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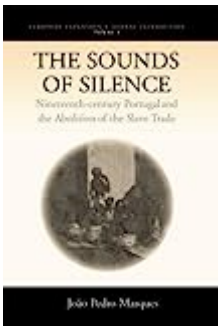

Joao Pedro Marques. *The Sounds of Silence: Nineteenth-Century Portugal and the Abolition of the Slave Trade.* Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006. 282 S. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-447-0.

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The Sin of Omission

A surprising number of scholars (more than one would ever think possible) seems to believe that the slave trade ended in 1807. Of course, "slave trade" here refers to the Atlantic slave trade and only a portion of it–the portion directed to the United States and British Caribbean–ended in 1807. These scholars, as well as many others, would benefit from reading this book, which highlights the role played by the Portuguese in prolonging the Atlantic slave trade and the rationale behind their eventual agreement to end that role.

To say that the nineteenth century, in particular its first fifty years, was not a good time for Portugal is something of an understatement. The Napoleonic invasions, the departure of the royal family to Rio de Janeiro, the subsequent British occupation of the country, Brazilian independence, and a liberal revolution in 1820 were all disastrous preludes to a bitter civil war (1832-34) between the supporters of crown prince Pedro (also known as Pedro I of Brazil, Pedro IV of Portugal) and his brother Miguel. Marques shows in great depth that the struggle to end the slave trade was closely linked to such (mostly) political events, several of which were well beyond Portuguese control; perhaps as importantly for scholarship on this subject, he also identifies Portuguese interest in this policy as minimal in such a tempestuous context. In the author's words, "the period from 1820 to 1834 was one of the most troubled periods in Portuguese history. In those years of great transformations and break-ups, revolutions and uprisings, of the loss of an empire, of constitutional advances and retreats, the issue of slavery was very low down on the list of Portuguese concerns" (p. 93).

Marques's work is divided into six chapters. The first centers on Portuguese moves toward ending the slave trade in the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. The second discusses the continuation of the slave trade in spite of British pressure from the early 1800s until 1820 to end it. The third chapter examines the impact of the 1822 loss of Brazil on public debates over ending the trade. The fourth chapter is very much the heart of the book and traces the ongoing and intensified interaction with the British over ending the trade during the 1820s and 1830s. In this chapter, Marques establishes how the pro-slavery/pro-slave trade argument became

intertwined with a strong nationalistic anti-British sentiment in response to British pressure to end the trade. One pro-slave trade Lisbon newspaper at the time went so far as to portray the Luso-British relationship as one of slave and master. This chapter also presents an outline for a Portuguese indentured labor scheme, similar to that used by the British in North America, in which Africans would freely come forward for peaceful transportation to work in Brazil for six years. This case represents an outstanding example of how far some politicians pushed arguments for continued labor schemes in the face of the inevitable end of the slave trade. That the scheme was even discussed also demonstrates how far removed these Lisbon residents were from the realities of the trade and daily life in their African colonies.

The final two chapters address these ideas and realities. Chapter 5 examines the Portuguese role in suppressing the slave trade after the 1847 Anglo-Portuguese treaty and places this suppression in the context of national honor. That is, Marques argues that the motivation for Portuguese treaty enforcement was not a sudden national sentiment in favor of outlawing the trade but rather two solid reasons that were both tied in some way to national honor. The first and most obvious of these was that the Portuguese had agreed to a series of international treaties ending the slave trade and the British (and other abolitionist forces) continued to focus international attention on Portuguese actions (and especially inaction) in an unending effort to force the "Portuguese door" of the Atlantic slave trade to close (p. 159). The second aspect of national honor was that the enforcing power (in this case Portugal) needed to control or occupy the coastal area(s) supplying human traffic. This gave Lisbon authorities the opportunity to extend their control over previously contested areas of northern coastal Angola. In this chapter, Marques also discusses how a small part of the trade could continue between Angola and SÃ£o TomÃ© in various guises. Chapter 6 examines an issue related to ending the slave trade: Portuguese interest in or neglect of its African colonies during this same period (1800-50). In this chapter, Marques revisits the oft-quoted position of Richard Hammond on Portuguese "uneconomic imperialism" (p. 193) and more recent arguments put forth to counter this view.[1] Marques concludes that both views are flawed because they fail to appreciate the duality of opinions on the colonies, one side favoring development (what he calls the enthusiast approach) versus the other group of indifferent skeptics. He makes clear that, while this period produced no end of plans, schemes, and companies planned for the colonies, none went further than paper. The same can be said for a multitude of emigration plans that had very little impact in the colonies. Portuguese emigrants during this period went to Brazil, British Guyana, Hawaii, and the United States. Hardly any went to Portuguese Africa. The work ends with a very brief conclusion that reviews the double meanings and political responses to *silence* in this work: the first silence is a lack of debate or interest; the second is "as a form of resistance to the advance of abolitionism" (p. 249).

Why would the Portuguese want to prolong the Atlantic slave trade and not end it with most of the other European powers? Some of the reasons that Marques has found in claims made by various Lisbon politicians and newspapers will be familiar to the reader, such as that the process was bringing "civilization" to Africans. Other reasons may not be as well known, and are worth including here to give a sense of their range and variety. At certain times, and in response to specific situations, Portuguese politicians and newspapers rejected ending the Atlantic slave trade because doing so would lead to the collapse or disintegration of Brazil; would offend newly independent Brazil and threaten good relations between the two counties; would lead to the loss of the African colonies; would cause the economic collapse of the African colonies; would be unwise because of the lack of a strong authority in the colonies; and would lead to revolutions in the colonies, which would then unite with Brazil; and would encourage smuggling. Further, the colonies needed more time to develop agricultural exports to replace slave exports; big interests were tied to the trade and hasty action was unadvisable; if Africans had no buyers for their slaves, they would kill their enemies, possibly resulting in cannibalism; and poor Portuguese (mariners) might be apprehended (south of the equator) by British ships and imprisoned.

This is only a partial list; the many reasons uncovered by Marques would fill pages. Nevertheless, this list suggests to the reader how extensive and convoluted these arguments could be. It also shows aspects of the internal rationale that countered British efforts to end the trade through a series of threats, agreements, and treaties negotiated over the first half of the nineteenth century.

Despite whatever may be put in writing, people, institutions, and countries will read what they desire into an agreement after the signing. As Marques shows, Lisbon authorities were ever-creative in their interpretations and did agree to some measure to end parts of the Atlantic slave trade throughout this period. One such ex-

ample is the 1817 treaty with Great Britain that ended legal trading north of the equator. Politicians in Lisbon then found ways to avoid its implementation or to use the agreement to extend the life of the overall trade. In this case for example, at one point the Lisbon authorities tried to use the promise of strict enforcement of this agreement to prevent any British inspections south of the equator. As Marques carefully notes, this would be have been "one step forward and two steps back" in the overall effort to end Portuguese involvement (p. 104). Marques also shows how the 1836 prohibition was also creatively and selectively interpreted by Lisbon, and especially colonial authorities, until its full and unconditional implementation was unavoidable in light of the 1847 agreement with Great Britain and the international attention focused on Portugal.

Readers unfamiliar with Portuguese history may be very surprised by all this foot-dragging and lack of enforcement of international agreements. The truth of the matter is that the Portuguese crown could and did bend laws frequently when it suited national or personal interest. For example, in early modern times, the crown continued to award lands, offices, and cash even in cases where the land in question had been lost to other powers twenty to fifty years earlier;,the office was already occupied and had a waiting list of four or five others, or the office had ceased to exist altogether. In other words, enacting a law or royal decree was one thing and seeing it enforced or made tangible was a completely different matter, frequently divorced from any reality. The early modern crown also had a tendency to micro-manage distant colonial situations, which frequently led to local officials ignoring laws from Lisbon. These same tendencies of imperial management lingered into the nineteenth century and form much of the backdrop to Marques's discussion of the end of the Portuguese slave trade. After reading Marques's work, it becomes abundantly clear that Lisbon authorities would agree to any number of treaties or other arrangements, formal or informal, in order to continue their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. When this strategy did not work, they reverted to a policy of saying nothing–the silence of the book's title.

Marques does a stellar job of tracing the public discourse on Portuguese involvement in the slave trade in Portugal and also especially in Luso-British relations. His main sources are newspapers, pamphlets, parliamentary debates, and diplomatic correspondence. While the reasons for the long delay in ending Portuguese involvement in this trade are not always stated, it is clearly conveyed that too many powerful people were making too much money for the Lisbon authorities to want to end it quickly, if at all. Of all the reasons for not ending the trade cited above, the only one that has the ring of truth about it is that big interests were involved. This is true for metropolitan society and doubly so for colonial elites. Although beyond the scope of Marques's work, it would be instructive to know who the slavers were, how far their political connections extended, and the depth of their pockets. Such a study would benefit from including African and Brazilian agents as well as Portuguese–if the relevant documentation exists and is accessible. Marques takes a couple of steps in this direction when he mentions a number of famous slavers, their clubs, and contacts with Lisbon *politicos* and later when he cites the numerous slavers who returned from Africa after the trade ended with Brazil and were able to use their profits to purchase respectability.

I have to congratulate not only the author on this very polished and sophisticated discussion of the complex topic of nineteenth-century Portuguese public discourse but also Richard Wall, the translator. While I have not read the work in the original Portuguese, it strikes me that this must have been a difficult and very demanding text to translate. I offer just one sentence to make my point: In discussing the ongoing debates on the slave trade in the context of Brazilian independence and reactions to it in Lisbon, the translation reads, "the ideological backdrop took on new tonalities and layers, and became overloaded with the idea of African interests, which made it more difficult to abandon the half-tints of the tolerationist [i.e., those who tolerated the continuation of the trade] approach" (p. 93). Clearly, Mr. Wall had a dense text in the original and has done an exemplary job.

The audience for this work consists of a very wide range of scholars, from those concerned with the slave trade itself, the nineteenth-century Atlantic World (especially British foreign relations), nineteenth-century Portugal, and Portuguese Africa, especially Angola. The book also complements a modest and growing literature on nineteenth-century Portuguese Africa and a much larger body of work about various forced labor regimes in Lusophone Africa during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This work is especially important and relevant since it fills a gap between the two. The work could be used successfully in a graduate class. It is well written and filled with the political intrigues of nineteenth-century Lisbon, using a great deal of primary materials. By focusing on the personalities and debates of the period, Marques clearly explains why and how Portuguese authorities delayed ending the county's role in

this trade, long after most other powers had withdrawn.

Note

[1]. For a complete discussion of these two contrasting views, see Richard Hammond, *Portugal and Africa, 1815-1910: A Study in Uneconomic Imperialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); and Valetim Alexandre, *Origins do colonialismo portuguÃªs moderno, 1822-1891* (Lisboa: SÃ¡ da Costa, 1979).