

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Transimperial Networks of Slave Trading, Piracy, and Empire Building in the Iberian Atlantic

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This essay reviews the following works:

The Admirable Adventures and Strange Fortunes of Master Anthony Knivet: An English Pirate in Sixteenth-Century Brazil. Edited by Vivien Kogut Lessa de Sá. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 230. \$25.19 paper. ISBN: 9781107463004.

Privateering, Piracy, and British Policy in Spanish America, 1810–1830. By Matthew McCarthy. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2013. Pp. vi + 184. \$115.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781843838616.

Monsters by Trade: Slave Traffickers in Modern Spanish Literature and Culture. By Lisa Surwillo. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014. Pp. vii + 251. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780804788793.

Amistad: A Hidden Network of Slavers and Merchants. By Michael Zeuske. Translated from the German by Steven Rendall. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2015. Pp. vii + 267. \$24.10 paper. ISBN: 9781558765931.

By examining privateering, piracy, and slave trading, these books present compelling cases of transimperial cooperation and competition in the early modern Atlantic as well as during the nineteenth century. Merchants and mariners, who commonly built networks across European domains in the Americas, became slave traders, privateers, and pirates depending on the context of Atlantic exchanges and geopolitics. From its beginning in the sixteenth century, the commerce of enslaved Africans to the Caribbean and mainland colonies involved Spanish officials and merchants, Portuguese traders and mariners, and Italian (principally Genoese) investment and outfitting. The crew of a slave ship was even more diverse because sailors came from throughout the Mediterranean. And of course this early traffic included African and Luso-African middlemen who supplied Cape Verde, Canary, and São Tomé islands, the first African hubs of the transatlantic slave trade.

During the union of the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns (1580–1640), Portuguese slave trading contributed to the repopulation of the Spanish Caribbean and the coastal mainland stretching from Veracruz to Venezuela and down to Peru, as the pervasive presence of enslaved and free Africans in all these regions made them “surrogate colonists” for the Spanish empire, according to David Wheat.¹ But Spanish merchants lacked direct trading contacts in Africa between the 1650s and the 1810s. The Treaty of Alcaçovas (1479) between Spain and Portugal limited Spanish expansion into West Africa while confirming the Spanish occupation of Canary Islands. Even though Castilians engaged in some slave trading from the mid to late fifteenth century; the Portuguese became the main suppliers to the Spanish colonies up to 1640. In the two centuries following the break of the Iberian Union, the slave markets in the Spanish colonies attracted additional European and New World interlopers. Dutch, English, French, Luso-Brazilian, and ultimately US merchants and mariners carried captive Africans to the Spanish colonies up to the development of a Spanish-flag slave trade (brief in the late-colonial Río de la Plata region while continuous and large in nineteenth-century Cuba and Puerto

¹ David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

Rico). The books examined here contribute to our understanding of the very transimperial nature of the slave trade to the Spanish Americas, which made the traffic of captives to the Spanish colonies different from any other national branch in the overall history of the transatlantic slave trade.

These books connect the histories of slave traders, pirates, and privateers (private individuals holding governmental commissions for capturing enemy merchant vessels during war) in the early modern Atlantic and the nineteenth century. The first experiences of French, English, and Dutch seafarers conducting slave trading in the Americas most commonly involved privateering, given that they captured Portuguese and Spanish slave vessels en route from Africa to the New World. Then, they ransomed the captives back to the slavers—usually to the Spanish colonists—or less commonly, they sold them in the nascent northern European colonies, as experienced by the first enslaved Africans arriving in colonial Virginia in 1619. While this practice was not quantitatively significant for the overall volume of the transatlantic slave trade, it was qualitatively important for these northern Europeans as this marked the beginnings of their slave ventures.

In addition, these Northern European colonies, for the first time, received African captives via piracy and privateering. This happened to the Cavendish privateering expedition that brought Anthony Knivet (the subject of Vivien Kogut Lessa de Sá's book) to Brazil in 1592. This English privateer captured a Portuguese vessel carrying enslaved Africans and merchandise from Pernambuco to Buenos Aires (Kogut Lessa de Sá, 33), which illustrates both the actions of these northern European mariners and a very early and active transimperial slave trade between Portuguese and Spanish colonies. What the English did with the captives is unknown. In 1587, five years before Knivet's arrival in Brazil, English privateers had captured the first known commercial venture sent by the Spanish of Buenos Aires to Brazil while the vessels were sailing to home port. The Portuguese and Spanish survivors made it back to Buenos Aires, bringing with them sixty enslaved Africans who had been embarked in Brazil.²

This was part of a larger history in which Spanish American markets lured Northern European merchants not just for looting but also increasingly for trading. In the late seventeenth century, English, French, and Dutch mariners confronted each other across the Atlantic while establishing slave trade factories in West Africa and contraband trade in the Spanish Americas. In the following century, the slave trade through the Asiento (a monopoly contract that the Spanish Crown granted to merchants or merchant houses to organize the slave trade to the Spanish colonies over a period of time) became the key to accessing Spanish American consumers for French and English traders. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Spanish colonies were the most lucrative markets for European and Asian textiles. This traffic led Spanish American silver to enter English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese commercial and credit circuits beneficial to metropolitan merchants and royal revenues; it also provided the specie for European long-distance trade with East Asia, where silver was always in high demand. Three of the books examined here present the end of this story after the disintegration of the Spanish empire in the mainland, given that they focus on Cuba, Spain, and Great Britain (McCarthy); Cuba, Spain, and Africa (Zeuske); and Cuba and Spain (Surwillo). In a different vein, the fourth book, to which we turn, examines the early Portuguese and English connections through privateering in Brazil.

Vivien Kogut Lessa de Sá translated, edited, and meticulously annotated the narrative of Anthony Knivet, a survivor of the second expedition of the English privateer Thomas Cavendish against the Spanish in 1592. Cavendish left Knivet stranded in Brazil, where the latter lived for many years, before publishing his narrative in England in 1625—the first English description about Brazil. As he travelled extensively in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, down to Santa Catarina Island, and then north to Bahia and Pernambuco, and as he even escaped to Angola, Knivet produced a unique and extensive account on the late sixteenth-century Portuguese South Atlantic.

Rather than the transatlantic slave trade, Knivet's narrative illustrates another type of human trafficking and slavery very common in the early Americas—the enslavement of Amerindian populations by the first generations of European colonists. Given that captive Indians rather than enslaved Africans most commonly staffed sixteenth-century sugar plantations in Brazil, Knivet participated in four slaving expeditions. This is why he travelled so extensively within and, particularly, beyond territories controlled by the Portuguese.

Knivet describes the degree to which the Portuguese enclaves in sixteenth-century Brazil were populated by people of mixed origins. Three generations of Portuguese and Indian unions solidified political alliances between the Portuguese and the indigenous groups through complex kinship ties. Outside the Portuguese coastal enclaves, this land was the realm of thriving Indian societies, which sheds light on why Knivet describes

² On this early slave trade involving both English pirates and Spanish colonies, see Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570–1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

far more contacts with Indians and people of mixed ancestry living among them than with the Portuguese. As depopulation of indigenous groups in the coast increased as a result of disease, enslavement, and war, the consolidation and extension of Portuguese colonization depended on the enslavement of Indians located inland, which the Portuguese commonly bought from other Indian groups. Thus the Portuguese fostered wars among Indian communities. Knivet also describes large-scale slaving expeditions of the Portuguese (but overwhelmingly staffed by Indians) southward to the Lagoon dos Patos close to the River Plate, which shows the long-distance range of these slave-trading campaigns. This produced 10,000 captives and a similar number of casualties, an astonishing figure given the scant population in Portuguese-controlled Brazil at the time (15).

The most interesting passages for Knivet's readers of his time and today are the descriptions of Amerindian societies, which reflect the early difficulties of European understandings of Indian beliefs and material life, as these differed from European categories. Knivet descriptions are centered on cannibalism given that this fitted European conceptions of the barbaric "other" around nudity, polygamy, and, above all, cannibalism. This is where Vivien Kogut Lessa de Sá is at her best as she compares and contrasts his narrative with others as well as with recent scholarship. This volume is a great introduction to both Portuguese-indigenous interactions and inter-indigenous relationships in Brazil. For instance, this is one of the first European descriptions of some non-Tupi groups, like the Charrua, who increasingly moved south toward the River Plate as a result of both Tupi and Portuguese actions.

The volume contains an excellent introduction to the sources on sixteenth-century Brazil produced by Portuguese colonialism and Christianization, on the one side, and European interlopers like Knivet, on the other. Early Portuguese accounts were rarely translated into foreign languages given that the Portuguese censors thought they provided intelligence to foreigners like the French and the Dutch, who contested Portuguese claims of the Brazilian coast at different times. Missionaries like the Jesuit Fernão Cardim produced early narratives, too. He was also captured by English privateers, which brought to his own life these Iberian and Northern European maritime connections. French and English travel narratives most commonly were written and published in order to obtain some advantage at the expense of the Portuguese. While Portuguese texts had very little circulation due to their censorship, texts in foreign languages were printed and reprinted in England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. The introduction and the appendixes of this book provide information about the Cavendish voyage, a biographical essay on Knivet, a history of the manuscript and its publication, an interpretative essay, and a very useful annotated bibliography. This work could be assigned to a range of classes from European-Amerindian early contacts, travel literature, colonial Latin America, Brazil, and of course, the history of pirates and privateers.

The book by Matthew McCarthy on the early nineteenth-century privateering and piracy in Spanish America presents to the reader an entirely different Iberian Atlantic. McCarthy examines the resurgence of privateering during the wars of independence between the new Spanish American republics of the mainland and metropolitan Spain. From about 1810 to 1830, Spanish American revolutionary governments from Mexico to Buenos Aires issued letters of marquees against Spanish property based on the legal tradition of early modern privateering by sovereign European powers—the same legal dispositions that had allowed British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish subjects to prey on the enemy's merchant fleet during wartime across the globe. Merchants and mariners located both in the Spanish American mainland and the United States outfitted insurgent privateers against Spanish vessels in the Atlantic and beyond. Up to this point, this is a well-known story. McCarthy adds the lesser-known cases of the Spanish privateers outfitted against ships conducting trade with the Spanish American republics and the very little known Cuban-based pirates. In all three instances (insurgent privateers, Spanish privateers, and Cuban-based pirates), he profusely documents the actions against British vessels as well as the ambivalent British policy in relation to Spain and the new republics. For his examination, he built an extensive database of prizes (booties), particularly of British vessels, which is generously accessible online.³

This is a good companion to David Head's work on the Spanish American privateers from the point of view of the United States.⁴ However, both of them lack some depth on the political and social landscapes of the Spanish American republics originating these actions. While US-based insurgent privateers were an extension of US merchant houses and trading networks, privateers outfitted in the ports of today's Colombia and Venezuela, for instance, may have had more diverse and multiethnic crews connected with the revolutionary

³ Matthew McCarthy, *Privateering and Piracy in the Spanish American Revolutions* (online dataset, 2012), <http://www.hull.ac.uk/mhsc/piracy-mccarthy>.

⁴ David Head, *Privateers of the Americas: Spanish American Privateering from the United States in the Early Republic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

momentum in the Caribbean.⁵ This part of the story is missing. To be fair, McCarthy acknowledges that he is surveying the British perspective, while underscoring that this is not the only angle. Overall, this is a chapter of British international history, as Latin American events supply the contexts for British agency; note that all but one of the primary sources are British. These external (to Latin America) perspectives usually overemphasize the importance of British and US actions. For instance, navies did not have a significant role in the result of Spanish American revolutions. While some maritime battles near besieged towns occurred, navies were largely irrelevant for the outcome of these wars. Privateering did not thwart the ability of Spain to send troops to the Americas; instead, Spanish political developments like the liberal Riego Revolt of 1820 impeded the Spanish in mobilizing additional troops in the Americas. This external focus reflects the timid engagement of this work with the large US-based Latin American scholarship on independence, not to mention the Latin American–based historiography outside of privateering.⁶

McCarthy intends to engage in the debate about how privateers' actions extended sovereignty and how these mariners positioned themselves and manipulated the legality of their activities.⁷ In addition, he examines the question of British informal empire in nineteenth-century Latin America.⁸ While his interventions in these discussions do not amount to more than a couple of pages in the introduction and conclusion (8–9 and 161–163), he contributes to successfully blurring the difference between privateers and pirates (for the Spanish against the insurgents) as they postured and presented themselves depending on the jurisdiction they faced.

British foreign policy, the main focus of this book, sought to maintain the United Kingdom's neutrality during the wars of Spanish American independence without upsetting the Anglo-Spanish alliance in Europe between 1810 and 1830. McCarthy underscores that British merchant's interests in Spanish America urged the British Foreign Office to officially recognize the new Spanish American republics, to end the problem of insurgent privateers interrupting British trade (80–81). Spanish privateering also benefited from British ambivalent positions, as they attacked British trade with the new Spanish American republics. Indirectly, the combined actions of insurgent privateers, Spanish privateers, and Cuban-based pirates contributed to the British leaning more decisively (and faster) toward recognizing the Spanish American republics (107).

Fighting against privateering and piracy also led to the creation of new international courts and contributed to envision a system of multilateral justice. The creation of an Anglo-Spanish Claims Commission for these cases, as well as the establishing of Courts of Mixed Commission between the British and other governments during the fight against the nineteenth-century illegal slave trade, as argued by Jenny S. Martinez, formed a crossroads for emerging conceptions about international law, human rights, and national sovereignty.⁹ As Lauren Benton reminds us, this linkage between international law, privateers, and sovereignty was nothing new; however, it was unprecedented how conceptions about human rights, liberalism, and national (rather than imperial) sovereignty shaped each other in the nineteenth-century Atlantic.¹⁰

Amistad, by Michael Zeuske, emphasizes that the nineteenth century was not just the era of emancipation. It was also a time when a clandestine and transnational network of merchants and mariners secured the survival of the transatlantic slave trade despite governmental prohibitions, abolitionist propaganda, and the British Navy. This is a healthy antidote to generalizations based on the sudden but decisive British Atlantic's turn toward abolition, given that the traffic clandestinely and vigorously survived in Brazil until 1850 and in Cuba until the 1860s. Zeuske revisits the slave rebellion in the sloop *Amistad*, a ship connecting Cuban ports

⁵ For close antecedents of insurgent privateers, see Alejandro E. Gómez, "Entre résistance, piraterie et républicanisme: Mouvements insurrectionnels d'inspiration révolutionnaire franco-antillaise sur la Côte de Caracas, 1794–1800," *Travaux et recherches de l'UMLV* 11 (2006): 91–120.

⁶ To introduce general readers to the very large scholarship on Latin American independence, as written both in the United States and Latin America, see these LARR reviews: Victor M. Uribe, "The Enigma of Latin American Independence: Analyses of the Last Ten Years," *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 1 (1997): 236–255; and Silke Hensel, "Was There an Age of Revolution in Latin America? New Literature on Latin American Independence," *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 3 (2003): 237–249. A recent annotated bibliography is provided by Karen Racine, "Latin American Independence," *Oxford Bibliographies* in Latin American Studies, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199766581-0011> (accessed November 28, 2016). While analyzing the impact of these privateers on British trade, McCarthy would have found useful the scholarship on Spanish colonial trade and British trade in Spanish America; see Manuel Llorca-Jaña, *The British Textile Trade in South America in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁷ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁸ See the discussion in Matthew Brown, ed., *Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

⁹ Jenny S. Martinez, *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*.

that after the revolt landed in the United States and became a famous court case about slavery in 1839. This is his window to examine the networks of illegal slave trading within and beyond the Spanish Caribbean. Zeuske is at his best when reconstructing the life of the Spanish captain of the *Amistad*, Ramón Ferrer; the networks of Cuban and Spanish slavers in the River Pongo (Sierra Leone), like the Zulueta brothers and Pedro Blanco; and the new pieces of evidence suggesting that the *Tecora* (the ship initially carrying the *Amistad* captives from Sierra Leone to Cuba) was actually a US vessel named *Hugh Boyle*, as well as that the *Amistad* was built in Cuba rather than in the United States. Zeuske also reveals that Celestino, the infamous slave cook key for the *Amistad* rebellion as one of the first casualties, was a man of mixed ancestry, a native of Puerto Rico, and personal servant of Ferrer, who had bought him some five years previously. Ferrer's story encapsulates the search for upward mobility by Spanish merchants and mariners negatively affected by Spain's maritime decline because of the Napoleonic wars and the independence of the colonies in the mainland Americas, who then moved to Cuba in search of fortune during the booming years of plantation slavery and Pax Britannica. Zeuske finds Ferrer helping other slave captains to transship captives and disembark them in coastal Cuban outposts, given that slave ships were unable to openly enter Cuban ports due to the prohibition of the traffic, which they largely dodged. All of this reveals the various links connecting diverse maritime craftsmanship, small-scale coastal shipping, and large-scale regular trade with the illegal transatlantic slave traffic, given that this book shows the various degrees of involvement and investment of Spanish shipping and Cuban society in the continuance of this traffic. Overall, this work brings to light the hidden social landscape of slave-trading networks connecting Cuba, Spain, and Sierra Leone.

The book, however, seeks to make a larger point. It not only addresses the history of the nineteenth-century slave trade but also its place in world history. This is where this work becomes questionable. The book presents bibliographical sections with sparse citations, such as chapter 2. For a general audience, it is unclear whose arguments Zeuske is following in this chapter and who he is criticizing. For a specialist, it is clear that he is implicitly citing the bibliography at the end. Explicit references are needed for fruitful and honest debate. Chapter 3, entitled "The Prisoners of the *Amistad*," is half bibliographical (based on Marcus Rediker's work, which the author acknowledges) and half primary research by Zeuske on Ferrer, who was not a prisoner of the *Amistad*, of course.¹¹ Chapter's titles fail to describe contents, as the chapter "Slavery in Cuba" is about slave trading, and the chapter entitled "The Ending of Human Trafficking" focuses on late nineteenth-century Cuba after the ending of the traffic. The narrative is erratic, as one paragraph deals with Karl Marx and Eric Williams while the next focuses on Medieval Europe and from there to Christianity and work ethics (8, 28, 85–90). And the book lacks some internal coherency (see differences in time line of the slave trade in page 32 in relation to the rest).

In the more bibliographical sections, which are the more problematic, this work disregards differences between historical patterns and exceptional cases. For instance, Zeuske speculates about the degree to which the transatlantic slave trade to the United States continued after its prohibition in 1808 even by considering the systematic smuggling of captives from Cuba to the United States (4, 35, and 215). There is a difference between the documented assertion that two dozen slave vessels arrived in the United States between 1808 and the Civil War and the unsubstantiated claim that one million captive Africans disembarked in the United States in the same period.¹² And the same is applicable to the musings about the continuance of the slave trade to Cuba to 1880. While this book claims to address the world history of slave trading in chapter 2, it largely overlooks mainland Spanish America for the three centuries of the traffic before the nineteenth century, and the central role of Luso-Brazilians in the "hidden Atlantic," the very core of this work. All of this damages serious discussion of the continuance of this traffic and its implications for historical memory to this day.¹³

Representations and historical memory of the slave trade are the subject of Lisa Surwillo's *Monsters by Trade*, which examines how the continuation of this traffic influenced Spanish literature and broader imaginings about Spain from the nineteenth century to the present. Perhaps the most sophisticated work of

¹¹ Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom*. (New York: Penguin, 2013).

¹² On the ignominious campaign to reopen the transatlantic slave trade to the United States, see Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), chapter 14.

¹³ More nuanced and transnational analysis of these networks of Cuban, Spanish, US, and Luso-Brazilian merchants is found in Leonardo Marques, *The United States and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to the Americas, 1776–1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Manuel Barcia, "Fully Capable of Any Iniquity": The Atlantic Human Trafficking Network of the Zangroniz Family," *The Americas* 73, no. 3 (2016): 303–324. See also ongoing research by María del Carmen Barcia and her group in Cuba, and the work of Marial Iglesias Utset and Jorge Felipe in the United States.

this group, this book examines how the post-1824 Spanish empire, mostly limited to the Spanish Caribbean and the Philippines, shaped the emergence of the Spanish liberal state. Nearly one-third of the Spanish royal income came from Cuban sugar in this era—the underbelly of nineteenth-century Spanish liberalism. And in the realm of literature, narratives portraying a new generation of *indianos* (Spanish-born men who made a fortune in the Americas, married a rich local heiress, and then returned to their Iberian hometowns as nouveau riche) multiplied from Asturias to Catalonia and still live today in heritage sites and collective memory.

Monsters by Trade analyzes how the continuation of the slave trade and slavery in Cuba shaped metropolitan imaginings of coloniality, nation, and empire, as it “aims to account for the place of empire and the practices of its retention, in every-day peninsular life, both past and present” (8). Surwillo discusses the connections of Atlantic slavery, enlightenment, and modernity by showing that slavery became the price of modernity for Spain. The emergence of the *negrero* (slave trader) character in nineteenth-century Spanish literature reflects nineteenth-century transformations, given that “[he] was, simultaneously, a symbol of Spanish defiance of the British maritime ascendancy, a conduit of wealth for the empire, the occult force behind the government, and an outlaw, in many ways beyond the control of Cubans or the Spanish government” (9). This cultural repertoire established representations of the new nation (Spain as a liberal and modern state) partially based on slave trading and colonial slave labor. Thus this excellent work illuminates the cultural aspects usually invisible in social, economic, and political examinations of the continuance of the traffic.

The book opens with José María Blanco White, the main early nineteenth-century Spanish abolitionist pamphleteer, through whom Surwillo introduces the reader to her sources and debates. Blanco White coined the phrase “monsters by trade” to refer to how the traffic of captives turned Spaniards into beasts. He employed empathy and identification, weapons of previous generations of English abolitionists, as he related the suffering of Africans to the ordeals of Spaniards under the recent Napoleonic occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, he inserted abolitionism in very emotional Hispanic narratives to mobilize the empathy of readers.

The first chapter concentrates on three novels by Wenceslao Ayguals and the theatrical representations of *Uncle Tom* in mid-nineteenth-century Cuba. These sets of writings and performances are linked to each other by the character Negro Tomás (Black Thomas), forming a common reference for Cuban readers and audiences. These representations depicted the slave trader as a villain who tortured Africans as well as contributed to prolong Spain’s grip on Cuba. Chapter 2 transitions to the late nineteenth century and examines two realist novels by the Spanish genius Benito Pérez Galdós, in which the *negrero* moved from his Cuban environment to influence Spanish politics during the Bourbon restoration (1874–1931). Here colonial corruption infected metropolitan life. The third chapter moves to the early twentieth century through the analysis of how the Spanish novelist Pío Baroja recasts the slaver’s individualist impulses in maritime narratives published after Spain lost her insular empire—the trigger of the literary Generación del 98 (Generation of 1898).

The two final chapters of *Monsters by Trade* switch gears. In guides to *indiano* mansions in Asturias and Cantabria, Surwillo describes the reinvention of *indiano* life for mid to late twentieth-century tourist consumption. Here the author participates in the narrative as she visits these places and identifies how the retelling of history changed according to the present. The final chapter analyzes contemporary Catalan literature and memory, given that this region was the birthplace of the most important nineteenth-century Spanish slave traders. The conclusion shifts to how art representing slave vessels intervenes in today’s debates on the Mediterranean migratory crisis affecting Spain. While a bibliography on heritage sites and the memory of the slave trade do exist for the British Atlantic, and less for France and Brazil, this is probably the first book-length study that addresses this present and pressing issue for Spain.

While the book is clearly written, it would have been useful for readers outside of cultural studies and literature, like most of those interested in the slave trade to the Spanish Americas, to have additional references and context about the authors examined here as well as a larger introduction about how the author’s theoretical approach connects with her primary sources. While some of these novelists are landmarks of Spanish literature, it is uncertain what criteria Surwillo uses to select the main primary sources. In addition, a note on how these writings and performances (in the case of theater) impacted on the Spanish public—at least a suggestion—would have been useful to measure their significance in the larger cultural landscape and Spanish public sphere.

The previous and long history of colonialism and slave trading in the Spanish Americas appears somewhat mischaracterized, but this is not the fault of the author as most of the historiography on slave trading to the Spanish colonies almost exclusively focuses on nineteenth-century Cuba, which is exemplified by Zeuske’s book. For instance, it was not new that nineteenth-century Spanish intellectuals feared that the

colonies infected Spain, which was at the core of the changing relations and gazes between Spanish people born in the Americas and in the Iberian Peninsula during the previous three centuries. The same could be applied to the concept of contraband related to slave trading, which is a very thorny issue but here appears simplified: “The illegal slave trade grew out of a culture that had previously accommodated—in its structure and processes of consumption—piracy and contraband, corruption and bribery” (8). Contraband sometimes supported the very existence of the colonial regime in places such as seventeenth-century Buenos Aires, where royal measures prohibited most Atlantic commerce. Yet trade continued under several guises, given that contributions from legalized contraband became the main revenue for the functioning of the colonial state: without trade there were no funds for the colonial regime.¹⁴ And as many jurisdictions and bodies of laws regulated different set of peoples in the Spanish kingdoms (including the Americas), contraband as well as privateering depended on the ability of merchants to position themselves (legal posturing) and manipulate these jurisdictions, a set of practices still thriving in nineteenth-century Cuba, as revealed by the book of McCarthy above.

While Blanco White characterizes slave traders as inhuman and barbaric monsters, the social history that transpires in these books reflects the terrible normality of these traffickers in human flesh. Slave traders, as pirates and privateers, had been initially merchants and mariners conducting regular trade of goods in the Atlantic, sometimes across imperial borders in the Americas. Certain tension arises from examining the past as inherently “other” and different from today’s values, on the one side, and, on the other, presenting the past in such a way that readers are able to sense the humanity they share with people and events from the past, including slave traders and their victims. When looking at slavers and pirates (the extreme violence of the latter does not counteract their positive standing with today’s audiences), it is important to make understandable both the horrors and normality of their violence. Establishing connections between the brutal stories of Spanish privateers and slavers and the regular, somewhat tedious, life of Atlantic commerce in the Hispanic Atlantic is imperative.¹⁵ In the case of the books focusing on nineteenth-century Cuba and Spain, these works still have to counteract a very large historiography of the maritime world of slavers, privateers, and pirates in the age of sailing where the dominant narrative is the British Atlantic. Even as they claim to be antidotes to Anglo-Saxon normative understandings of Atlantic history, their main world of reference, categories, and conversation is the British Atlantic rather than the larger, older, and more diverse Spanish American world. Much more remains to be written not only about the slave trade to Cuba but to the entire Spanish Americas.

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¹⁴ Zacarías Moutoukias, *Contrabando y control colonial en el siglo XVII: Buenos Aires, el Atlántico y el espacio peruano* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1988).

¹⁵ See the dossier on trade, war, and contraband in the Ibero-Atlantic world published by *Colonial Latin American Review* in April 2011, vol. 20, no. 1.

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