Introduction, The Second Slavery

Mass Slavery, World-Economy, and Comparative Microhistories

Dale Tomich & Michael Zeuske

The articles gathered in this collection explore the history of Atlantic slavery during the period of what we have elsewhere called "the second slavery" (Tomich, 2004b: 56–71; Zeuske, 2006: 322–31). The term "second slavery" of course suggests an analogy with the "second serfdom." It refers to the systemic redeployment and expansion of Atlantic slavery during the nineteenth century. It is opposed to the more common view that chattel slavery was in one way or another an archaic institution, incompatible with modernity, that was condemned to extinction after the advent of industrial capitalism, modern political regimes, and liberal ideologies. In contrast, the concept of the second slavery calls attention to the world-historical processes that transformed the Atlantic world between the 1780's and 1888, when slavery was abolished in Brazil. These processes resulted in the decline of old zones of colonial slavery and the formation of highly productive new zones of slave commodity production. The period from the 1780's to the 1840's was a cycle of economic expansion throughout the Atlantic world, despite the disruptions of wars and revolutions. However, by the late 1820's and early 1830's, sugar production, the leading commodity in Atlantic trade, stagnated and declined in the old slave colonies of Great Britain and France as well as in the Brazilian Northeast. Yet, the production of sugar, along with the production of other slave-grown staples—most notably cotton and coffee—expanded in new zones of agricultural production outside of the colonial empires of France and Great Britain during the same period.

At the core of this expansive second slavery is the redeployment of slave labor as a productive force (*Massensklaverei*), that is,

the mass concentration of slave laborers devoted to staple production (Zeuske, 2004: 11–21, 131–56) and the creation of new productive spaces in order to meet growing world market demand for tropical and semi-tropical plantation staples generated by industrialization and urbanization. Cotton replaced sugar as the leading commodity in Atlantic trade, and the expanding commodity frontier of the U.S. South provided over 75% of world raw material supply from 1830 until the U.S. Civil War. Slave labor, new lands, and the cotton gin increased supply and drove the price of cotton down, fueling industrialization in Great Britain, the United States, and Europe. Demand for sugar also increased dramatically during the first half of the nineteenth century and it remained a major item in international trade. By 1830, Cuba emerged as the world's leading sugar producer and doubled its output every 10 years until the 1860's. The railroad made possible the expansion of the Cuban sugar zone. The Cuban *ingenio* produced sugar on an unprecedented scale and incorporated the new technologies of the steam-mill, vacuum pan, and centrifuge. Cuban sugar producers increased the quantity and quality of sugar placed on the market and set world prices. During the same period, coffee became a new article of mass consumption in Europe and North America, and Brazil emerged as the world's dominant producer. The Brazilian coffee *fazenda* organized land and labor on a new industrial scale, and production increased exponentially during the nineteenth century.

The emergence of this new Atlantic division of labor was not simply the result of market forces, but was shaped by the political forces of the Age of Revolution. The independence of the United States broke the imperial integration of Great Britain's North American colonies and its Caribbean plantation zones. Not only were the British West Indies deprived of a privileged source of timber, livestock, and foodstuffs, and, above all, the services of North American slave traders, but Great Britain was faced with a potential maritime and commercial competitor as well. American shipping in the Atlantic was about equal to that of Great Britain. The United States began to actively trade with the French and Spanish colonies of the Americas as well as with Brazil, including, of course, trade in slaves. The United States confounded British efforts to abolish the international slave trade; we should also recall that from early on in the nineteenth century, the one place that Great

Britain could not undersell its rivals was in the Cuban market where the United States was predominant.

Haiti's victorious slave revolution and the foundation of a new state destroyed France's American empire and Great Britain's imperial ambition. It removed the world's richest colony and largest producer of sugar, coffee, and cotton from international commerce. The revolution also transformed the politics and economics of slavery and the slave trade throughout the Americas in myriad ways. In this regard, it is perhaps the pivot on which the new zones of slave production emerged. The transfer of Florida and Louisiana to the United States was also a consequence of the Haitian Revolution, as, in certain sense, was the undermining of export slave economies in the *tierra firme* of Venezuela during the wars of independence, 1810–21. The acquisition of Florida brought the Gulf ports of Pensacola and Mobile under U.S. control and gave the expanding cotton belt access to river and maritime transport. The Louisiana Purchase brought in new lands west of the Mississippi and extended control of the Gulf Coast to New Orleans, providing a river and ocean transport network and tying together the various zones of the new republic. The rich lands of the Lower South, with their river systems and ports, were open for the expansion of cotton production and slave labor. However, with their expansion, they came into political and economic competition with Northern agriculture on the western frontier.

Latin American independence and particularly the independence of Brazil created the political space for planters to respond to the new economic opportunities. In Brazil, the coffee planters of the Valley of Paraíba became particularly influential in the new empire, and independence allowed Brazil a wider margin to continue involvement in the African slave trade, particularly in Angola, Kongo, and Mozambique. Cuba remained part of the Spanish Empire, but, responding to the stimulus provided by the destruction of the Saint Domingue sugar industry, the Havana planter class secured the autonomy necessary to develop the sugar zone of *Cuba grande,* secure markets for their produce, and maintain their active involvement in the slave trade. Indeed, the profits of Cuba's contraband trade were an important support of the Spanish state itself.

Staple production in the new zones of the second slavery had to adapt to expanding and competitive postcolonial markets and their formation entailed the creation of new commodity circuits linking

the Atlantic world. The United States exported cotton to Great Britain but did not import British goods on the same scale. It had a large balance of trade surplus that allowed it to become the major market for Cuban sugar and Brazilian coffee. This trade was financed by British credit, and goods were carried in British ships. Cuba and especially Brazil were major markets for British exports. This new commodity triangle reshaped the linkages between North and South America, Africa, and Europe.

At the same time, the new zones of the second slavery developed against the pressure of antislavery movements and efforts to abolish the international slave trade. The abolition of the slave trade did not in itself end slavery, but it was a factor in the economic and political differentiation of the Atlantic as the politics of antislavery and the market demand for slaves directed the slave trade from the old production and toward the new zones of the second slavery. Despite efforts to abolish the international slave trade, the first half of the nineteenth century was perhaps the peak period of the Atlantic slave trade. The contraband slave trade continued in the shadow of the new commodity triangle until the 1870's. The most comprehensive survey of the Atlantic slave trade available records over two million African slaves who were disembarked in the Americas between 1801 and 1850, the great majority of them in Brazil and Cuba (Eltis et al., 1999). The traffic in slaves—legal, illegal, or internal—was the motor of the development of the new zones of the second slavery even as slave trading operated under new logics and strategies.

The second slavery represents a crisis of colonial slavery, but not the crisis of slavery as such. The emergence of new slave commodity frontiers accelerated the decline of the old colonial spaces that were unable to compete under the new conditions. At the same time, they undermined the colonial division of labor in which competing metropolitan powers attempted to control and manage the sources of production in their Atlantic colonies and to confine trade within politically defined mercantilist circuits. This crisis reformed the Atlantic as a political economic space. Step by step, American-Atlantic port cities, like Rio, Havana, and New York, became more important. The strategic point of control in the nineteenth-century Atlantic was no longer the sources of production, but the flows of commodities.

The second slavery structurally transformed the Atlantic as a historical region of the world-economy. The redeployment and differentiation of slave labor throughout the Atlantic world was the result of the interaction of multiple causes operating across diverse spatial-temporal scales. It was "a partial outcome of complex causes and a partial cause of complex outcomes" (Hopkins, 1986b: 147). The decline of old zones of slave production and the formation of new ones are simultaneous and interrelated processes. The coexistence of old and new slave zones is perhaps best understood as what Reinhardt Koselleck refers to as the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" (1985: 92–104). It at once emphasizes both the temporal and spatial complexity of slavery and the ways in which slavery is implicated in the formation of modernity. The relation of zones to one another within the evolving world division of labor creates and recreates the differences between them. Taken together, they form an interdependent, structured, and mutually conditioning historical whole that creates a definite new pattern of development of Atlantic slave systems with its own temporalities and spatial extensions.

Thus, contrary to many prevailing interpretations, the second slavery defines a distinct period of Atlantic history. The linkages forged across the north and south Atlantic, on the Atlantic facades of the Americas, and what we might call "the Africas" demonstrate the fundamental interrelation and interdependence of the Atlantic as a historical space. The distinctive configuration of relations and processes that emerged during this period represents a spatial temporal break in the history of Atlantic slavery. It must be understood in its own terms and not as a residual of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century slave systems. It requires us to develop explicit models that extend at least to the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888 (and, perhaps, in Africa as well).

Our approach emphasizes the spatial-temporal singularity, interrelation, and interdependence of the instances of slave production within the Atlantic as a complex, comprehensive, multilevel unit of social action. It calls for a different method than the comparison of apparently independent and commensurate (national) units, each of which possesses its own intrinsic attributes. At stake is a unified history of Atlantic slavery, a history *formed by and formative of* the Atlantic rather than a history of slaveries *in* the Atlantic.

Our purpose is to reconstruct the Atlantic as a complex, multilayered spatial-temporal whole. We take the Atlantic plantation zone as the unit of observation of our inquiry (Wagley, 1957; Tomich, 2005a; Zeuske, 2004). We understand this zone as a distinct and more or less coherent region formed by and formative of relations and processes of the modern world-economy that extend beyond it both in space and time. The Atlantic plantation zone is itself comprised of diverse and singular local instances of slave production that are regarded as constituent parts of the larger regional and world division of labor rather than independent entities with their own social laws. These instances are particular concentrations or nodal points produced within more extensive networks of relations. Systemic world processes operating through definite and identifiable social relations interact with particular local environments possessing distinct historical conditions and material endowments. The resultant transformations of particular locations create specific and irreducibly "local faces" that are incommensurate with one another (Mintz, 1977; Tomich, 1990: 76–123). Similar processes of plantation slavery operate in each instance, but each represents a spatially and temporally distinct outcome of processes within the common relational field (Hopkins, 1986a, 31; 1986b, 149–57). The non-identity of, and ongoing tension between the global and the local gives rise to the temporal and spatial heterogeneity and unevenness of the world-economy.

Within this analytical framework our interest lies in examining the formation of relations in particular local time-place settings and theoretically reconstructing the complex and multiform processes that produce the differences between them. (In other words, our focus is on understanding the relations that produce specific outcomes, not on outcomes as properties of autonomous units.) Successive movement back and forth between whole and parts, between global and local, allows us to redeploy general concepts in specific contexts and progressively bring more elements into relation with one another. This procedure enables us to order and interpret data, establish variation through time and space, and ground interpretive and explanatory accounts in specific contexts (Hopkins, 1986b, 147; Kosík, 1976: 15). In this way we may extend and deepen analysis by specifying particular developments and reconstructing the relations among them within a unified framework. Such relational mapping of plantation slavery discloses spatially

and temporally complex and uneven patterns of development of Atlantic slavery. It provides a richer and more adequate understanding of the processes forming and reforming Atlantic slavery and allows a more comprehensive account of its historical transformations through specific times and places.

However, we must be careful not to confuse our theoretical framework and methodological procedures—the conditions of cognition—with actual history. We are not proposing a structural history without human actors (Zeuske, 2006: 20–24, 35–62). Rather, we emphasize that agencies are formed through social relations that are spatially and temporally complex and diverse. However, the relation between structure and agency presents two difficulties to be avoided: on the one hand, seeing actors as simply determined by fixed and predetermined relations among structures; on the other hand, treating actors or agencies as prior to or in isolation from the relations that create them and make action possible. In the light of these difficulties, we approach the question of agency, and particularly slave agency, through comparative microhistory. Through self-conscious reduction in scale, microhistorical analysis allows us to closely contextualize human agency while remaining relatively open to the diversity and contingency of social action and thought. In this way microhistory facilitates exploration of the conditions, possibilities, and limits of agency.

However, we do not view microhistorical research as an end in itself. Rather, we propose microhistory as "world history from the perspective of the individual" (*Weltgeschichte aus der Perspektive von Menschen*) (Zeuske, 2006: 9). This conception may seem like an oxymoron. Microhistory is known for its rich and innovative interpretations of singular phenomena and its innovative approach to the interpretation of documentary evidence. It is characterized by a reduction in scale, concern with the contingent, the unique, the fragmentary. It thus appears to be far removed from macrohistorical approaches. However, what has come to be known as *microhistoria* in Italy was conceived as a response to the serial history practiced by Fernand Braudel and the French *Annales* School and has maintained a complex relation to it even as it has pursued a divergent course of development (Ginzburg & Poni, 1991). For the Italian microhistorians the *Annalistes'* strongly quantitative emphasis on serial history and their concern with identifying causal relations between spatial-temporal structures results in what Carlo Ginzburg

describes as the "equalization of individuals" (1993: 21). Serial history is only concerned with what is homogenous and comparable. It disregards the singular, the peculiar, and the anomalous. In both subject matter and method, Italian *microhistoria* turned to the *opposite* of serial history. In a sense they theorize the "event history" polemically dismissed by Braudel as the "ephemera of history," "dust," and "fireflies" passing across the stage. Thus, despite the obvious differences between Braudel's *longue durée* approach to historical structures and the practices of the microhistorians, both share a common grounding in a conception of the plurality of historical time (Braudel, 1969).

The shared ground of these two approaches in a conception of plural time allows microhistory to be brought into a dialogue with the macrohistorical model that we are constructing for the Atlantic second slavery. However, it is necessary to register a note of caution with regard to what we may call the "false concrete" or pseudoconcrete (Kosík, 1976: 1–17). Microhistory is not "more real" or "more concrete" because of its proximity to the actions, beliefs, and values of particular social actors. It is a spatial temporal reconstruction like any other. In fact, present within the reduced scale of microhistory are elements of long duration and greater spatial extension—for example, demography, kinship, agricultural practices, structures of belief and knowledge—although they are not at the foreground of analysis. However, such long-term, large-scale relations do not simply reproduce themselves at the microlevel. The microhistorical unit does not simply reiterate the relations of a more comprehensive historical unit, and it cannot be explained by reference to a closed global system that stands outside of it. Rather, the reduction of scale practiced by microhistory allows closer interrogation of the complex interaction of dense clusters of relations that is not accessible in any other way. From this perspective it is possible to more adequately reconstruct the relations between conditions experienced as given by particular actors, and the space of possibility, choice, and contingency that informs the actions of individuals and groups.

Thus, we regard both the macrohistory and microhistory of Atlantic slavery as parts of an encompassing modern world history—the formation of societies, world economic structures, and structures of domination. The juxtaposition of these two approaches draws explicit attention to questions of spatial-temporal scale and

movement across diverse scales. However, relations between global and the local, *longue durée* processes, specific conjunctures, and event history are necessarily nonequivalent, asymmetrical, and discontinuous. Just as long-term world historical processes cannot, by themselves, provide adequate accounts of particular local histories, so weaving together microhistories of specific regions or localities removes from consideration translocal processes and global structures. At the same time, macrohistorical and microhistorical scales are not commensurate with one another. Each speaks to different orders of reality and different levels of abstraction. Each requires a methodology appropriate to it.

Consequently, analysis of the relation between global and local processes requires us to move back and forth *across* diverse, incommensurate, and asymmetrical temporal and spatial scales. Microhistories may be contextualized in larger spatial-temporal conjunctures and concretize macrohistories through close-grained microhistorical analysis. Such an approach allows us to re-apply concepts in new contexts, and to progressively incorporate new relations into our interpretive and explanatory frameworks. It enables us to delineate the active formation and reformation of long- and medium-term relations, more adequately account for the production and reproduction of spaces and places, to ascertain the conditions and consequences of diverse forms of agency and to specify processes, networks, transfers, and make relevant comparisons. In this way, we may produce more adequate accounts of the singularity, interrelation, and interdependence of diverse instances of slave production within the Atlantic as a complex, comprehensive, multilevel unit of social action.

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