related to the transatlantic slave trade in the South Atlantic, even if each chapter is more or less devoted to the broader umbrella of networks and cultural exchanges.

Thus, the approaches are certainly varied. Gustavo Acioli Lopes analyzes the connection, and interdependence, between Brazil's colonial economy and the labor of African slaves, particularly the way in which slaves fuelled the production, trade, and export

of products such as sugar or tobacco, as well as the mining of gold. Filipa Ribeiro da Silva examines the transnational nature of the participation of private businessmen in the Dutch Republic's trade with Angola from the late sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century. In turn, Arlindo Manuel Caldeira links the seventeenth-century Angolan slave trade to the broader Atlantic world, paying particular attention to the acquisition and transport of slaves, as well as to the harsh conditions that slaves endured aboard ships crossing the Atlantic towards the Americas. Mariana Candido focuses on trade networks in Benguela, from the early eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, highlighting the roles played by African men and women as key agents in the West-Central African traffic of slaves, linking Benguela to its hinterland, as well as to the wider oceanic space, in what she termed an "Atlantic enterprise" (p. 164). As for the chapter by José Capela, to whom the volume is dedicated, it addresses the connections between the slave trade networks in eighteenth-century Mozambique and the Atlantic dimension of this trade, examining, in particular, the links between the East African ports of Mozambique and Brazil, the French Antilles, and Spanish America. Stacey Sommerdyk analyzes twelve voyages undertaken by the Dutch vessel *Prins Willem V* to the Loango coast in the mid-eighteenth century, seeking to emphasize the agency of African merchants from Malemba and Loango Bay in the broader transatlantic slave trade. Finally, Roquinaldo Ferreira discusses the contribution of diplomatic and military abolitionism to the gradual erosion of the slave trade system in the South Atlantic from the early nineteenth century to the late 1860s.

As mentioned in the introduction, the two books are quite different in nature, but the characteristics that they do, in fact, share are a good pretext for reflecting upon the recent dynamic development that the study of the transatlantic slave trade has been experiencing. This reflection will be made in the next two sections of this article.

3. Atlantic History and the South Atlantic Slave Trade

If we had to pinpoint one of the most, if not the most, dynamic fields in Atlantic history, we would unarguably choose the history of slavery and the slave trade, and what Patrick Manning termed "Africa-Diaspora studies" (Manning 2003b: 487).⁴ As Allison Games states, "No other field has been so aggressively engaged for so many decades in pursuing an Atlantic vision and in framing the field as a whole" (Games 2006: 743). In fact, the relationship between the two is far from being a new one. In his reflections on the idea

⁴ On the slave trade and the African diaspora, see also Miller 1988 and Thornton 2015.

and contours of Atlantic history, Bernard Bailyn demonstrated how slavery, slaves, and the slave trade have long been consistently linked to the gradual development of Atlantic history (Bailyn 2005). Pierre Verger's *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le golfe de Benin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du dix-septième au dix-neuvième siècle* (1968) and Philip Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (1969) were perhaps pioneers in approaching the slave trade from an Atlantic perspective.⁵ While linking Bahia to the Bight of Benin, Verger balanced both sides of the Atlantic equally and impartially, hence making his approach an essential one for the development of an Atlantic perspective. Curtin's *Census* was equally crucial, and ended up building a school of followers committed to looking at slavery and the slave trade from the Atlantic viewpoint, a framework that he himself pursued in other seminal studies on the African diaspora.⁶

Curtin's *Census* was published long before Atlantic history had established itself as such, but this did not mean that other historians, particularly Africanist and Brazilianist historians, did not follow in Curtin's footsteps, examining the various aspects – political, economic, social, cultural, etc. – involved in the so-called Middle Passage, “a metaphor of the inhumanity and brutality of the Atlantic slave trade” (Richardson and Ribeiro da Silva 2015: 2), and placing their findings in the new and fast-growing field of Atlantic history.⁷ Soon, scholars following Curtin's tradition in the study of slavery and related issues conceptualized what came to be known as the “Atlantic system” (Bailyn 2005: 33).⁸ In time, other in-depth works emerged, focusing on the slave trade while also pursuing a conceptualization of the Atlantic world. Such was the case with Paul Gilroy's “The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness” (Gilroy 1993) or David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick's “The British Atlantic World” (Armitage and Braddick 2002).

Within this Atlantic world, many topics were under scrutiny and several different perspectives were adopted. Economic historians sought to understand the particularities of the trade, the partners involved, and the numbers as well. Political historians sought to

⁵ Frédéric Mauro's work is also worth mentioning. Mauro addresses the slave trade within the framework of his broader analysis of the Portuguese and Brazilian Atlantic economy from the late sixteenth to the late seventeenth century, but his classic study is key because of the integrated analysis he makes of the South Atlantic economy, particularly the interdependent links between Portugal and Brazil, as well as the links with the Atlantic islands and northern and western Africa. See Mauro 1960, and Mauro 1983. A similar approach, albeit wider in its scope and with far more archival material available, was carried out by Pierre and Huguette Chauvin in their classic multi-volume *Séville et l'Atlantique* (1956-1960).

⁶ For instance, Curtin 1969, Curtin 1975, and Curtin 1990. On the broader contribution of Philip Curtin and, in particular, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* to World History, see Manning 2003a: 57-61.

⁷ The volume edited by Paul E. Lovejoy and dedicated to Philip D. Curtin is a very good example of a generation of scholars deeply influenced by this professor and scholar from the University of Wisconsin. See Lovejoy 1986.

⁸ See also Solow 1991.

reveal the relationship between the slave trade and empire building, the place of this traffic within inter-imperial rivalries, and consequently its place in the relationships between European powers and local African rulers. Social historians, in turn, were curious about the impact of slavery and the slave trade in the shaping of colonial societies, and about the dissatisfaction that was gradually felt among enslaved and freed Africans. They have examined how this dissatisfaction developed into forms of resistance and rebellion, resulting in the growth of abolitionist movements, and, eventually, in the suppression of the slave traffic throughout the nineteenth century.

While the study of slavery and the slave trade has rapidly gained its own niche in Atlantic history, the hemispheric perspective suggested by Jack Green, has had greater difficulty in becoming consolidated, since, when it comes to the studies of slavery and the slave trade, the division of the Atlantic Ocean into north and south has hindered an integrated and comparative approach to the two hemispheres. In this respect, the North Atlantic has been clearly more privileged than the South. Gilroy's "The Black Atlantic" is, yet again, a good example of this, since it focuses primarily on the northern tip of the ocean, leaving its African coast behind (Manning 2003b: 493-494; Ferreira 2012: 10).

This does not mean, though, that the South Atlantic has been completely forgotten by historians of slavery, the slave trade, and the African diaspora. We just have to think, for example, of the remarkable works by Joseph Miller, John Thornton, Herbert Klein, Stuart Schwartz, Linda Heywood, João José Reis, Manolo Florentino, Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, José Curto, Roquinaldo Ferreira, and Mariana Candido.⁹ These studies, however important their analyses of the southern dimensions of the transatlantic slave trade may be, do not conceal the fact that, so far, the English-language literature on the Atlantic slave trade has paid more attention to the northern hemisphere, partly because, as Richardson and Silva note, the southern trade was dominated by Portuguese-Brazilian traders (Richardson and Ribeiro da Silva 2015: 3-4).¹⁰ It is just a matter of scale, which is why any "southern" contribution to this intricate field is more than welcome.

The two works that serve as the pretext for this brief historiographical reflection consolidate the important southern dimensions of the study of the transatlantic slave trade. David Richardson and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva's volume has a clear geographical focus on

⁹ See, among other equally pertinent examples, Miller 1976 and 1988, Klein 1978 and 1999, Klein and Vidal Luna 2009, Thornton 1983 and 1992, Schwartz 1985, Reis 1995, Florentino 1995, Alencastro 2000, Heywood 2002, Curto 2004, Curto and Lovejoy 2004, Heywood and Thornton 2007, Ferreira 2012, or Candido 2013. On Atlantic history and the slave trade to Spanish America, see Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat 2015.

¹⁰ As the editors remark, historical literature on the south Atlantic dimension of slave trade has been mostly written in Portuguese (Richardson and Silva 2015: 3-4).

the South Atlantic, an option they justify because the South Atlantic “trading systems [...] lasted almost four centuries,” a time span that, the editors believe, “provides vital insights into the workings of the Atlantic slave trade as a whole.” Besides, by focusing on the southern half of the ocean, the editors sought to “go beyond the commercial world shaped by Atlantic winds and currents” (Richardson and Ribeiro da Silva 2015: 4). Thus, although considerable attention is paid to connections with Europe, the Loango coast, and even Mozambique, most of the essays gathered together in this collection analyze trade networks between Brazil and West-Central Africa, particularly Angola. By doing so, these essays intersect with the path proposed by Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, who, in his well-known *O Trato dos Videntes*, suggested that, “united by the ocean,” the American and African sides of the South Atlantic complemented each other in a “sole system of colonial exploration,” a system where slavery and the slave trade played a fundamental role (Alencastro 2000: 9).¹¹ The relevance of the connections emphasized throughout Richardson and Silva’s volume is unquestionable, but our understanding of this South Atlantic system would have been further enriched had more attention been paid to the ties with the Bight of Benin, as was the case with the classic study by Pierre Verger (1968).¹²

In turn, Graden’s study focuses on Brazil, Cuba, and the United States, pointing to the existence of two triangles in the transatlantic slave trade during the nineteenth century: a northern triangle, linking the United States to Africa and Cuba; and a southern triangle, linking Cuba, Brazil, and Africa. Apart from highlighting the crucial role played by the US in both triangles, Graden emphasizes the multiple inter-connections between each of them, using the South Atlantic space to “bind international commerce, public health, and social history” (Graden 2014: 1, 9). Furthermore, by stressing the US involvement in the dynamics of the southern trade, Graden’s monograph succeeds in approaching the study of the transatlantic slave trade, and, thus, of Atlantic history, from the hemispheric perspective proposed by Jack Green.

At the same time, while following the connections between these different players, and thereby drawing attention to the dynamics that have been generally overlooked by historiography, Graden also illustrates the advantages of pursuing a transnational approach to the analysis of the transatlantic slave trade, in general, and to the study of the South Atlantic, in particular. The links he examines are never only one or two-way. Instead, he

¹¹ Although the two works differ in terms of methodology, Roquinaldo Ferreira makes the same proposition in his *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World* (Ferreira 2012: 245-246).

¹² See also the article by Law and Mann (1999), where the authors suggest the existence of an “Atlantic Community” that linked Bahia and the Bight of Benin (the so-called Slave Coast) through commercial, social, and cultural connections.

clearly demonstrates the multiple connections operating in many different directions and contributing to the persistence of this traffic even after the British suppression of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century, as well as to its eventual demise in the late 1860s. For example, Graden tells the story of the slave ship *Venus*, built in Baltimore, in the United States, in 1838. The *Venus* sailed to Cuba in the same year, and, once in Havana, the captain replaced his crewmen. From Cuba, the *Venus* sailed towards the islands of Cape Verde, and then to Mozambique, in Southeast Africa. In Mozambique, 1,120 African slaves were purchased and taken to Cuba aboard the *Venus* (Graden 2014: 18-19). The US participation in these trade circuits, Dale Graden argues, did much to delay the definitive suppression of the traffic, and such an understanding would otherwise have become blurred had the focus been exclusively on one nation's participation in the broader Atlantic enterprise that the slave trade truly was.

The transnational perspective is yet another element that Graden's monograph shares with Richardson and Silva's volume. Indeed, both books present the South Atlantic as a transnational space, where slave trade networks linked diverse locations across the Atlantic – Europe, Africa, and the Americas – as well as a wide array of actors, whose agency was much richer than is often believed.¹³ As pointed out earlier in this essay, one of the reasons for the predominance of studies on the North Atlantic in the English-language literature on the slave trade was the belief that Portuguese and Brazilian traders dominated the slave trade south of the Equator. This assumption is shown to be a rather narrow one by some of the chapters of *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange*.

A good example is provided by Filipa Ribeiro da Silva's study on the trade that took place between private businessmen based in the Dutch Republic (although such traders were not necessarily Dutch) and Angola. Silva's analysis of insurance, finance, commercial partnerships, and their respective agents lead her to acknowledge the Atlantic connections that these private businessmen developed across political, religious and cultural borders, thus participating together in the development of Dutch trade with Angola and, consequently, in the growth of the transatlantic slave trade (Silva 2015). Silva goes even further to suggest that the transnational organization of these voyages anticipated "forms of multinational endeavor that we commonly associate with the modern world" (Silva 2015: 99). In turn, José Capela, while exploring the Atlantic connections of Mozambique in terms of the traffic of forced African labor, observes that these networks

¹³ This fits in with David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson's observation that "Atlantic history was the result of the Creolization of peoples from four continents" (Eltis, Morgan and Richardson 2017: 1358).

were not maintained exclusively with Brazil; rather, up until the late eighteenth century, a considerable part of this traffic also headed to the French and Spanish Atlantic markets, thus involving a participation that was not exclusive to Portuguese or Brazilian traders (Capela 2015).¹⁴ A transnational perspective also proves to be useful when addressing the international or multi-national character of abolitionism. This is what Roquinaldo Ferreira does in his chapter (just like Dale Graden, although from a different angle). He shows how several dynamics contributed to the eventual suppression of the slave trade in the South Atlantic. It was not only the strong diplomatic pressure applied by the British and their seizure of Portuguese and Brazilian slave ships that made the difference, but also the military threat that they posed to the Portuguese territories in Africa. In their efforts to force Portugal and Brazil to end the forced labor of African slaves, Ferreira demonstrates how the British were able to play with the Portuguese and Brazilian “desire” for sovereignty, which was threatened in Portugal by the French, and in Portuguese Africa by the British, and which was claimed by Brazil after its independence in the early 1820s (Ferreira 2015). Ferreira’s approach exemplifies how a transnational perspective is crucial for grasping not only the multiple connections across the South Atlantic, but also all the reverberations involved in the eighteenth-century international abolitionist movement.

Europeans were, undoubtedly, key actors in the development of transatlantic trade, but the agency and participation of Africans must not be disregarded. For a long time, the history of slavery and the slave trade was told nearly exclusively from the European perspective. Many scholars have drawn attention to the agency of African actors and the possibility of studying them by bringing together diverse sources, as well as comparing and combining methodologies. The works by these scholars, with John Thornton and Roquinaldo Ferreira both being fine examples, have contradicted the idea of “African passivity” (Thornton 1992), and have overcome the assumption of the slave trade as a “process driven primarily by European actions and African resistance” (Ferreira 2012: 242).¹⁵ Indeed, as Philip Morgan recalls, “In terms of migration, Africa, not Europe, dominated the Atlantic” (Morgan 2009: 224), which is why it is crucial to look at the African agency in the various dynamics involved in the slave trade. The two books under analysis give these actors their due attention, proving once again their importance for an overall understanding of the transatlantic slave trade.

¹⁴ Luiz Felipe de Alencastro described these connections in a later period (at the beginning of the nineteenth century) as the “Atlantization of Mozambique” (Alencastro 2000: 19).

¹⁵ In his *Way of Death*, Joseph Miller also tried to explain the slave trade from the perspective of Africa and Africans. See Miller 1988.

The attention given by some of Richardson and Silva's contributors to African agency is, perhaps, responsible for the inclusion in the title of the expression "trans-cultural exchange." Indeed, the focus on these agents makes it possible, as Arlindo Caldeira has shown, to understand the dynamics involved in the acquisition of slaves, which often depended on negotiations with African merchants brokered by the so-called *pombeiros*, "enslaved or manumitted individuals of African or mixed descent," who, in the service of Luanda traders and residents, penetrated deep into the African interior to purchase slaves from African traders (Caldeira 2015: 112-118). This broad perspective also allows for the observation of a range of different actors involved in this process, as Mariana Candido does when stressing the role played by African women (*donas*) in local merchant networks in Benguela and its hinterland, not only as traders, but also as slave owners.¹⁶ Candido demonstrates how these *donas*, along with their descendants (born from their relations with Europeans), "became intermediaries *par excellence* between Portuguese and African cultures," assuring the healthy relationship between colonial Benguela and the neighboring states, and between European traders and indigenous populations (Candido 2015: 157-163). Candido is able to show how the mediation of these women was crucial for these African societies in adapting to the demands of international trade, a mediation that often involved providing slaves from the African inlands to coastal markets, thus connecting the hinterland to the Atlantic world. This diversity of agency is also explored in Stacey Sommerdyk's chapter. By looking into trade negotiations between African brokers and mediators and Dutch merchants on the Loango coast, Sommerdyk highlights African agency in the broader Atlantic slave trade (Sommerdyk 2015: 206-213). Indeed, the exercises put into practice in these chapters achieve what David Eltis and David Richardson's *Extending the Frontiers* was once criticized for; not making the due connection between the history of the forced migration of enslaved Africans and African history itself (Lovejoy 2009: 65-67).

In the case of Dale Graden's approach, when he stresses the role of interpreters and translators in defending the continuity of the trade or in disseminating the "spoken word" of resistance, he focuses not only on Europeans, but also gives voice to the Atlantic Creoles, agents that have been characterized by their "linguistic dexterity, cultural plasticity, and social agility."¹⁷ In acknowledging the crucial role played by Atlantic Creoles in shaping the course of the international abolitionist movement, Graden follows the approaches of

¹⁶ On women and slavery, see, for example, Campbell, Miers, and Miller 2008. See also Patrick Manning's reflections on the theorization of women and slavery while reviewing the latter (Manning 2009).

¹⁷ On the definition of Atlantic Creoles, see Berlin 2000: 24, quoted by Graden 2014: 151.

Ira Berlin and Jane Landers. As the latter emphasizes, the actions of these “African and African-descended actors” were of key importance to “European and American revolutions, Indian wars, slave revolts, and the international efforts to abolish slavery” (Landers 2010: 5),¹⁸ an assumption whose pertinence Graden demonstrates in Chapter 6 of his book. Here Graden distinguishes the interpreter, “an intermediary who enables face-to-face interaction between persons who speak different languages,” from the translator, “someone who translates a written document from one language to another” (Graden 2014: 152), and the agency he concedes to both groups coincides with Philip Morgan’s observation that “Africans, not Europeans, took the initiative in learning the others’ languages; and the grammar of the various trading languages (or pidgins) that emerged on the coast owed most to African languages” (Morgan 2009: 225).

The inclusion of diverse actors and agents in the analysis of the transatlantic slave trade depends greatly upon the theoretical and methodological approach chosen. This does not have to do exclusively with the choice of Atlantic history as the framework or angle of analysis; it also has much to do with the empirical support on which historians base their research. The opportunities posed by the digital era in which we are currently living tend to be widening, with the day-to-day appearance of new projects and tools in open-access modes. In fact, digital outputs are now a necessary feature of any project applying for funding, including in the area of the Humanities.

4. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database

The inclusion of a diversity of actors and agents in the analysis of slave trade networks and of transatlantic traffic as a whole allows us to understand the various dynamics involved in the forced migration of African slaves, thus contributing to a much more complete understanding of the way in which this trade operated, its short-term impacts, and its long-term consequences. The effort that all the authors contributing to the two books made in highlighting the diversity and agency of these actors is laudable, but their achievements owe much to one of the most important tools yet devised to help scholars of slavery and the slave trade in the pursuit of their research goals: the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database.¹⁹ Coordinated by David Eltis, the database has been praised by academia in general ever since it went online in 2008. It has also, of course, received

¹⁸ See also Berlin 1996; Berlin 2000; and Graden 2014: 150-152.

¹⁹ Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database: <http://www.slavevoyages.org/> (accessed May 2017).

some criticism, but the success it has so far achieved proves, among other things, that the Digital Humanities are, and will long continue to be, an absolutely crucial complementary field of historical research.

For a long time, it was believed that the study of slavery, slaves, and the slave trade, as well as the broader study of the African diaspora, lacked the necessary sources to allow for a full understanding of all the dynamics involved. As pointed out earlier in this essay, historians protected themselves by invoking this presumed absence in order to avoid addressing the subject other than from a clear European perspective. In the last few decades, however, the picture has changed quite considerably, and historians now have access to a diversity of sources and archives that have greatly enriched their perspectives for analyzing the field.

The two studies clearly demonstrate the usefulness of this diversity. In *Disease, Resistance, and Lies*, there is an evident predominance of English consular documentation, namely from the Foreign Office Records. Of these Dale Graden focused on the correspondence of British diplomats and officials residing in Cuba and Brazil. Despite the scanty references to Cuban and Spanish documentation, Graden made an effort to complete his study with American and Brazilian archival research, as well as with the use of published sources, namely medical reports and writings on diseases deriving from the African slaves who disembarked in the Americas.

As for the essays published by David Richardson and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, these confirm all the advantages to be gained by gathering together a group of historians with varied historiographical profiles and from a range of institutional backgrounds. Not only do they have different language skills, but they also have quite different sources to draw from, as well as different approaches to the study of such sources, so that the combined contribution of these authors provides a significant introduction to the study of the slave trade in the South Atlantic. The volume brings together research carried out in Portuguese, Brazilian, Angolan, Mozambican, Dutch, English, and Italian archives, and the types of sources used are most varied, including notarial documents, official correspondence, diplomatic documentation, commercial records, and even literary sources, to name only a few examples, even if, in the case of some chapters, it would suit the reader better to have complete information about the particular document cited (e.g. type, author, recipient, date, location, etc.). Even if most of these chapters are syntheses of more extensive and previously published works, they consist of original archival research that greatly enriches the overall contribution made by this volume.

Although the diversity of sources used in both works speaks for itself, the combined use that the two volumes make of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database completes and consolidates the archival research carried out by their authors. The two books under consideration here reflect the impressive operational capacities of the Slave Voyages project and demonstrate, once again, why this database has become essential in conducting any study on the transatlantic slave trade, coming very close to fulfilling David Eltis and David Richardson's hopes of representing a "new era of slave-trade studies" (Eltis and Richardson 2008a: 5). Indeed, the database is believed to be "the most significant work on the quantification of the Atlantic slave trade to have appeared since Philip D. Curtin produced his census of the commerce" (Silva and Sommerdyk 2010: 77), and to have "challenged scholars to reconsider the impact of the slave trade on the Atlantic world" (Curto and Lovejoy 2010).

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, or the Slave Voyages project, is not new. Not only does it constitute a timeless working instrument for students, teachers, and specialists undertaking studies of the slave trade, and a platform that is accessible to the public in general, but scholars are also still discovering and exploring innovative ways in which the database can be used. In fact, the potential and relevance of this type of data has been generally recognized ever since Philip Curtin published the *Census*. The original seed of the project was planted long ago, and its first major harvest was reaped in 1999 in the form of a CD-ROM, "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: a Database on CD-ROM", which comprised records on 27,233 voyages (Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson and Klein 1999). At that time, digital projects were still very much a mirage in a dim future, and it took nine years for an upgraded, revised and enhanced version of the CD-ROM to be put together in the form of an open-access website (2008). The "Voyages" website now includes information and data on nearly 36,000 slave voyages, and, as can be read on the website, "no less than sixty percent of the slave voyages in the Voyages Database contain information unavailable in 1999."²⁰ To this end, and aside from the many people belonging to the project team, over fifty scholars have contributed with their own data and research, allowing the estimates provided by the database to cover the whole Atlantic basin in an extremely solid manner. The level of collaboration involved in the database is absolutely remarkable.

²⁰ "History of the project," at <http://www.slavevoyages.org/about/history> (accessed May 2017). On the history and evolution of the project, see also Eltis and Richardson 2008a.

Throughout the life of the project, which began long before the CD-ROM was launched in 1999, many studies have been carried out using its information, but the online database has, indeed, increased the availability of its data to a growing number of scholars. David Eltis and David Richardson illustrated the potential of the database with the publication of a collection of essays demonstrating the possible approaches, as well as the publication of an atlas that visually maps these slave voyages, a work that the Africanist historian Joseph Miller has described as “monumental” (Miller 2011: 589). If Eltis and Richardson’s *Extending the Frontiers* and *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* reinforced many of the avenues of research made possible by the data set, other authors who have been utilizing this digital project have not lagged behind, having benefited from its data in making their important contributions to the understanding of the transatlantic slave trade, the African diaspora, abolitionism, etc.²¹ These studies exemplify the full range of the information pertaining to the slave voyages that is available in the data set: ship’s name; ship’s owner; ship’s captain and size of crew; place of embarkation of the slaves in Africa and their disembarkation in the Americas; age and gender of disembarked slaves; tonnage of vessels; numbers of Africans that died on board; and information on rebellions taking place on board slave ships, among other records.²² Such a diversity allows for a panoply of different approaches to the study of the transatlantic slave trade, not only from the perspective of economic history, but also from the standpoint of social, cultural, and even political history. Methodologically speaking, the Slave Voyages database facilitates comparative studies and large-scale approaches, thus encouraging the study of slavery and the slave trade from a perspective of global history that embraces the multiple connections both within and outside the Atlantic basin (Caldeira 2015: 103).

Regardless of its potential, and just like any project of such a large dimension, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database does, of course, have its weaknesses. Much of the criticism that was made of the database was related to the numbers and the estimates, and the debate it has triggered is far from being closed (we may even assume that it will never be so).²³ On the other hand, the database reveals some limitations when it comes to indicate the exact place where the slaves came from within Africa, as well as their final

²¹ See, for instance, Silva 2011, Ferreira 2012, and the special issue of the journal *African Economic History* edited by José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy, “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database and African Economic History” (vol. 38, 2010), with essays by Paul Lovejoy, Jelmer Vos, Daniel Domingues da Silva, Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Stacey Sommerdyk, Henry B. Lovejoy, and Suzanne Schwarz.

²² See the table entitled “Select Summary Information Contained in the Revised Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyage Data Set (TSTD2)”, Table 1.1, in Eltis and Richardson 2008a: 9.

²³ See, for instance, Inikori 2011.

destination after their disembarkation in the Americas. Likewise, it is not the best source for understanding the cultural dimension of the African diaspora; nor does it provide the necessary information to address the emotions involved in the slave trade and in slavery in general, not only the pain and suffering, both physical and emotional, but also the conditions experienced by slaves when in captivity.²⁴ These are weaknesses that the two books under consideration do not conceal or resolve, nor do they attempt to do so. What the two volumes do demonstrate is some of the methodological possibilities described above.

In the volume edited by Richardson and Silva, the use of this database appears as one of the central objectives of the book or, as Richardson and Silva put it, it “provides an important evidential foundation for several of the essays in this volume [...] thereby underlining the centrality of electronic resources to ongoing research into the multi-national history of transatlantic slavery” (Richardson and Silva 2015: 8). This makes perfect sense, given that David Richardson has been involved in the development of this powerful tool since its very early stages. Indeed, albeit in different ways and with different degrees of centrality, nearly every author in this collection uses or mentions the database, making the volume a palpable example of the diversity of approaches and possible uses of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, while also demonstrating the great explanatory capacities of the information contained in it.

Hence, Arlindo Caldeira, for instance, while acknowledging the underrepresentation of slave voyages from Luanda, uses the database to look at the number of slaves recorded as embarking at Luanda during the first half of the seventeenth century (Caldeira 2015: 103-104, 111), and to assess mortality rates among slaves on board ships disembarking at Brazilian ports (Caldeira 2015: 141). The Slave Voyages’ data set can also be used to examine the average length of the voyages from African to American ports, as Mariana Candido does in her chapter to reinforce her argument that slave voyages from Benguela to Rio de Janeiro or Salvador da Bahia, in Brazil, could be shorter and, therefore, more profitable for Brazilian traders than for the owners of ships that set sail from Lisbon (Candido 2015: 148-149). Candido also employs the database to calculate the number of slaves embarking in Benguela and disembarking in Rio de Janeiro or Salvador da Bahia in the second half of the eighteenth century, a number that rose to as high as 305,057 slaves (Candido 2015: 152). In turn, José Capela shows how this digital tool may help to link the

²⁴ Some of the criticisms made of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database are pointed out in Paul Lovejoy’s review essay “Extending the Frontiers”. See Lovejoy 2009.

Indian Ocean to the Atlantic world. He demonstrates, for instance, how, throughout the eighteenth century, expeditions between Southeast Africa and Brazil were no more than sporadic, never exceeding twelve voyages per year, and only achieving this figure in the years of 1786, 1790, and 1797 (Capela 2015: 182). He also uses the data collected from the database to show how slaves leaving Mozambique were transported mainly to the Atlantic markets of Spanish America and the French Antilles.²⁵ The database can also be used to analyze slave voyages according to ship owners, as Stacey Sommerdyk did with the Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie. In an effort to understand the key role of the Loango coast as a supplier of slaves to the Dutch company, Sommerdyk sorted the number of slaves supplied to the company by port and by West African region. She realized that Malemba, on the Loango coast, was the main supplier of slaves to the company, providing 7,651 slaves. Compared with the 6,325 supplied by Cape Lahou on the Windward coast, the Loango coast was “the largest single regional supplier of slaves in western Africa” (Sommerdyk 2015: 204-205).

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database is no less important in Graden’s study. It proves to be an indispensable tool when, for instance, Graden examines the widespread fear of infectious diseases caused by the disembarkation of African slaves in the Brazilian ports. Graden uses the Slave Voyages project, for example, to follow the voyages of the US-built ship *Brazil* and to measure its hypothetical involvement in the spread of the 1849 yellow fever epidemic in Brazil. The *Brazil* had set sail from New Orleans and had arrived in Salvador da Bahia in September 1849. According to its captain, the journey from the former to the latter had been direct, but, going through the database, Graden observed that the *Brazil* had previously disembarked African slaves both in Brazil, in 1848, and subsequently in Cuba. By June 1849, yellow fever had already spread throughout Havana, which leads Graden to suggest that the epidemic in Bahia had Cuban origins (Graden 2014: 70). The database also proves to be a crucial tool when Graden examines the ship connections between Cuba and the African coast, as well as the slave expeditions and disembarkations in Cuba from 1821 until the suppression of this traffic in 1867. The importance of the Slave Voyages project in Graden’s study as a whole is illustrated by the tables he included in the appendices, most of them drawing upon information contained in the database, even if in combination with other sources.

²⁵ Capela 2015: 185. In the period between 1717 and 1799, of the 16,393 slaves that had embarked in Mozambique, 13,373 disembarked at the ports of Spanish America. As for the French Atlantic markets, in the period between 1759 and 1793, of the 35,697 slaves that had embarked in Mozambique, 25,843 disembarked in the French colonies.

5. Conclusion

The close examination of the two books reviewed in this essay was an opportunity to reflect upon the past, the present, and the future of transatlantic slave trade studies, particularly as far as its southern dimension was concerned. This essay has sought to stress the dynamic interest that this field of research is currently experiencing, but also to assess some avenues that are being followed and should keep being pursued in the future. The focus on the South Atlantic has brought to light many relevant dynamics regarding the functioning of the transatlantic slave trade as a whole, as David Richardson and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva noted in their introductory essay. The “transregional” and “transnational” approaches that are being developed have greatly contributed to this situation. They have highlighted additional and multi-directional connections and interactions, and they have drawn attention to the participation of multiple actors in the South Atlantic slave trade besides the Portuguese and Brazilian traders. Hence, these works demonstrate that the Dutch or the Americans, for instance, also played a significant role in the dynamics of the slave trade south of the Equator. They also show that African agents, both men and women, played a crucial role in the overall functioning of the trade and, later on, in its eventual suppression, something that often implied, for example, looking beyond the coastal regions of West Africa and considering the internal dynamics of the African hinterland.

The examination of both volumes is also an opportunity to think about the benefits of digital collaborative projects, in general, and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, in particular. What the database has been doing for the field is absolutely remarkable, regardless of the shortcomings that it may have or the debate that it may have caused regarding some of its estimates. The dialogue that it has stimulated is actually good evidence of its success and of its usefulness. In the future, one can hardly imagine any study on the transatlantic slave trade, north or south, which does not at least partly utilize the information contained in the Slave Voyages project. The close collaboration involved in its development will guarantee the gradual improvement of what might today be considered by some critics to be flaws or limitations in the database.

It is expected that the richness of the approaches that have been put to such stimulating use in both books may inspire others that have so far tended to be absent from slave trade studies. For example, what can a transnational perspective or the Slave Voyages database do for our understanding of the suffering of slaves, not only in the course of their

capture, but also on board slave ships, and during their subsequent captivity, working on plantations, and so on? Studying the lives of slaves from the standpoint of the history of emotions, for example, is something that is not solved only with a broader approach or by resorting to computerized data (apart from the slave revolts on board ships that clearly express collective forms of anger and discontent). This, however, does not make broader perspectives, whether transregional or transnational, nor the database itself any less valuable. It simply draws attention to the need to seek new ways of understanding the more human dimension of slave traffic.²⁶

Another possible approach is, for example, the study of slavery and the slave trade from the perspective of the history of human rights in the long term.²⁷ Oral history is, of course, a good path to follow in seeking to achieve that objective, as too are slave biographies.²⁸ However, more effort should be taken in uncovering and compiling archival evidence similar to that contained in Gomes Eanes de Zurara's description of the first mass arrival of African slaves in the Portuguese slave market of Lagos, and the slaves' partition thereat. In his description, the chronicler demonstrated that, already in the fifteenth century, there was something close to a "humanized" perception of slaves and of their suffering, which they expressed in both tears and screams (Zurara 1841, Chapter XXV).²⁹ The exercise of looking beyond the numbers and the purely commercial and economic reasoning behind the slave trade could perhaps link the early stories of slavery and the slave trade to those that, albeit silent, still exist today in many different forms.

²⁶ Roquinaldo Ferreira's *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World* has nonetheless contributed to filling in this gap (Ferreira 2012).

²⁷ This has, for example, been done from the perspective of legal history. See, for example, Martinez 2012.

²⁸ Although their goal is not to place slavery or the slave trade within the broader framework of the history of human rights, Roquinaldo Ferreira's *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World* and Arlindo Caldeira's recent *Escravos em Portugal* provide some good examples of the usefulness of these biographies. See Ferreira 2012 and Caldeira 2017.

²⁹ See also Russell-Wood 1978: 29-31.

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Received for publication: 22 May 2017

Accepted in revised form: 12 June 2017

Recebido para publicação: 22 de Maio de 2017

Aceite após revisão: 12 de Junho de 2017