

**Daniel B. Domingues da Silva. (2017) *The Atlantic Slave Trade from West Central Africa, 1780–1867*. Cambridge University Press: New York, 243 pp. (ISBN 978-1-107-17626-3). Hardback/Ebook.**

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This book concerns the Atlantic slave trade during the nineteenth century within its globalised functioning. It is an attempt to describe the whole enslavement procedure starting from the origins of slaves and to bring to light new perspectives and undiscovered sides about the slave trade; this attempt sometimes has led the author to confute previous results of studies about slavery. Daniel Domingues da Silva, within the introduction of this book, clearly remarks that there is a lack of research regarding the origins of slaves from West Central Africa (p. 8) and to make up for this lack is one of his main intents in this work. Furthermore, within the introduction, there is an explanation about the contraposition between quantitative and qualitative methods; the author tries to use both quantitative and qualitative methods, considering that they are usually used as 'mutually exclusive' (p. 10).

Chapter one (pp. 16-37) traces the route regarding the paths taken by slave trade during the nineteenth century: the Haitian revolution, the British slave trade abolition and the contrasts to slave trade caused a great expansion of the Iberian trade. Namely, the trade was moved further South (its starting point's centre could be placed in Luanda and in ports North and South of Luanda) and the vast majority of slaves were taken to Brazilian ports. The author's sources mostly rely on a web archive named *Slave Voyages* on which the same author has worked, making an important contribution.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter two (pp. 38-72) is about the actors involved in the slave trade between West Central Africa and Brazil. These actors are subdivided into merchants, brokers and traders. After acknowledging the favourable climatic conditions consisting of the currents of the South Atlantic Ocean, the author states that other factors that allowed the trade between Central West Africa and Brazil to flourish were the cultural and economic ties. This slave trade route was mostly based on shipments based on small investments financed by Portuguese and Brazilian merchants. Brokers, who supplied slaves for the shipments, were also an important part of the slave trade; depending on the area, they were Africans or Portuguese. Traders were always African or Luso-African.

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<sup>1</sup> Slave Voyages, (2015). *Slave Voyages*. [online] Available at: <https://www.slavevoyages.org> [Accessed 29/06/2019].

Within chapter three (pp. 73-99), the author confutes the interpretations about the origins of the slaves, which were based on the wrong assumption, which claimed that their origin was mostly internal; he instead showed that their origin was almost always coastal.

As shown in chapter four (pp. 99-121), the vast majority of slaves were males for economic reasons; in fact, most of the times it was not the European patriarchal cultural consideration towards women as not able to perform heavy jobs but the economic logic of Africans who considered women as a high value for agricultural labour tasks that caused a high percentage of slaves to be males. Furthermore, another interesting fact is that children were an important part of slaves' shipments, a fact that for various reasons has been raised over the years.

At the beginning of chapter five (pp. 122-142), the author summarises really well its content: 'The majority of slaves were purchased for Asian and European textiles, rum produced in the Americas, and weapons brought largely from Europe' (p. 122). Following an innovative approach, Domingues da Silva demonstrates that these goods were not used by Africans to satisfy their basic needs but to satisfy their personal taste. It is interesting to point out that this element makes slave trade a global phenomenon because of the origin of some of these goods.

Chapter six (pp. 143-166) shows us the methods of enslavement: most of the slaves were low-class people outsiders enslaved after small-scale conflicts; only a small proportion of the totality of slaves were insiders thanks to judicial proceedings.

Despite the initial intent of the author to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis, most of the book or, at the least, most of the interesting conclusions, are based on quantitative data analysis; nevertheless, chapter six seems a very good example of how the mixed method should work and it traces a path for future academic works in the wake of this. Apart from this not really important note of method, the author is really an expert on the topic of the slave trade because of his genius and his in-depth knowledge of the topic, also thanks to his contribution to the same data on which most of the interesting analyses of this book are based.

In conclusion, this book should be hopefully considered as a milestone in its field because it confutes many aspects of previous studies on the subject and opens many new future avenues in this field of research.