https://doi.org/10.14195/1645-2259_25-2_12

MORGAN, Jennifer L. (2021). ***Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic.*** Durham: Duke University Press, 296 pp., ISBN: 9789004428508.

Reckoning with Slavery is the new book by the black Atlantic studies scholar Jennifer Morgan. In this fantastic book, Morgan explores the topic of slavery between the 16th and 18th centuries. However, contrasting with scholarship on this topic, Morgan does not focus on the enslavement of male Africans. Instead, Morgan focuses on how enslaved women's reproductive role shaped the early Atlantic slave trade. This is an original and important focus because most scholarship on the Atlantic slave trade has focused on male slaves. Resultantly, most of the scholarship has concluded that, in fact, the majority of slaves were men. However, Morgan argues differently. She contends that women, due to their reproductive potential, have been, in fact, central to the slave trade. Morgan claims that while women were forced to have children and create families, they were at the same time denied kinship ties and treated as commodities. Her core argument is that because enslaved women could produce wealth by having more slave offspring, then they had a fundamental role in how slavery was shaped: the ideology surrounding African women was the compass for most slave trade because African women were a fundamental source of wealth.

The question that comes immediately about her work is: how does she conclude, in contrast with previous scholarship, that women were fundamental to the slave trade? What underlies the significant change is, in fact, Morgan's methodology. Informed by Black Feminism, Morgan takes the black female as an absent presence, i.e., figures who are seemingly absent and it is through that absence they appear. More precisely, Morgan contends that the absence of women in the slave records is an absence that speaks; it is precisely through this absence that enslavers could rationalise their actions without feeling guilty. This way, enslavers could deny that Africans had any form of kinship relations, family ties, gender, etc. For if there was no kinship for Africans, it was easier for enslavers to separate parents from children, spouses, and siblings.

But where there is oppression, there is resistance. According to Morgan, African women realised that they played this fundamental role in the Atlantic economy and could create forms of resistance with their bodies. Morgan contends that abortion, suicide, and infanticide were not, as usually conceived in historiography of the slave trade, accidents, acts of madness or manifestations

of desperation. Instead, Morgan upholds that such acts were rebellious acts, using the body as a place for resistance to disrupt the slave market.

Morgan's book is fantastic, and it is worth a read. Her black feminist methodology makes a significant difference in the conclusions drawn, which are plausible (PESTANA 2023). More work should use black feminism and critical race theory methodologies to analyse primary sources in history. The only shortcoming in Morgan's book is her focus on English sources only: other sources, like those from the Portuguese Atlantic slave trade, are relevant. Portugal had a fundamental role in the slave trade (TYMOWSKI 2020; BLACK 2015; WOLF 1994; SAUNDERS 2010).

There are, in fact, important female African figures in the history of the Portuguese slave trade; these include Kimpa Vita and Queen Nzinga (CAVAZZI 1965; THORNTON 1998; HEYWOOD 2019; THORNTON 1991). These women offered resistance to the Portuguese slave trade in very creative ways. Kimpa Vita used Christianity as a way to rebel against the slave trade from within the belief system of the time. Queen Nzinga, on the other hand, was a master strategist who could play with her gender to further her goals (CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES 2024). Particularly, Queen Nzinga's case would play an important role in the questions addressed in Morgan's research. Queen Nzinga became a Queen due to her royal blood lineage and kinship. Hence, the case that Morgan makes that African women's lineage was ignored is slightly challenged: it seems that there is a social class dimension in the questions of kinship and familial denial of African women. All in all, a good book, but it would be more rich of it also included sources beyond the English Atlantic.

References

BLACK, Jeremy (2015). *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History*. New York: Routledge.

CAVAZZI, Giovanni Antonio (1965). *Descrição histórica dos três reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola*. Junta de Investigações do Ultramar.

CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES, Luis (2024). *Angolan Political Thought: Resistance and African Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

HEYWOOD, Linda M. (2019). *Njinga of Angola: Africa's Warrior Queen. Reprint edition*. Harvard University Press.

PESTANA, Carla Gardina (2023). "Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic, by Jennifer L. Mor-

gan". *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 97, 1-2, 142-43. https://doi.org/10.1163/22134360-09701033.
SAUNDERS, A. (2010). *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555*. 1st edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
THORNTON, John (1991). "Legitimacy and Political Power: Queen Njinga, 1624-16631". *The Journal of African History*, 32, 1, 25-40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700025329.
THORNTON, John (1998). *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
TYMOWSKI, Michał (2020). "Chapter 9 African Slaves in Portugal – Cultural and Psychological Aspects." In . Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004428508_011.
WOLF, Kenneth Baxter (1994). "The 'Moors' of West Africa and the Beginnings of the Portuguese Slave Trade". *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, January. https://www.academia.edu/7399830/_The_Moors_of_West_Africa_and_the_Beginnings_of_the_Portuguese_Slave_Trade_.

Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues *
Yuelu Academy, Hunan University
lccmr1984@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9571-2120

* Funding Yuelo Academy Subject Construction Fund Support, grant number 541109010001.