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O abolicionismo português em perspectiva comparada

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Portuguese Abolition in British Perspective

Seymour Drescher*

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I

The abolition of the slave trade and slavery entailed a dramatic paradigm shift for all European empires with large-scale slave systems. An imperial obsession with the processes of wealth creation had to come to terms with one that insisted upon the welfare of its enslaved wealth-producers. The slave trade had to be redefined as manstealing and the institution itself as an intolerable crime against humanity. Over the course of a century, between the 1780s and the 1880s, all Western overseas empires transformed themselves from empires of slavery to empires of antislavery.

During the intervening century Western societies did not proceed at the same pace from one frame of ideological and political reference to the other. Studying the different trajectories of European empires from slavery to antislavery has now become a growing field of scholarly interest. The Portuguese case offers equally interesting opportunities for comparative analysis. We can best begin with the general findings of economic historians. Fifty years ago it was widely accepted that New World slave plantations were fundamentally flawed enterprises. At best they were hot-house systems, using inefficient labor. They yielded short-term profits followed by rapid decline. It now seems fairly clear that in comparative terms most histories of abolitionism and emancipation must begin with a different premise. In every major Atlantic empire the ideological and political assaults on the slave system began when they were both economically viable and usually at expansive moments in their history. Demographically too, the political attacks on the slave systems began when their slave recruitment systems – the slave trades – were in full gear. Neither demographic nor economic endings to slavery were anywhere in sight.

* **University of Pittsburgh**

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In the 1780s every participant in the Atlantic system, both actual and prospective, assumed that slavery was and would continue to be a significant component of imperial or national wealth and power. The transatlantic slave trade reached its all time peak during the decade after 1783. More than 100,000 enslaved Africans were annually transported to the Americas, not counting the thousands who died en route to the Western hemisphere (Eltis, 2007, Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database). Participation in the system was not confined to ships sailing under the flags of the "big three" carriers: Britain, Portugal and France. Merchants from Sweden to Italy sought to invest new capital in the booming slave or sugar trades. The British Caribbean colonies resumed the trade badly interrupted by the war of American Independence. The British slave trade reached its decadal peak in the 1790s. During the decade after 1783 the French slave colonies became the world's leading customers of Africans. In 1790 the 55,000 slaves landed in French ports far exceeded numbers ever approach in any other imperial domain. Saint-Domingue was the premier exporter of sugar and coffee in the world. In most parts of the Atlantic the great Saint Domingue slave revolution that began in 1791 only intensified the search for entry or re-entry into the Atlantic slave system (Eltis, 2007, Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database).

When the British began to debate the abolition of the slave trade at the end of the 1780s, the French were beset by turmoil on both sides of the Atlantic. The other colonial powers speculated about the new opportunities opening for them by the shortages of tropical products produced by the Saint Domingue revolution. The Spanish monarchy abandoned its centuries-old policy of *asientos* the controlled method of delivering Africans to Spanish America. Even Russia, the only major empire without eighteenth-century ambitions for involvement in New World slavery, now explored the possibility of acquiring a Caribbean colony. Throughout Latin America merchant capitalism, based upon slavery, was poised for continued expansion. Portugal, of course, was not immune to the general impulse to enlarging slave empires with all deliberate speed. Despite its threatening implications, the Saint Domingue slave revolution stimulated slaving in the Portuguese orbit to a fever pitch. The value of Brazil's sugar exports doubled between 1790 and 1807. Its coffee industry expanded even more spectacularly. Exports rose seven-fold from 1790 to 1807.[1]

Nevertheless, between the Saint Domingue Revolution and the abolition of the British and American transatlantic slave trades in 1808 it was the British colonies that took greatest advantage of the Franco-Caribbean revolutions. Between 1790 and 1807 Jamaica's sugar exports rose by nearly 80 percent. Its coffee exports expanded even more spectacularly, by 1500 percent. Jamaica quickly displaced Saint Domingue as the greatest single producer of both staples in the Atlantic world (Drescher, 1977; Drescher, 2010, 79, Table 18).

In terms of actual and potential imperial development the British and Portuguese both had enormous potential for further growth in the wake of the French and Caribbean Revolutions on the eve of British slave trade abolition. In 1806 The British West Indies accounted for 55 percent of all the sugar reaching the North Atlantic market, a share which no empire had approached during the previous century. About 35,000 Africans a year were landed in British and Portuguese America on the eve of British abolition.

1 On the Iberian empires, see Adelman, 2006, 56-100. On Spanish trade policy, see Salmoral, 1996.

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Brazil's slave population of three quarters of a million was larger than the number who toiled under British imperial control. The underdeveloped territory available for further British exploitation was also far smaller than those available in Portuguese Afro-America. However, the British empire expanded its slave frontier more than tenfold in the decade before it abolished its slave trade. [2]

Viewed from other perspectives, however, the British and Portuguese slave empires were on different trajectories even before the British legislated the ending of their transatlantic slave trade. Demographically, the ratio of metropolitan Portuguese to Brazilian population was only 3:2 in 1800. The corresponding ratio of the British metropolite to its Caribbean population was 35:2. Equally striking was the different economic significance of the British and Portuguese slave colonies to their respective metropoles. On the eve of slave trade abolition the British West Indian share of metropolitan trade was at its all-time peak. Nevertheless, the contribution of Britain's West Indian and African trades combined was to the British imperial economy "no greater than that of many other economic activities" (Eltis and Engerman, 2000, 123-44).

By contrast, by the start of the nineteenth century, Portugal was ever more dependent on African slaving and Brazilian production to sustain its trade surplus with Great Britain: "By 1807 more than 60 percent of all Portuguese exports came from Brazil alone" (Adelman, 2006, 116). Portugal's trade surplus with the rest of the world was likewise achieved by a trade deficit with Brazilians. In the crucial decades before British abolition the Brazilian, African, and Portuguese segments of the empire were all aware that their South Atlantic economic system, both colonial and metropolitan, was tied to the expansion of slavery.

Their respective economies therefore allowed metropolitan British abolitionists more leeway to convert hostility to the British slave trade into political action. Leeway itself, however, was not sufficient to ensure the triumph of an attack on a flourishing economy. What was required was the conversion of metropolitan Britons to a new paradigm. The history of the Netherlands demonstrates that neither a stagnant slave system nor a declining slave trade was sufficient to inspire an effective abolitionist movement, much less an abolitionist outcome. [3] What, then, allowed the inhabitants of the British metropole to successfully undertake a fifty year sequence of abolitionist initiatives: to organize an abolitionist mass movement (1787); to induce their national legislators to abolish the British slave trade (1807); to stimulate their government internationalize the attack or the slave trade (1814/1815); to sustain abolitionism in series of mass movements from 1788 to 1838 to commit their society to the emancipation of its colonial slaves (1833-38); to globalize the campaign against the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, (1830s/1840s); to secure the ending of the transatlantic slave trade by (1867); and, finally, to globalize the paradigm shift against slavery by having antislavery recognized as an international obligation of "civilization" (1889-90). This transformation was completed within a century after the launching of British political abolitionism (Drescher, 2009, chapter 8-10; Miers, 1975, chapter 6).

How was this done? As the European pioneers in the attack on the Atlantic slave trade, British abolitionists were faced with formidable obstacles. During two decades of public and parliamentary discussion before slave trade abolition there was still a widespread

2 Compare Drescher, forthcoming 2010, 34, Table 10; and Andrews, 2004, 41 Table 1.1.

3 See Oostindie, 1995, especially the essays by Seymour Drescher (pp. 25-66) and Maarten Kuitenbrouwer (pp. 67-88).

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consensus in Britain that slavery remained a significant and valuable contributor to the wealth, power, and public finances of the empire. Especially during a period of momentous wars and revolutions the British slave colonies were viewed as reliable producers, trading partners and taxpayers. Moreover, the victory of slave trade abolition was long postponed by a widespread assumption that unilateral British abolition would only redound to the benefit of those empires that continued slaving as usual. The stimulus to the slave trade as a result of the Saint Domingue slave revolution in the 1790s only fortified this assumption.

In this context it is no wonder that it required two full decades of intermittent popular agitation and parliamentary maneuvering for British abolition to become law. British abolitionist mobilization was embedded within a much broader transformation of British society. By the late eighteenth century Britons and North Americans shared one of the most highly developed civil societies in the Atlantic world. A thickening network of newspapers encouraged an evolving dialogue between people and legislators in Britain. Newspapers connected provincial readers not only to the nation's political leaders in London but to provincial readers actors throughout the metropole. Outside of Parliament, public debates, associations, libraries, debating societies, religious congregations and public meetings offered citizens multiple venues for launching local discussions and national petitions. Rapid economic development encouraged the formation of pressure groups and techniques that could easily be transferred to political movements (Oldfield, 1995; Drescher, 1987); Midgley, 1992; Temperley, 1972).

Within this broader framework abolitionism came to occupy a distinctively innovative position. Between its emergence as a national social movement in 1787 and the globalization of antislavery in the 1840s, British abolitionism became a pioneering organization in the mobilization of hitherto untapped groups as political actors. The great surprise of British abolitionism was its breadth, depth, and duration. Popular agitation came in successive waves over the half-century between 1788 and the end of the 1830s. A mass petition from industrial Manchester catalyzed the first abolitionist mobilization in 1787. It became the model for the most of the 100 petitions in the provincial campaign of 1788. Manchester's 10,000 petitioners represented two-thirds of the city's eligible adult males. Manchester also advertised its petition in every major newspaper in England, calling for similar petitions. As a result, appeals for abolition comprised more than half of all petitions sent to parliament in the 1788 session. At a conservative estimate more than 60,000 individuals signed the abolition petitions of 1788.

The abolitionist public sphere quickly expanded. From the outset organized religious dissenters rallied to the movement. Unitarians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, and evangelical Anglicans quickly added their support to the initial Quaker cadres. Although parliament still generally considered women's signatures as delegitimizing public petitions, female voices and propaganda burst forth in debating clubs, poems, and pamphlets. Newspapers took note of their activities. Public space also opened for Africans. Olaudah Equiano's autobiography became the first popular narrative of an African lifetime journey from transatlantic cargo, to British freeman, to abolitionist writer and lecturer. During a second petition campaign, in 1791-92, more than 400,000 names flowed into London, timed to arrive just in time for the debate on William Wilberforce's successful motion for gradual abolition in the House of Commons. At that point the

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abolition campaign had recruited the largest numbers of petitions and signatures ever to flow into parliament on a single subject. [4]

The modus operandi established in 1788-92 continued for half a century more. When British abolitionists shifted their attention towards the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies in the early 1820s, petitioning continued on an ever greater scale. More than 5,000 petitions reached Parliament in 1831 and again in 1833. From the mid-1820s women inserted themselves en masse into the category of legitimate signers. By 1830 non-conformist dissenters welcomed women as a crucial presence. By 1833, on the day scheduled for the introduction of the Slave Emancipation Bill in the House of Commons, the largest single antislavery petition in British history arrived by carriage at the doors of Parliament. "A huge featherbed of a petition," it bore 187,000 signatures, in "one vast and universal expression of feeling from all the females in the United Kingdom." Of the 1.3 million Britons who signed that year's petitions, 400,000 were women. In the last mass petition, of 1837-38, to terminate the "apprenticeship system, the 700,000 females who addressed an appeal to the new young Queen Victoria amounted to two-thirds of the 1.1 million signatures sent up to London. By that time religious dissenters' share of signers had also risen to an all-time high (Midgley, 1992, 62-66).

The abolitionist movement stimulated another innovation in mass mobilization that was to endure intermittently within abolitionist circles for more than three generations. In 1791 the defeat of Wilberforce's first parliamentary bill stimulated a popular movement to boycott slave-grown sugar. This "Anti-Saccharite" movement was a response to Parliament's negative vote. If Parliament could not be counted upon to act on "the people's will," and if women could not gain formal access to petitioning or the public sphere, they could still act through a nationwide campaign against the consumption of slave-grown sugar. The movement failed as an economic pressure group, but it dramatically broadened the public sphere. It was directed towards women as managers of the household budget. Propagandists stressed privileged female sensitivity to family destruction. Children were urged to become part of the national consumer mobilization. Thus, alongside the carefully crafted and targeted campaign of the London Committee appeared a parallel movement involving hundreds of thousands of otherwise ineligible actors. [5]

British abolitionists appealed to the minds as well as to the emotions of the legislators and the public. Thomas Clarkson painstakingly accumulated statistical evidence and eyewitness accounts of the conditions of the Middle Passage. Doctors and common seamen testified before parliamentary committees on the brutality and mortality suffered by both slaves and crew. Every Briton became aware of the inside of a slave ship through mass-produced reprints of images and testimony. The appeal of the abolitionists was overwhelmingly humanitarian. Between 1791 and 1807, abolitionists in and out of Parliament predominantly emphasized morality and justice over economic justifications for abolition. Their opponents consistently and symmetrically emphasized economic and security concerns over moral reasons. In no other European country was the inhumanity of the transatlantic voyage so widely publicized in genres ranging from pictorial representation to children's literature. [6]

4 In addition to the works above cited , see Carretta, 2005.
5 Drescher, 2009, ch. 9; See also David Brion Davis's synthesis of British West Indian slave revolts in Davis, 2006, ch. 11.
6 See, inter alia, Rediker, 2007; Drescher, 1990; Oldfield, 1995, ch. 5, 6.

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In 1814, after victory over Napoleonic France, British abolitionists again called on the nation. This time they demanded the renegotiation of an article in the Anglo-French peace treaty that allowed French merchants to temporarily reopen the French slave trade. Within a few weeks another national petition flowed into Parliament. The result was 1,370 petitions favoring renegotiation for abolition and none opposed. Even the previously hostile Liverpool merchants and the West India planter Interest came aboard. As Clarkson noted to Wilberforce, "All England is Moving." (Drescher, 2007).
British Abolitionism now expanded its agenda. The petition of 1814 launched Britain into a global mission against the transoceanic slave trade. When Clarkson, in 1814 wrote that "all England is moving," he may not have grasped the full import of his words. The British Ambassador in Madrid immediately received a confidential communication from Foreign Minister Lord Castlereagh to get things moving: "You must really press the Spanish Government to give us some more facilities on the Slave Trade. . ..the nation is bent upon this object; I believe there is hardly a village that has not met and petitioned upon it; and the Ministers must make it the basis of their own policy." The British ambassador to Rio de Janeiro received a similar urgent appeal (Drescher, 1994).
At the Congress of Vienna the condemnation of the slave trade became the only article of the Peace treaty of 1815 that referred the world beyond Europe. In subsequent years, however, British foreign ministers tried in vain to negotiate collective multi-national treaties to implement this moral condemnation. Instead, they had to settle for a series of bilateral treaties that created two major breaches of the principle of national sovereignty in the attack on slaving. First, mutual "right of search" treaties allowed officers of one nation's navy to board the ships of another in order to look for African captives. In effect, this provision gave British naval officers the right to do most of the searching, simply because the Royal Navy constituted the principal fleet patrolling the sea lanes from Africa to the Americas. Second, bilateral "mixed commissions" were instituted on both sides of the Atlantic. They were authorized to adjudicate the disposition of seized ships and their captives. For the first time in Western history, European nations created international judicial courts that could supersede the rights of Europeans to be tried solely by magistrates of their own state for acts committed on the high seas. These commissions were the quiet pioneers of the international law court system that came to fruition in the second half of the twentieth century. In short, by the 1820s British abolitionists were able to leverage the economic, diplomatic, and naval power of their own nation to internationalize the enforcement of abolition. The pattern of British abolition established after 1815 cast a long shadow over the half century that followed. By the end of the transatlantic slave trade in the 1860s, Britain's commitment to antislavery had cost its metropolitan citizens 1.8 percent of their national income over six decades.

II – Britain and Portugal: Civil Society

What did Britain's commitment to abolition mean for the future of world slavery and for Portugal in particular? The Portuguese case is probably more illustrative of the impact of British abolitionism than that of any other slave empire in the Atlantic. The inverse relation of economic interest and political abolitionism is nowhere better illustrated than

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in the Anglo-Portuguese relationship. Economically, the triumph of British slave trade abolition was a golden opportunity for Portuguese slavery. British abolitionism restored the Portuguese empire to its pre-eighteenth century status as the Atlantic's premier transatlantic slave trading nation. Between 1808 and 1850 the two Luso-Brazilian empires transported two out of every three enslaved Africans crossing the Atlantic. More than four out of every ten Africans boarded on Portuguese/Brazilian slavers during three and a half centuries of slaving came in the first half of the nineteenth century.
Before 1807 the Portuguese appear to have been unimpressed by the paradigm shift being attempted by British abolitionists. A Portuguese diplomatic observer in Britain could dismiss Wilberforce's annual and unsuccessful parliamentary motions as "a kind of stage-play" with predictable actors and outcomes. Faith in the old economic paradigm remained intact, re-enforcing the expectation that humanity could not triumph over "commercial greed." By 1813, however, a Portuguese minister bitterly complained that things had changed. In terms of the slave trade, the British were not keeping faith with the very principles of political economy which they themselves had done so much to develop. Perhaps the most telling evidence of the distance between two national perspectives at the time of abolition came from a Portuguese religious authority. In 1808 Azeredo Coutinho, the bishop of Elvas reiterated the traditional rationalization of slavery. The institution designed for the greater good of the barbarous nations of the world, sometimes sparing their lives and always saving their souls (Marques, 2006, 20-21).
At least as important as ideological differences was the divergence between Portuguese and British political and civil societies in the early nineteenth century. Portuguese governments, whether nominally conservative or liberal, generally avoided public discussion of slavery. For half a century after the American Revolution in 1776, national constituent assemblies on both sides of the Atlantic empire opened windows of opportunity for subverting slavery. In convocations of the Portuguese Cortes such discussions were usually curtailed or evaded. It is clear that there was more discussion of the slave trade in the legislature of Great Britain than in the Portuguese, or any other national constituent assembly.
Civil society offered the same contrast. There is little evidence that Portugal offered a counterpart to the British religious mobilization against slavery during three generations after the American Revolution. Neither the Portuguese ecclesiastical establishment or lay Catholic associations offered encouragement to antislavery initiatives. At the end of the Napoleonic wars the British were equally unsuccessful in convincing Pope Pius VII to use his influence to procure slave trade abolition from the Iberian monarchs. A generation later, at the peak of popular antislavery mobilization in Britain, the British government appealed to Pope Gregory VII to issue a letter condemning the slave trade. This time the Pope did issue a formal letter of condemnation. However, it was obvious to European observers that the British government had taken the lead in publicizing the letter in Portugal and elsewhere (Kielstra, 2000). It had no perceptible impact on abolitionist publicity in Portugal.
In these respects Portugal resembled most other continental European nations. I am not aware of evidence that Portuguese women made a substantial public contribution to the discussion or organization of antislavery initiatives, either in the form of literary or social mobilization. Political actors in Portugal did not use the tools of public petitioning against the slave trade. Portugal does not seem to have formed an elite antislavery soci-

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ety in the manner of France during the 1830s or of Spain in the 1860s. The violent civil conflicts that resulted from numerous regime changes in the French and Spanish empires had little impact in accelerating the progress of abolitionism in Portuguese society, either before or after the secession of Brazil from the empire. Above all, compared with the British Portuguese antislavery initiatives were confined to intermittent interventions in constitutional assemblies, the Cortes and the newspaper press. There was certainly no major flurry of pamphlets and artistic surges detailing the horrors of the trade. There were few published hearings of legislative committees on the slave trade, or major interventions in the public sphere by mobilized citizens. In short, Portugal abolitionism conformed to the more intermittent and reactive abolitionist model of Continental Europe (Marques, 2006, chapter 2-4).

In general, then, Portuguese initiatives against the slave trade were far more dependent upon external than internal pressures. As indicated above, Portugal was more heavily dependent upon its slave colonies than was Britain for its economic well-being. At the moment of British abolition more than 60 percent of all Portuguese exports came from Brazil alone. Luso-Brazilian elites deemed Portugal's African connection as equally vital for their continued economic growth. On the other hand, almost from the moment of British abolition, Portugal was militarily and financially more dependent upon Britain than was any other empire in the Atlantic.

III – Anglo-Portuguese Interaction

We may now compare the British and Portuguese abolitionist trajectories after the ending of the British slave trade. With the United States passing legislation against the transatlantic trade to its shores in 1807, Portugal, the third great slave trading nation, was poised to become the heir of the departing Anglo-Americans. Within weeks of the passage of the abolition act in March 1807, Britain's Foreign Secretary sounded out the still neutral Lisbon government on the possibility of their following Britain's example, or at least of confining the Portuguese trade strictly within its existing limits. The Portuguese Foreign Minister dismissed the British proposal as "utterly impracticable". Portugal, he replied, would not adopt any policy that would "discourage, much less abolish the trade in enslaved Africans." (Marques, 2006, ch. 9-10; Bethell, 1970, ch. 6).

Thus began a tortuous diplomatic relationship that was to last for more than a generation. Thereafter the British government used every opportunity to extract concessions. The Portuguese used most opportunities to evade or minimize the impact of any concessions on an activity that they considered vital to their own nation's economic and political interests. Of course the balance of power in this relationship was never in doubt. Its impact was felt within months of British abolition. Napoleon's invasion of Portugal, in November 1807, forced the royal court to choose between following the Spanish monarchy into French captivity or flight to Brazil colony on ships of the British Royal Navy. Portuguese military dependency was soon reinforced by financial dependency. British money was necessary to stabilize the Portuguese government's budgetary situation in Brazil. The result was Britain's first treaty with a foreign power dealing with its slave trade. Portugal agreed to affirm the injustice and disutility of the slave trade, especially to Bra-

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zil; to take steps to gradually abolish that trade, and to immediately restrict it exclusively to Portuguese subjects within the African domains of the Portuguese Crown. Successive Anglo-Portuguese agreements were to be signed in 1815, 1817, 1822, and 1842.

As significant as governmental initiatives in Anglo-Portuguese relations was the extra-governmental pressure exercised by British abolitionists. Immediately following the passage of British abolition, the African Institution, founded by British abolitionists, began to oversee the rigorous enforcement and of the suppression of the trade. It became "almost a de facto slave-trade department of the Foreign Office." The Institution it suggested new legislation and gave the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1810 a meaning endowing the Royal Navy with power over Portuguese slavers trading beyond the regions specified in the treaty. The excessive reading was acknowledged at the return of peace in 1814 when the British government agreed to pay £300,000 in compensation for wrongful detentions and arrests of Portuguese ships (Eltis, 1987, 105-108).

The British government, however, refused to turn over the agreed sum until Portugal signed yet another treaty more precisely confining its own slave merchants to Portuguese territories south of the equator. The increased British pressure on Portugal in 1814-1815 was, in turn, a direct result of another wave of abolitionist petitioning. On hearing reports of the massive campaign, the British ambassador in Rio de Janeiro felt "so convinced of the strength and prevalence of the sentiments which are felt upon [slavery] throughout the British empire," that he risked exceeding his orders and threatened the Portuguese government with British naval action unless it limited its participation in the slave trade (Drescher, 1994, 22). The threat, sweetened by the remission of further payments on a less than half-repaid loan of £600,000, induced the Portuguese monarch to prohibit his subjects from any further trading North of the equator. The Portuguese government also agreed to at least negotiate a fixed date to abolish the entire Portuguese trade. At the Congress of Vienna Portugal also joined in signing the article in the final treaty, identifying the slave trade as "repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality." This British-sponsored supervised article declared that "the public voice in all civilized countries calls aloud for its prompt suppression" (Bethell, 1970, 14).

This reference may have been intended to compliment popular sentiment in Britain but there was virtually no evidence of such a public voice in the metropoles of Europe, much less on either side of the Portuguese empire. Two years later the Portuguese government acceded to another constraint on transatlantic slaving. At its southern border Brazil's Portuguese troops invaded an area claimed by both Iberian monarchs. Soon Portugal again needed British military and diplomatic support. An Anglo-Portuguese agreement, negotiated in 1817, established a mutual right of naval search and seizure. This was a significant surrender of Portuguese sovereignty. Only the Royal Navy had the effective capacity to utilize the "Right of Search" (Marques, 2006, 46-47). Portugal's example became the model for dozens of similar treaties during the next half century.

The decade following the abolition of the British slave trade (1807-1817) revealed further defining characteristics of Anglo-Portuguese relations. Early in 1814, when the alliance against Napoleon was negotiating with the French at the Congress of Chatillon, British diplomats insisted on including slave trade abolition on the agenda. Napoleon's representative proudly replied that such language might be appropriate for Denmark, "but not for us." He made it clear that "[the] compulsory article you have inserted can never be tolerated by a great people who are not yet in a situation to be insulted with impu-

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nity" (Kielstra, 2000, 20). Small colonial powers like Denmark, Sweden or the Netherlands could, of course, be told that the recovery of their colonial possessions depended crucially on their adoption of abolition.

Two decades later it was Portugal that replaced Denmark and Holland as a byword for being forced to negotiate under threat. For Britain, Portugal became the very symbol of a weak and faithless power holding mighty Britain hostage by its ability to elude repeated treaty promises and obligations. Henry Brougham, an abolitionist in the House of Lords sarcastically described the situation: "We pause and falter and blanch and quail before the ancient and consecrated Monarchy of Brazil, the awful might of Portugal"…. [7] Infuriated abolitionists emphasized Portuguese ingratitude: "Portugal, our most faithful ally…indebted to us for political existence [is]…shamelessly violating all of her engagements…leading to the utter futility of all our treaties"(Sturge, 1841, 8).

On the other hand, unilateral British abuses of the right of search converted subjects of smaller powers into victims of imperialist infringements of sovereignty by an all-powerful maritime nation. Even the great powers were wary of giving British warships too much power unsanctioned by national agreement. By 1818 "joint international action would not go beyond empty declarations" (Eltis, 1987, 111). Still more seriously, British maritime hegemony, naval power and economic influence clearly constituted a fertile field for arousing national sentiments. The coexistence of Britain's abolitionist and capitalist hegemony always suggested that Machiavellian as well as moral motives were at work. The same nation that demanded the closure of the international slave trade was notoriously the empire whose colonial production, with emancipated slave labor, was stagnating and declining by the 1840s. A decade later, the world's leader in the campaign against the slave trade and slavery was a principal investor in, and consumer of, the world's leading slave-grown products. Britain's turn to free trade in 1846 meant that British society provided a cornucopia for the rulers of any slave economy motivated to subvert or decelerate the abolitionist process. Thereafter, ebbing international acquiescence in British abolitionist initiatives reflected these counter-abolitionist developments.

Even more importantly, before 1840, the "soft power" of the abolitionist leaders always rested on their ability to claim to represent an overwhelming popular sentiment, always potentially on call to demand further political action. But abolitionist popular mobilization waned after the early 1840s, as during the 1790s abolitionist enthusiasm receded during moments when British society was economically depressed or abolitionism deeply divided (Temperley, 1972, ch. 6, 111-167).

Even before 1840 between moments of mass mobilization British governments had some leeway to relent on pressuring Portugal. During the 1820s Britain remained firmly under the control of conservative governments. Its Foreign Ministers could easily use Portuguese imperial crises to extract abolition treaties from both Portugal and newly independent Brazil. However, Conservative British governments also showed little tendency to aggressively press for enforcement. In 1828 Prime Minister Wellington, privately dismissed the abolitionist goal as a fantasy: "We shall never succeed in abolishing the foreign slave trade. But we must take care to avoid any step (sic) which may induce the people of England to believe that we do not do everything in our power to discourage and put it down as soon as possible" (Bethell, 1970, 66). The following year, the last

7 See *Immediate Emancipation: Lord Brougham on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (London: J. Haddon, 1838, 13).

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during which African slaves could be legally imported into Brazil, imports reached nearly 79,000, 16 percent greater than ever previously recorded by any plantation society.

"It can never be overemphasized," concludes João Pedro Marques, how important British pressure "was in motivating abolitionist discussion in Portugal" (Marques, 2006, 250). British pressure on Portugal was also of low priority during the decade before British slave emancipation. Almost immediately after the implementation of British slave emancipation, however, British abolitionists, now at the peak of their popularity, began to cast about for new ways in which to redirect their energies. Their attention was first directed towards launching a parallel mobilization in the United States. When that process stalled along sectional lines during the late 1830s, British attention returned to the transatlantic slave trade.

British mass mobilizations in 1837 and 1838 brought British abolitionists to a final surge of popularity. Even more significantly, it brought them to the all-time peak of their political power. For the first time a fragile administration needed abolitionist support to remain in power. Abolitionist influence on the Whig Foreign Ministry, under Lord Palmerston also reached its apogee. Between 1838 and 1842 more bilateral treaties were ratified to prohibit and enforce abolition than at any time in the entire history of slavery (Ziskind, 1993).

In 1840, a World Antislavery Conference convened in London with the express aim of abolishing slavery throughout the world. The Portuguese slave trade, the world's largest, became a prime target. Between 1835 and 1840 the transatlantic movement of slaves from Africa to Brazil had reached new all- time highs. The Portuguese flag was identified as the major culprit in the new surge. The differential between British power and Portuguese evasion seemed to have reached its zenith. A British abolitionist publication identified Portugal's defiance as a humiliation and an affront to national: "In no instance recorded in the page of History, has England so tamely submitted to such infamous breaches of Solemn Treaties as those which she has permitted Portugal to indulge in, in regard to the slave trade…so openly – that posterity will almost be led to doubt whether England herself was in earnest in her endeavors to obtain its total abolition." Perfidious Portugal was portrayed as incorrigibly evasive from one political regime to the next.

The difficulties faced by Portuguese governments in attempting to navigate between British and domestic pressures were patent. An ostensibly Portuguese abolition decree in 1836 was in reality a pre-emptive move designed to postpone British implementation. Like French or Papal negotiators two decades before, the Portuguese government wanted to avoid appearing to sacrifice its own "national honor" by seeming bow to foreign pressure. Its author, Sá da Bandeira, feared the backlash that he would face by signing a bilateral treaty rigorous enforcement. He correctly expected widespread hostility to any such treaty. The Gordion knot was finally severed by Lord Palmerston, when he shifted tactics from private diplomatic negotiations to an open military threat. In 1839 Palmerston successfully induced Parliament to vote for a Bill allowing the Royal Navy to search and seize suspected slavers flying the Portuguese flag. In both nations the "Palmerston Act" was regarded as tantamount to a declaration of war. The four year delay after 1836 had only raised the stakes and deepened the humiliation of Portuguese acquiescence. In the end the Portuguese could only voice their sense of victimization to the British public, while Palmerston added insult to injury (Brasahemeco, 1840, quotation on p. ccclx.). It would take time to reconfigure Portugal's march to abolition as an act in line with progress and civilization.

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IV – National Honor

Hovering over that long historical march to the final treaty of 1842 was the enormous asymmetry in power between the two signatories. What might have been the fate of the treaty had the balance of power been different? A parallel case, drawn from contemporary Anglo-French diplomatic relations, offers a compelling clue. In all of France's anti-slave trade treaties with Britain, its governments, under every regime, drew a clear line against allowing foreign authority over its own citizens. No French regime would agree to participating in the new international institution of "Mixed Commissions." British judges would never be allowed to adjudicate the seizures of ships and crew sailing under the French flag. Nor would France subscribe to the usual terms of a "Right of Search." For Lord Palmerston, this was prima facie evidence that no country but his own could claim the lion's share of abolition's moral capital. On the issue of the slave trade blockade, Palmerston assured parliament in 1841, "it is England alone that feels any deep and sincere interest in this matter." [8]

At the very same moment that Palmerston challenged Portugal, the scene was set for another confrontation between Britain and France. In 1839 Foreign Secretary Palmerston wanted to cap his bilateral slave trade treaty network with a multilateral treaty between the five great European powers. By early 1840, a treaty appeared to be on the verge of ratification. Then a major crisis intervened. In a confrontation between Mehmet Ali, Pasha of Egypt, and the Ottoman Sultan, the French government aggressively backed the Pasha. The other four powers, in the interest of the status quo, supported the Sultan. They signed a treaty in pledging military support to the Sultan if necessary. An isolated France was forced to back down. An angry French public, aware that it faced insuperable odds in any major conflict, looked elsewhere for an opportunity to retaliate (Kielstra, 2000, ch. 8).

The opportunity arrived when the French administration prepared to submit the Five Power Slave Trade treaty for legislative ratification. The French press exploded. After more than half a century of relative French silence on the slave trade, the treaty called forth a broad popular mobilization – against the Right of Search; against Britain's encroachment on French national sovereignty; and against the increased Royal Navy's "enumerable molestations" of French shipping in African and Brazilian waters. Even French abolitionist legislators, facing an upcoming election, overwhelmingly joined in refusing ratification. France, it was made clear, was not to be treated like Portugal.

François Guizot, the French Foreign Minister privately, confessed, "I have often fought popular impressions but never a more general, stronger impression" (Kielstra, 2000, 215). In order to save his administration he had to withdraw the treaty from the legislature. Guizot, of course, never considered reopening a slave trade that France had definitively ended ten years earlier. Three years later, after the furor had subsided, the British and French governments quietly signed a new bilateral treaty to police the slave trade. Separate national patrols along the coast were substituted for any "Right of Search." Questions of national honor were not trivial matters in the enforcement of transatlantic abolition. With the ratification of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty in 1842, the Portuguese flag disappeared from the masts of slave ships en route from Africa to Brazil and Cuba.

8 Hansards Parliamentary Debates (1841), London, Thomas Hansard, 3rd series, volume 58, column 654, 18 May 1841, Palmerston.

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The treaty did not, however, prevent Portuguese citizens from continuing their participation in the slave trade from Africa to Rio de Janeiro or Havana.
The British scenario of threat and violence had to be enacted again on the coast of Brazil in 1850. The attack on the Brazilian trade was repeated in very different British metropolitan circumstances. By the late 1840s British abolitionism's prestige as a mobilize of national opinion and as a power in preserving or overturning administrations had markedly diminished (Temperley, 1972, ch. 11). After 1841, organized antislavery could no longer call forth or threaten an overwhelming national mobilization on the old scale. Abolitionists never again played a role in overturning governments.
By the second London world antislavery convention, in 1843, abolitionists were hopelessly split over the question of continued protection of "free labor sugar" in the metropolitan market. The latent conflict between British capitalism's response to economic forces and the British crusade against economic tariffs in addressing the Atlantic slave trade reached a decisive turning point in 1846. Over the fierce opposition of many abolitionists, parliament abandoned protection of British colonial sugar in the home market. During the following three years more slaves were landed in Brazil than at any point in Portugal's four centuries of African slaving.
Some British free traders were not satisfied just to open the markets of Britain to Brazilian and Cuban produce. Between 1845 and 1850 they launched a parliamentary campaign to have the Royal Navy withdrawn from the transatlantic fight against slavers. They argued their case on both economic and moral grounds. The patrol was both expensive and counter-productive. It intensified the sufferings of Africans in a vain war against the law of supply and demand. This supreme test of the challenge came in 1850. By this time no groundswell of popular mobilization was available to come to the defense of a government determined to maintain the patrol. After three decades of naval activity without victory, the press, across the political spectrum, was unimpressed by the government's case for retention of naval suppression. Only the threat by Prime Minister Russell and Foreign Secretary Palmerston to resign kept enough of their party majority in line to defeat the motion (Drescher, 2002, 191-92).
Nevertheless, the debate was a shot across the bow. The government knew that their policy could not continue indefinitely without some major success. Within a few days of his hard-won vote Palmerston intensified naval action on the coast of Brazil. He gave expanded latitude to the pursuit of suspected slavers, even onto Brazil's shores. In the case of Brazil, the British government had already taken pre-emptive legal action on the Portuguese model. In 1845 parliament approved the so-called "Aberdeen Bill." Like the Palmerston Bill against Portuguese slavers, Britain now claimed the right to unilaterally intercept Brazilian shipping if officers of the Royal Navy suspected that they had encountered a slave ship (Bethell, 1970, 337-339).
The naval action was successful. Brazil abolished its trade in 1850, and by 1853 the flow of enslaved Africans had diminished to a trickle. In Brazil's legislature no effort was made to conceal the fact that it was once again British pressure was forcing Brazil to bring the slave trade to a rapid end. As with Portugal, honor was salvaged by two affirmations. First, the whole of the civilized world was now hostile to the slave trade The Brazilian government also shared the sentiment of the Portuguese government a decade earlier: "With a pow-

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erful nation such as Britain" pursuing abolition "will we be able to resist such a torrent which sweeps us along, as surely as the world in which we live? I think not." [9]
Brazilian legislators had one more face saving recourse to national honor not available to their Portuguese counterparts ten years earlier. The Brazilian government identified Portuguese merchants as the principal perpetrators of the Brazilian slave trade. The Brazilian example was not lost on the Spanish government. Thirteen years later, in Havana, one of the first actions taken by Cuba's Captain-General, to demonstrate a change in Spain's determination to end the colony's slave trade, was to expel Portuguese slave traders from Havana (Murray, 1980, 312).

V – Portugal's Retrospective

Long after the ending of the transatlantic slave trade Portugal continued to remain a relatively poor nation with few opportunities for economic development. In 1870 Portugal still had the lowest per capita Gross Domestic Product in Western Europe. [10] Having joined the "cause of humanity" in aligning the nation with the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, Portuguese continued to view its remaining African colonies as a potential source of wealth. They regarded some form of coerced labor as the best means of developing viable enterprises in their remaining colonies.
The British government thereafter only intermittently focused on Portugal's remaining links with the slave trade and slaving, but British abolitionists continued to complain about the persistence of slavery and involuntary contract labor in Africa well into the twentieth century (Grant, 2005, ch. 4.Nevertheless, Portugal retrospectively insisted on its preeminent role in the long march of Western civilization towards ending slavery. At the League of Nations, after World War I, Portugal occupied a key position on its Temporary Slave Commission. Portugal's acquiescence to the League's Convention on Slavery in 1926 was especially assertive. The pioneer of Europe's overseas empires framed its relation to overseas slavery as one of centuries of "civilizing policy" and "Christian brotherhood with native peoples." Its contributions to the slave trade and slavery were treated as incidental, limited, and "fortuitous" (Davis, 1984, 311).
The reconstruction of imperial history as an antislavery narrative appeared particularly urgent because another scandal over Portuguese forced labor in the 1920s was brewing in Africa. In this sense, however, "Portugal's retrospective narrative was but one variant of a more generic historical realignment of Europe's relationship to the institution of slavery. By 1900 all of Europe's imperial nations, in one way or another, had reconfigured their imperial histories as civilizing antislavery missions. If Portugal now claimed to have worked for half a millennium for what it had agreed to only yesterday, there was biblical precedent: 'and the last shall be first." (Drescher, 2009, p. 411). Who, at Geneva, would deny a prodigal's return when the institution itself seemed to be on the verge of becoming nothing more than a historical artifact? At that moment no one could possibly foresee a massive new resurgence of slavery in the very heart of Europe.

9 Needell, 2001, 681-711 (quotation on pp. 707-708).
10 Maddison, 2007, 382, Table A.7, "World Per Capita GDP."

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