

JAH Forum

EXTRAVERSION, CREOLIZATION, AND DEPENDENCY IN THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE*

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Abstract

This article considers the Atlantic slave trade in relation to ‘extraversion’ in African history. Drawing especially on the work of Jean-François Bayart, it argues that slaving fit a long-term pattern in which elites drew on external connections in order to further their wealth and power at home. In doing so, they also opened their societies to new goods and ideas, thus bringing about cultural creolization. This is a different approach to the question of creolization than is commonly found among Americanist studies of Atlantic slavery, which tend to treat cultural change without consideration of politics. The concept of extraversion thus helps to link culture and political economy. Nevertheless, it also bears refinement. Recent scholarship on African involvement in the Atlantic slave trade – some of it detailed in this article – makes clear that extraversion may have reflected African agency, as Bayart insisted, but that it also entangled African societies in destructive relationships of dependency.

Key Words

Historiography, slave trade, precolonial, political culture.

More than twenty years ago, Jean-François Bayart suggested a long-term pattern of ‘extraversion’ in African history. In *The State in Africa: Politics of the Belly* (Fr. 1989, Eng. 1993), Bayart argued that given the difficulties rulers faced in extracting resources from their own dependents, African leaders past and present have used access to materials and services from outside their own polities in order to extend and maintain wealth and power. The availability of land and simplicity of farming technologies meant that heavily exploited people could always leave their societies and set up elsewhere; in turn, this ‘exit option’ imposed limits on leaders’ political and economic power over their subordinates. In this context, the external political and commercial environment, in Bayart’s view, became ‘a major resource in the process of political centralization and economic accumulation’ for elites as well as for subordinates seeking autonomy.¹ Frederick Cooper’s conception of African colonial and postcolonial states as ‘gatekeepers’ rests on

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1 J.-F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2010), 22–3. Also see J.-F. Bayart, ‘Africa in the world: a history of extraversion’, *African Affairs*, 99:395 (2000), 217–67, reprinted as the preface to the second English edition of *The State in Africa*, x–lxxiv.

a similar analysis of the difficulties of local exploitation, the resulting political and economic importance of controlling access to the outside world, the interweaving of political power and wealth, and resulting patterns of internal political struggle.² Though their focus is on more recent eras, both Bayart and Cooper have suggested that extraversion facilitated and was shaped by Africa's external slave trades. Yet even as scholarship on the development and internal effects of overseas slaving has flourished in recent years, few historians of the Atlantic slave trade have explicitly drawn on this conceptual model. This represents a missed opportunity, not only for placing the slave trade in the *longue durée* of African history but also for conjoining different strands of scholarship on the Atlantic slave trade.³

Bayart's foremost concern was to emphasize African agency and the specific 'historicity' – by which he meant distinctive political patterns – of African societies. Approvingly, he quoted Kwame Nkrumah: 'We should write our history as the history of our society in all its fullness. Its history should be a reflection of its self, and contact with Europeans should only figure in it from the viewpoint of the African experience.'⁴ Bayart was responding in particular to Walter Rodney's book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, which famously argued that contemporary African poverty was the result of the overseas slave trade and European colonization.⁵ As Bayart saw it, the trouble with Rodney's analysis, and that of other members of the so-called 'dependency school', was that in attributing global inequality to the domination and exploitation of the West, it located agency outside of Africa and inadvertently reinforced longstanding, racist images of black people as passive victims. In contrast, Bayart insisted that Africans had long controlled their own destinies, even under conditions of violence and subordination. In trade, colonialism, and beyond, he argued, African elites cooperated with Europeans because those relationships brought them access to resources they could use in their own bids for wealth and power. Over the past quarter century or so, this emphasis on African agency has come to dominate scholarship on the Atlantic slave trade, with historians highlighting the roles and motivations of African elites involved in slaving.⁶ At the same time, Americanists studying Atlantic slavery have also repudiated previous assumptions about African powerlessness, though their focus has been on the culture of the enslaved.⁷ As in John Thornton's well-known text, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, the slave trade for Africans appears as a matter of political economy,

2 F. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002).

3 Richard Reid, for one, has called for historians to pay greater attention to Africa's deeper past, especially as it helps to illuminate contemporary issues. See R. Reid, 'Past and presentism: the "precolonial" and the foreshortening of African history', *The Journal of African History*, 52:2 (2011), 135–55.

4 Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 6.

5 W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, 1972).

6 For instance, see D. Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2000). There are also studies much more focused on cultural changes associated with the slave trade, but these are primarily by anthropologists rather than historians. See C. Piot, 'Atlantic aporias: Africa and Gilroy's black Atlantic', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100:1 (2001), 155–70; and R. Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago, 2002).

7 Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA, 2007) is something of an exception, emphasizing the hopelessness of captivity, particularly in the Middle Passage.

while for Afro-diasporans its impact was on such things as language, religion, and family life.⁸

Bayart's approach helps us to reconcile these two separate tendencies. Bayart linked the political economy of extraversion to a concept that has become practically a keyword for Americanists studying the slave trade: creolization. For them, creolization refers to the cultural transformations of African slaves and their descendants in the Americas, as variously affected by their African backgrounds, the Euro-American cultural milieu, and the material constraints of slavery.⁹ While some scholars have highlighted the creativity of the enslaved as they assimilated to the ways of Europeans and other Africans, others have insisted that distinct African practices and worldviews persisted in the Americas, even spreading beyond their core communities.¹⁰ A few historians have extended the creolization concept to Atlantic Africa, locating 'Atlantic creoles' in the West Coast trading ports or the areas of Central Africa affected by European trade and Christianity.¹¹ The concept is not without critics, however. In this *Forum* and elsewhere, James Sweet argues that creolization has been described as if cultural change solely implied Europeanization, rather than 'an open, complex, multi-faceted "process"'. In this respect, he is not far from Bayart in rejecting the assumption that change was European- rather than African-driven. Sweet urges scholars to consider African cultural dynamics, alternative ontologies and epistemologies, and African influences on Europeans.¹² Taking a different approach, Vincent Brown has suggested that trying to index how 'African' or 'African American' individuals or groups were – a pre-occupation of some studies of creolization – 'leaves the mistaken impression that people's sole aim was to achieve a distinct cultural identity'. Rather, culture offered tools for surviving the physical, social, and psychological ravages of slavery. We therefore need to study culture as part of the politics of the enslaved, and to think of politics expansively.¹³

8 J. K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1998). For differences in Americanist and Africanist approaches to the slave trade, see J. W. Sweet, 'The subject of the slave trade: recent currents in the histories of the Atlantic, Great Britain, and Western Africa', *Early American Studies* 7:1 (2008), 1–45, esp. 34–41.

9 The seminal text is S. W. Mintz and R. Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992 [orig. pub. 1976]). See also I. Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

10 An example of the former is P. D. Morgan, 'The cultural implications of the Atlantic slave trade: African regional origins, American destinations and new world developments', *Slavery and Abolition*, 18:1 (1997), 122–45. For the latter, see Thornton, *Africa and Africans*; J. H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); and J. H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011).

11 I. Berlin, 'From creole to African: Atlantic creoles and the origins of African-American society in mainland North America', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 53:2 (1996), 251–88; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*; L. M. Heywood and J. K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (New York, 2007).

12 In addition to Sweet's two books referenced already, see his review of Heywood and Thornton's book in *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 83:1–2 (2009), 124–7.

13 V. Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 7. Also see V. Brown, 'Social death and political life in the study of slavery', *American Historical Review*, 114:5 (2009), 1231–49.

Bayart's conception of extraversion does this, locating political economy at the heart of creolization, itself conceived as a 'phenomenon . . . inherent in the historicity of African societies'.¹⁴ When Africans opened their societies to political and economic resources from abroad they introduced new goods, practices, and ideas. Particularly focusing on the colonial period, Bayart argued that this was part of a heterogeneous, ambiguous, violence-laden process of *subjectivation* – of creating new lifestyles derived both from political domination and from Africans' active domestication of foreign ways and things.¹⁵ It did not entail 'clumsy mimicry' or attempts to become European, but rather creative 'acts of reappropriation and invention'.¹⁶ Indeed, the domestication of foreign cultural elements has a long history in Africa. Anticipating Sweet's argument about creolization, Bayart reminded readers that because of interregional trade, migration, and so forth, outsiders to given African societies were most often other Africans, creating cultural change internal to the continent. In fact, he argued, Africans have never been completely isolated from foreign influences, and thus there are no distinct African cultural forms that have not evolved through engagement with the rest of the world. 'The interaction between Africa and the rest of the world cannot be considered a relationship, since Africa is in no sense extraneous to the world.'¹⁷ Thus there is no pristine, untouched set of African dynamics. Rather, African cultures have long been creolized in one way or another even as they have changed in relation to intensifying contact with outside forces. 'Today, as at the time of the slave trade', he wrote, 'what is really at stake is not the safeguarding of a problematical cultural veracity, but controlling the ideological and material resources resulting from integration into the world economy.'¹⁸

If the concept of extraversion helps us to bridge Americanist and Africanist scholarship on the slave trade by connecting politics and culture, however, it also bears refinement. Bayart's emphasis on African agency struck critics as overdrawn. Mahmood Mamdani, for one, was incredulous: 'Dependency theory is thereby stood on its head as modern imperialism is – shall I say celebrated? – as the outcome of an African initiative!'¹⁹ Recent Africanist historiography on slaving provides the opportunity to further reconsider the relationship between agency and dependency. Over roughly the past decade, scholars have drawn inspiration and specific data from the monumental Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database compiled by David Eltis, David Richardson, and others.²⁰ Rather than sweeping overviews, they have produced ground-level studies of the origins, development, and consequences of the slave trade in particular African contexts.²¹ Such studies make clear that

14 Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 28.

15 *Ibid.* xlvii–liv; Bayart, 'Africa in the world', 246–51. See also J.-F. Bayart, *Global Subjects: A Political Critique of Globalization* (Cambridge, 2007), ch. 4.

16 Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 27.

17 Bayart, *The State in Africa*, xxxiii; Bayart, 'Africa in the world', 234.

18 Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 28.

19 M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 10.

20 D. Eltis et al., *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, (<http://www.slavevoyages.org>).

21 In addition to works mentioned elsewhere in this article, examples include R. Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 2002); K. Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760–1900* (Bloomington, IN, 2007); and W. St. Clair, *The Door of No Return: The History of Cape Coast Castle and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 2007).

agency and underdevelopment were connected features of an Africa unequally tied to other parts of the world. As I will discuss in the rest of this essay, they illustrate how the slave trade fit into patterns of extraversion, how extraversion and creolization were linked in Atlantic commerce, and how the initiatives of African elites could nonetheless produce dependency in African societies.

EXTRAVERSION AND ATLANTIC SLAVING

The connections between extraversion and slaving are perhaps best documented for so-called 'predatory states'. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Kongo, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Segu and Futa Jallon, and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dahomey and Asante, military expansion generated tribute and captives, some of whom were exchanged for weapons and luxury goods to maintain the army and patronage systems.²² In return for enslaving others, warriors received weapons, trade goods, and often wives. Their captives came initially from the wars of expansion as these states consolidated, but over time they were produced as taxation or raids from outlying polities. Though their strength related to other kinds of trade as well as intensive agriculture, Martin Klein reminds us that 'the slave trade was essential to the reproduction of such states'.²³ Victims were members of smaller-scale societies outside the jurisdiction, but within range, of the larger predatory states. In time, many of them too sought internal strength through external connections.

As recent studies show, decentralized societies were not just targets of predatory states. They reorganized for defense, sometimes making use of the slave trade for their own purposes and in this way becoming 'extraverted' themselves. The Balanta of Guinea, for instance, had in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries lived in dispersed homesteads, cultivated yams, and engaged in only limited regional trade. As overseas demand increased, however, they became increasingly vulnerable to slaving raids. In response, they began to move into larger villages, and they shifted their farming to rice because of its nutritional efficiency. In order to grow rice, however, they needed iron tools. Coastal people in the Guinea-Bissau region had long traded with Mandinka merchants from inland for small quantities of iron, although the narrow range of goods they produced limited their purchasing power. As Atlantic merchants increasingly visited Upper Guinea ports, they offered

22 B. Barry, *Muslim Revolutions and the Atlantic Slave Trade: Senegambia before the Colonial Conquest* (Eng. trans., Cambridge, 1998); R. A. Kea, *A Cultural and Social History of Ghana from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: The Gold Coast in the Age of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, Volumes 1–2 (Lewiston, NY, 2012); R. Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550–1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford, 1991); P. Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge, 1990); J. C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison, OH, 1988); R. L. Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford, CA, 1987); Thornton, *Africa and Africans*.

23 M. A. Klein, 'The slave trade and decentralized societies', *The Journal of African History*, 42:1 (2001), 49–65; M. Klein, 'The impact of the Atlantic slave trade on the societies of the western Sudan', in J. E. Inikori and S. L. Engerman (eds.), *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham, NC, 1992), 25–47.

a new source of iron to coastal people, but in exchange they demanded slaves. Balanta then became involved in slaving, often preying on other Balanta communities and using weapons derived from the slave trade. Balanta and other decentralized societies also sold people from within their own communities, enslaved through judicial processes, especially witchcraft trials, or for debt.²⁴ Moreover, individuals within such groups turned to slaving on their own accounts. In Upper Guinea and elsewhere, men within decentralized societies sometimes became clients of larger states, supplying them with slaves in order to extend their own power and authority at home. Surveying the literature on decentralized societies and the slave trade, Klein argues that generational conflict fueled much of their engagement with Atlantic markets.²⁵

Thus different levels of extraversion operated in overlapping ways. On the collective level, there were states where selling slaves into the Atlantic economy reinforced political centralization, alongside decentralized societies organizing to exchange slaves for survival. At a more individual level, slave marketing supported the power of elites, but it also offered upstarts the resources to rise within their societies or to set out on their own. The question of gatekeeping was crucial in these dynamics. The slave trade – like ‘globalization’ more generally – linked not whole societies but particular nodes of interaction. Leaders of centralized states worked to maintain control over those trading sites, whether by attempting to conquer coastal ports or through other means of ensuring that foreign traders dealt only with those who were properly authorized, overseen, and taxed. Once Ouidah became the kingdom of Dahomey’s outlet to European trading partners, for instance, the state maintained close supervision of external trade through its principal administrator, Yovogan, the ‘chief of the white men’.²⁶ Where potential nodes of exchange were more numerous, the slave trade often reinforced political fragmentation, as multiple suppliers worked to evade centrally-controlled commercial channels and develop others for their own access.²⁷

The Bight of Biafra, with its numerous water outlets and dense population, would seemingly offer many potential sites of interaction and thus tend toward political fragmentation and a proliferation of slave-sellers. Until the early eighteenth century, though, there was relatively little overseas slaving from this region. After that, the slave trade developed with the expansion of the Aro trading network, which, as Ugo Nwokeji shows, centralized a high volume of slave exports even in a context of political decentralization.²⁸ Nwokeji’s purpose in *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra* is to explain how the Aro and the external slave trade shaped each other. In a way, the Aro can be seen as gatekeepers as well as middlemen: they controlled the flow of mostly Igbo captives to European traders,

24 W. Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400–1900* (Portsmouth, NH, 2003); W. Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1830* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 2.

25 Klein, ‘The slave trade and decentralized societies’, 65.

26 R. Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving ‘Port’, 1727–1892* (Athens, OH, 2004).

27 I am drawing here on Frederick Cooper’s notion of gatekeeping (in *Africa Since 1940*) and also his elaboration of globalization as operating through particular nodes in, among other places, ‘What is the concept of globalization good for? an African historian’s perspective’, *African Affairs*, 100:399 (2001), 189–213.

28 G. U. Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2010).

along with the influx of imported goods into local societies, and their wealth and strength derived from their near-monopoly of this trade. Yet the Aro did not, strictly speaking, belong to a state, but rather constituted a trade diaspora. Aro settlers spread out from their original home at Arochukwu, infiltrating Igbo settlements and sometimes forming their own. The Aro served the interests of elites where they settled, bringing new economic resources as well as the capacity to export unwanted people like political opponents, criminals, and social outcasts. Their position also relied heavily on the use and threat of violence – not so much to capture slaves, which others did for them, but to ensure their continued access to supplies and outlets for trade. Geographically dispersed, the Aro maintained a cohesive identity as well as a coordinated trade strategy through a set of their own institutions including a central council, a religious oracle, and a confraternity with judicial functions.

A similar linkage of extraversion and coordinated decentralization operated along the Gold Coast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Rebecca Shumway details.²⁹ Her study of the Fante shows that coastal slaving did not lead to destructive conflicts between small-scale polities. Because of their long history of trading gold to Europeans, Shumway argues, people on the Gold Coast had developed mechanisms for integrating commerce without the local violence that came with slaving. This foundation served them well with the region's transition to the slave trade in the eighteenth century. The Fante confederation presented a united front *vis-à-vis* slave traders and allowed for cohesion against Asante threats from the north. Allied elites channeled captives to one nodal point, Anomabo, thereby reducing the possibility that Europeans would trade with upstart Africans. In this case, as with the Aro, extraversion was the key to political strength and prosperity, but tight central coordination meant that it did not bring political fragmentation.

Shumway also traces the long-lasting cultural changes brought by external trade. In the eighteenth century, local *asafo* militias responded to the military threat posed by Asante, a new religious shrine offered protection, and the modern Fante language evolved from political and commercial interaction. While these changes affected large numbers of people, those in direct contact with Europeans also made cultural bridges with their mainly English trading partners. Eno Baisiue Kurentsi, known in English as John Currantee, was the most powerful man in Anomabo in the 1740s and 1750s. He welcomed an Anglican missionary to his home, spoke some English, enjoyed imported tobacco and rum, married a daughter to a prominent Irish trader, and sent sons on missions to France and Britain. One recalls in this context Ira Berlin's early Atlantic creoles – the provisions dealers and fisherfolk who supplied the coastal trading installations, as well as the personnel who worked in the fort.³⁰ These were the forebears of the cosmopolitan Fante who, Shumway briefly suggests, formed much of the nineteenth-century Gold Coast intelligentsia, and whose descendants composed part of the first generation of nationalist elites in independent Ghana.

29 R. Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, NY, 2011).

30 Berlin, 'From creole to African'.

EXTRAVERSION, CREOLIZATION, AND DEPENDENCY

Toby Green's *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* makes the links between a political economy of extraversion and cultural creolization explicit. Cape Verde and nearby parts of Western Africa, he argues, were sites of the first Atlantic creole societies, created through trade with European mariners, indexed by the new Kriolu language, and characterized by both violence and cultural flexibility. Coastal trade, and the cultural accommodations that came with it, echoed pre-existing relationships between Upper Guineans and members of trans-Saharan trade diasporas. As Upper Guineans adapted to Mandinka expansion toward the coast, they had already engaged in 'primary creolization' by incorporating foreign traders bearing not only non-local goods but also a monotheistic religion, Islam. This broad pattern persisted as European traders, many of them displaced and culturally adaptable Iberian 'New Christians', increasingly sought to purchase slaves on the Upper Guinea coast. Green makes clear that Atlantic connections offered new possibilities for African rulers: as early as 1488, for instance, a Jolof prince traveled to Portugal seeking a political alliance with which to confront a rival; more broadly, Kassanké elites of the Casamance bettered their positions within Mandinka imperial networks by supplying slaves to the New Christians at Cape Verde and settled among them on the mainland. He also stresses the reciprocal cultural influences on Upper Guineans and their Iberian trading partners, many connected through marriage and residence as well as business. 'Commerce and the operations of merchants', Green writes, 'were thus an essential part of both the cultural history of Western Africa in the Atlantic era and the way in which the region related to the Atlantic world.'³¹

Yet at root, Green's emphasis is on violence, disorder, and ultimately, African economic dependency. If African patterns shaped Atlantic slaving, as his careful differentiation of Upper Guinea shows, nonetheless African societies were soon overwhelmed by the trade. Larger political entities fragmented, as multiple contestants for power were able to access the iron – used for weapons and tools – brought by foreign traders. Fragmentation then reinforced the necessity for external trade, in order to acquire the means of defense, and thus the cycle of dependency continued. Political reorientation came with violence and insecurity. Productive surpluses in the form of food crops were diverted to European settlements and ships, intensifying agricultural labor even as communities became increasingly oriented toward defense.

In Bayart's formulation, this linkage between extraversion and dependency often takes second place to the stress on African agency and internal dynamics in African societies. Bayart refers to African leaders' '(possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment' and the role of Africans as 'active agents in the *mise en dependence* of their societies'.³² As Joseph Miller's classic *Way of Death* showed for the slave trade from Angola to Brazil, though, extraversion as a political strategy carried enormous risks.

31 T. Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge, 2012), 85 (on the Jolof prince) and quotation on 285.

32 Bayart, *The State in Africa*, 22 and 24.

Exchanging people for the goods that brought in more people—through distribution, patronage, debt, and warfare—enlarged rulers' political and productive bases. However, when leaders lost exclusive access to outside resources to their external or internal rivals—or even when they just feared such a loss—the scale of violence and destruction associated with the production of slaves grew along with the scale of external dependency.³³ This is why the cases of decentralized societies involved in slaving on a relatively stable basis, described above, are so remarkable.

As Roquinaldo Ferreira and Mariana Candido both detail, it was not only along the eastward-moving 'slaving frontier' described by Miller that Central Africans became victims of the Atlantic trade. In *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World*, Ferreira draws upon contextualized life histories to illustrate the commercial, political, and cultural links between Angola and Brazil largely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Candido, in *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World*, focuses on political and cultural transformations in and around Benguela.³⁴ Near Portugal's Central African colonies, they show, African leaders (*sobas*) who had become Portuguese vassals relied on imported goods and Portuguese-sponsored armed force to maintain their positions. Although their own freeborn subjects were entitled to protection against enslavement (in theory if not always in practice), *sobas'* dependence on external goods nonetheless put their subordinates at risk. To pay their creditors or meet colonial exactions, elites increasingly produced slaves through judicial processes, witchcraft accusations, and abduction, creating a steady stream of slaves to the coast even from areas relatively free of warfare. Moreover, Candido asserts that colonial agents of Portuguese, Brazilian, or Luso-African origin were themselves engaged in capturing slaves, often in military engagements against recalcitrant *sobas* and using African troops raised through levies against other African leaders. These processes spread violence and political instability along with slaving both in the hinterland and near the coast.

As elsewhere, the Central African slave trade also brought new linguistic, religious, and other cultural influences to local societies, particularly in the coastal entrepôts of Luanda and Benguela. Even further inland, Candido argues, Central Africans adopted some European clothing styles, cultivated New World crops like manioc and corn, drank Brazilian liquor, and baptized their children in the Catholic Church. In the hinterlands, Ferreira notes, traveling salesmen known as *pombieros* offered imported goods on credit not only to *sobas* but to a widening range of ordinary people, who ultimately were expected to pay their debts with slaves if they could not settle them otherwise. Though they shared a similar cultural background with those they captured, these traders also distinguished themselves through their connections to the outside world. Some *pombieros* became known as *negros calçados* ('blacks wearing shoes') and were perceived as whites by other Africans. Angolan officials accused them of using their special status to request release from the duties, like portage, that other Africans allied to the Portuguese were

33 Miller, *Way of Death*.

34 R. A. Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 2012); M. P. Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (Cambridge, 2013).

expected to perform, while local people victimized by slaving sometimes targeted them for attack.³⁵

This example powerfully illuminates the nexus between extraversion and creolization. We know that although Africans purchased weapons and tools, the major trade item exchanged for captives was imported cloth. European slave traders constantly complained about changing African fashions and worked to deliver the colors and prints demanded by African consumers. Thus cloth as a mark of wealth and patronage linked local rulers to international traders, making consumer desires a motor of extraversion. At the same time, people who wore foreign cloth or exotic clothing held exceptional status – not only rulers, but also intermediaries like Central African *pumbieros* or the West African *signares* with their local version of European dress.³⁶ There is more to be said about clothing, desire, status, and extraversion.³⁷ My point here is that changing local demand for foreign fashions tied leaders to trading relationships, fueled patronage ties, indexed the emergence of new categories of people, and was part of the creative appropriation of the foreign. Thus it exemplified the connections between extraversion, creolization, and dependency, even as it reflected the assertion of African traders' own agency.

AGENCY AND IMPOVERISHMENT

One reason that extraversion provides a useful conceptual model is that it suggests long-term patterns in African history linking the era of slaving to the colonial period and the present. Walter Rodney was not wrong in arguing that the slave trade was a disaster for Africa, even if he under-emphasized African participation and only vaguely described the specific ways slaving brought underdevelopment.³⁸ These days, some economists have picked up where Rodney left off, identifying a correlation between a history of external slave trading and current poverty in Africa.³⁹ The trouble with their models, which focus on population losses and political fragmentation, is that they rely on static notions of African political groupings and leapfrog between the period of the slave trade and the present, without paying attention to developments chronologically in between. Extraversion as a persistent strategy, a 'matrix of action' as Bayart called it, suggests a useful way around these problems, linking Africa's participation in the external slave trade and associated political disintegration, the large-scale export of its raw materials under

35 Candido, *An African Slaving Port*, ch. 2; Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange*, ch. 2.

36 Miller, *Way of Death*, ch. 3; G. E. Brooks Jr, 'The *signares* of Saint-Louis and Gorée: women entrepreneurs in eighteenth-century Senegal', in N. J. Hafkin and E. G. Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford, CA, 1976), 19–44; G. E. Brooks Jr, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, OH, 2003).

37 See, for instance, J.-F. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* (Chicago, 2005), 195–226.

38 For a critique of Rodney's argument that overseas trading smothered African manufacturing, see D. Eltis, 'Precolonial Western Africa and the Atlantic economy', in B. L. Solow (ed.), *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge, 1991), 97–119.

39 See, for example, N. Nunn, 'Historical legacies: a model linking Africa's past to its current underdevelopment', *Journal of Development Economics*, 83:1 (2007), 157–75. A. G. Hopkins introduces Africanist historians to recent economic studies of African poverty in his article, 'The new economic history of Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 50:2 (2009), 155–77. Also see Reid, 'Past and presentism', 142–3.

colonialism, and the persistence of economically unproductive 'gatekeeper states' in the present era.⁴⁰

Understanding the slave trade and impoverishment in this way acknowledges African participation, even while describing how the strategic actions of some resulted in overall damage to their societies. Today's scholarship makes very clear that African actors helped to create and sustain the Atlantic slave trade, even as it spread violence and disorder and even as it became increasingly difficult to resist. As in Cooper's conception of modern gatekeeper states, elites' self-interested choices brought large-scale harm, but they also followed the logic of the prevailing political economy, itself an Afro-European 'co-production'.⁴¹ This is a sober evaluation of the limits of African agency. As Green puts it, 'of course we must recognize the role and autonomy of African societies in this period [of the slave trade], but we must do so whilst also grasping the very real constraints which the institution of Atlantic slavery imposed on both slaves and the African societies from which they came'.⁴²

This returns us to the different approaches to the slave trade in Africa and the Americas, and to the relations between culture and political economy. Relative to European capital, both slavers and the enslaved held subordinate positions in trans-Atlantic structures of commercial and political power; but their agency was hardly commensurate. Agency is not something that people do or do not *have*, of course; what we really need to know is what people wanted to do and what they were able to do, given the circumstances in which they lived and the obstacles they faced.⁴³ The Americanist focus on cultures of the enslaved is based on the assumption that their sphere of political action was limited. For Atlantic Africans, creolization was deeply connected to political processes: facilitating exchanges among trading partners, distinguishing members of new intermediary groups, propelling demand for foreign expertise and things. Yet Africans too were unable to control the long-term dynamics of Atlantic slaving. Thus the linked processes of extraversion and creolization, crucial to driving the system of Atlantic slavery, reflected the differently weighted limits on the power, as well as the creativity and will, of Africans at home and in the diaspora.

40 Bayart, 'Africa in the world', 234.

41 Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, esp. ch. 8.

42 Green, *Rise*, 21.

43 W. Johnson, 'On agency', *Journal of Social History*, 37:1 (2003), 113-24.