The British Parliament’s decision in 1807 to outlaw slave carrying by British subjects had profound international consequences. Having supported transatlantic slave trading for centuries as a central pillar of colonial projects in the Americas, British governments in the nineteenth century pursued a range of policies designed not only to end slavery within British territories, but also to restrict the slave systems of other political communities. This international antislavery advocacy proved difficult, expensive, and politically divisive. In places untouched by organized antislavery, slavery and slave trading continued to be considered – as they had been in Britain up to the late eighteenth century – integral features of the prevailing social and economic order. Contests over the status of slavery challenged the economic interests of pro-slavery groups. They also brought into focus larger questions of collective honour and national virtue. Continental European elites commonly suspected that anti-slavery masked other goals, making them hesitant to embrace policies they knew to be politically unpopular and potentially damaging economically. Ultimately, however, they felt compelled to condemn publicly slavery in order to uphold their international credentials as ‘civilized’ nations. Having taken steps to introduce anti-slavery measures, they went on publicly to celebrate their humanity and to downplay their earlier involvement in slavery. These individual national decisions had important cumulative effects: by the second half of the nineteenth century, anti-slavery was more a hallmark of European civilization than just a peculiarly British preoccupation.

To understand this evolving relationship between British anti-slavery, collective honour, and European identity, we draw on an expanding literature on the history and theory of international society. This provides an instructive vantage point from which to explore the history of slavery and abolition before and after 1807. Though

it embraces issues relating to strategic interactions and national interests, the concept of international society places particular emphasis upon the sociological and institutional dimensions of relations between states. Especially salient here are evolving cleavages between 'Self' and 'Other'. These tend to operate at multiple levels. At a national level, we consistently observe nation-states – or political communities more generally – juxtaposing their own values and traditions against those of their immediate peers, as, for example, when the British constructed their national identity by means of stylized contrasts with absolutist France. At the level of civilizations, however, collective identities may overshadow national differences. Thus, whatever their differences with the French, Britons still regarded their centuries-old rivals as representatives of a common European civilization, which shared values distinguishable from 'barbarous' and 'decadent' peoples elsewhere. These overlapping identities – and associated political institutions – played, we shall argue, a key role in shaping first the colonization of Europe's 'New World' and then the post-1807 dissemination of anti-slavery commitments across the globe.

Our story does not attempt to capture every aspect of the history of European colonization and anti-slavery. Rather, it offers an episodic account of some of the main dynamics that have shaped the international status of slavery over the last five centuries. To this end, we shall first briefly outline the key features of the concept of international society. We then move on to explore slavery’s entanglement with the expansion of European models of political authority in the Americas between 1492 and 1807. This connection between international society and transatlantic slavery involved the alignment of private interests with state-dominating political elites in the pursuit of public or mercantilist policies aimed at maximizing the wealth and power of individual states relative to their rivals. Finally, we shall look at the international history of organized anti-slavery, beginning with Britain’s attempt to build consensus within the European world and then looking at the relationship between anti-slavery and the outward expansion of European international society during the age of high imperialism. By this time, opposition to slavery was firmly embedded within evolving forms of collective identification and differentiation, with anti-slavery gradually coming to represent both a key symbol of moral and social progress within Europe and a further emblem of what set European 'civilization' apart from peoples in other parts of the globe.


2 For a useful survey, see I. B. Neumann, Uses of the Other: «The East» in European Identity Formation (Minneapolis, 1999), especially 39–64.

1. The Concept of International Society

The concept of international society can be understood as both a set of theoretical ideas and as an empirical-historical category. The theoretical strand revolves around a distinctive image of international order, in which common interests, institutions, and orientations are said to play an important part in shaping relations between political communities. Commonly characterized as part of the ‘Grotian tradition’, this image of international order occupies a middle ground between ‘Machiavellian’ power politics and ‘Kantian’ utopianism. In this formulation, international society rests on core institutions such as the balance of power, diplomacy, and international law. These pillars of international order maintain a fragile yet nonetheless identifiable society of states. Thus an international society exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.

An international society can be distinguished from an international system, which involves political communities interacting in ways that affect their individual calculations, but remaining unbound by shared rules, institutions or orientations. This distinction is especially valuable when we consider international society as an empirical-historical category. This formulation allows for different kinds of society and the evolution of social and institutional orders through time. In this context, the concept of international society offers a framework for examining the principles and procedures that have governed relations among political communities in changing historical settings. In particular, it allows us to focus on the ways in which changes in ideologies and institutions have influenced international behaviour across time and place.

Much of the discussion to date using this approach has centred on European history, reflecting in large part the European origins of contemporary international order. Two main axes of inquiry are discernible within this now extensive literature. One revolves around change within European international society, and relates, among other things, to the transition from medieval Christendom to sovereign statehood or from absolutist sovereignty to modern nation-states. The other axis relates to the process of international integration, with particular reference to the development of new forms of institutional cooperation, such as the European Union, and to the institutions of global governance.

to sovereign nationhood. The other relates to the outward expansion of European authority, traditionally seen to have begun with fifteenth-century Iberian conquests and culminating in the «high imperialism» of the early twentieth-century. Though each invites different lines of inquiry, we may envisage the two axes as different faces of a larger cultural-institutional complex, where transformations within European international society helped to shape Europe’s evolving relations with the wider world.

Our purpose in this article is to explore both facets of this empirical-historical approach to the construction of international society. We shall begin by looking at how European expansion helped to shape international society in the Atlantic world before 1807. This involved, among other things, the transplanting of slavery as a key institution in building European political authority and ultimately wealth-creation in the Americas. We shall then look at how a revulsion, first against slave-trafficking and later against slavery within European international society, helped to initiate processes that resulted not only in the redefining of European identity but also in reshaping international society itself during the course of the nineteenth century. As we shall see, conceptions of «Self» and «Other» were a key component of shifts in the cultural and institutional complex of European identity and thus in the changing international society that Europeans sought to construct.

2. Slavery and the Expansion of European Models of Political Authority

Portugal’s exploration of the Atlantic coastline of Africa and the Castilian-Genoese funding of Columbus’ voyage to the Americas in 1492 transformed European and ultimately world history. After first overrunning the Atlantic islands off Africa, the Iberian powers soon became colonial powers in Central and South America, overthrowing the Aztec and Inca empires and established footholds in Northeastern Brazil by 1540. In the following century, they extended their own domain and encountered growing competition from North Europeans for American resources.


11 E. Keene, Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics (Cambridge, 2002), 5–11, 22–29; J. Clark, Legitimacy in International Society (Oxford, 2005), 33–50; Keal, European Conquest, 32–37; Onuma, «When was the Law of International Society Born?», 24, 64.

By 1650, the coastline of the Americas was familiar to many Europeans; by 1750, large portions of the continent were firmly under European rule. It is a story familiar to most historians and schoolchildren. Yet it stands in stark contrast to what happened in continental Africa, where, with some exceptions, Europeans rarely succeeded in imposing their rule before the nineteenth century. This is not to deny that Europeans established trading forts along the Atlantic littoral of Africa and built a substantial settlement at Luanda in Angola from the sixteenth century onwards. Such bases, however, arose under African sufferance and their primary goal was to establish local rights to trade against European rivals. It was to be four centuries after Portuguese travellers first began sailing south that the <Scramble for Africa> took place. In the meantime, Europeans or people of European descent had largely completed the colonization of the Americas. The qualified nature of European colonialism in Africa also echoes developments in other parts of the world, where political elites from the Chinese, Ottoman, and Mughal empires regularly dictated terms to Europeans during the early modern era, only to be gradually eclipsed from 1750 onwards. From a global standpoint, the conquest of the Americas appears as something of a historical anomaly, predating European expansion in most other parts of the world by several centuries.

A critical factor in the different patterns of European interaction with peoples in Africa and the Americas was epidemiology. Writing in 1776, Adam Smith noted the failure of the <miserable and helpless> groups that inhabited the Americas to withstand European colonization, contrasting this with the resilience of African societies in the face of Europeans. Smith emphasized the relative strength of African and American societies to explain this difference, but the collapse of indigenous institutions in the Americas probably owed more to epidemiological factors over which the local population had no control than to any intrinsic weaknesses in Native American societies or the military and technological superiority of their conquerors. For each indigenous American who died at the hands of European soldiers, hundreds if not thousands likely fell victim to bacteria and viruses of European origin to which they had no natural immunity. By contrast, when Europeans travelled to tropical or sub-tropical Africa, it was they and not the local

population who were at risk from diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. This was to be a major obstacle to European penetration of Africa before the nineteenth century."

Two major outcomes flowed from these different epidemiological exchanges between European and non-European peoples. First, the collapse of indigenous populations in the Americas facilitated the transplanting of European socio-political institutions and values to the Americas after 1492 while, simultaneously, creating local shortages of labour for the commercial exploitation of the new lands and resources falling under European rule. Secondly, in their efforts to resolve the labour crisis, Europeans needed to resort to alternative sources of labour and at the same time to impose limitations on the local mobility of such labour if they were to maximize returns from their exploitation of American natural resources. Migration from Europe played some part in resolving these problems, in the process reinforcing the transfer of European values and institutions to the Americas. The number of migrants from Europe to the Americas reached about 200,000 before 1600 and perhaps 2.25 million in total during the three centuries before 1800. Moreover, from very low proportions in the sixteenth century, the ratio of bonded servants among European migrants rose thereafter, peaking between 1650 and 1750.

While such migration was instrumental in extending European international society to the Americas, it nevertheless fell far short of meeting the labour needs of American colonies from which mercantilists in Europe anticipated extracting increasingly large amounts of tradable output and wealth. Enslaved Africans provided the solution. There is some debate about why precisely this happened, but long-term familiarity with enslaved African labour in the Mediterranean, the use of Africans to repopulate the Atlantic islands conquered by Portugal and Spain after 1450, and the willingness of African societies themselves to sell captives to Europeans, conspired collectively to facilitate the adoption of that solution by the Iberian powers. Moreover, it was a model that rival European nations found...
attractive when they joined the «scramble» for the Americas from the late sixteenth century onwards. As they did so, they helped to build international systems with Africa in which political communities with otherwise few shared values agreed to interact in ways to maximize the benefits of mutual exchange.

The outcome of these forces was a transatlantic movement of African captives on an increasingly massive scale. The numbers of Africans deported to the Americas has been much disputed and can never be precisely known. The latest estimates, however, indicate that some 9.5 million captives were embarked in Africa for the Americas between 1500 and 1807, when Britain outlawed such activity by its nationals. Another 3 million or so were taken away between 1807 and 1867. Of the total of 12.5 million captives deported before 1867, just over half (or 6.5 million) left their homeland in the eighteenth century. The last fact underlines the dramatic rise in transatlantic slaving activity that occurred between the sixteenth century, when Spain and Portugal dominated the Atlantic slave trade, and the later years, when nations from Northern Europe joined in the colonization of the Americas. This accelerated outflow caused an «Africanization» of transatlantic migration, with over four times as many people of African birth crossing the Atlantic as Europeans between 1500 and 1820. Moreover, because Africans travelled as captives whereas large proportions of European were «free» migrants, the overall proportion of coerced to free migrants from the «Old World» to the Americas tended to rise through time. The desire of Europeans to turn their American colonies into productive, wealth-creating assets thus relied to an extraordinary extent on a forced migration that increasingly affected Africans. Without being formally colonized, political elites in Africa were instrumental in allowing Europeans to effectively extend the boundaries of international society to the Americas between 1500 and 1807.

The actual flows of African peoples into transatlantic slavery largely depended on investment by Europeans in ships, in goods to barter for captives in Africa, and in the plantations and mines in the Americas that required coerced labour. Such investments, in turn, hinged on growing demand in Europe for the products of slave labour such as precious metals, sugar, tobacco, coffee, rice, and cotton.

22 As Davis remarks, «[b]y the late 1500s [...] the central elements of an Atlantic Slave System had already emerged» (Inhuman Bondage, 95).


27 For a recent and accessible survey, see H. S. Klein, The Atlantic Slave Trade (New York, 1999).
Critical among these items in the long-term was sugar, the production of which accounted for the lives of some three-quarters of the Africans taken into American slavery before 1807. Sugar production therefore largely dictated changes in the scale and direction of arrivals of African captives in the Americas from the mid-sixteenth to early nineteenth century. Sugar also emerged as an important item of consumption in Europe by the eighteenth century, strengthening the identity between European consumerism and American slavery. The relationship between slavery and sugar, however, proved to be very problematic, for American slave-importing areas that specialized in sugar production rarely managed to achieve sustainability in their slave populations. The production of sugar became a ‹sweet malefactor›, consuming the lives of captive Africans and in the process increasing the dependence of American sugar plantations on continuing flows of such captives across the Atlantic.

While market forces and their human costs largely determined patterns of commercial activity, including slave-trading, in the emergent Atlantic economy created by European colonization of the Americas, we should not overlook the direct involvement by European states in promoting the growth of transatlantic slavery as a key element of the extension of international society to the Americas. From the 1510s, the Spanish authorities issued licenses for slaving voyages and later established the asiento or international contract to supply slaves to their territories. In time, the asiento became a bargaining counter in international diplomacy, passing from Portuguese, to Dutch, then French and finally English slave carriers. The entry of the Danes, Dutch, English and French and even some of the German states into the slave trade in the seventeenth century was encouraged by their national governments by the issue of monopoly charters of trade to Africa. It was a model followed by the Portuguese during the Pombal period in the eighteenth century. Burdened with the cost of maintaining trading castles in Africa,

32 See, for example, W. Westergaard, The Danish West Indies under Company Rule (1671–1754) (New York, 1917); G. F. Zook, The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa (Lancaster, Pa., 1919); K. G. Davies, The Royal African Company (London, 1937); Abdoulaye Ly, La Compagnie du Senegal
yet unable to prevent encroachment on their monopoly trading rights in Africa by other Europeans, these companies often failed in the face of competition from private traders, but their role in laying the foundations of the slave trade of several European nations should not be understated. Moreover, their passing did not mean the end of state underwriting of transatlantic slavery. On the contrary, the private slave traders that typically replaced them arguably profited from subsidies in the form of protection for slave-produced goods in European markets and in some cases from direct subsidies to outfitters of slave ships. To state interventions in support of slave trafficking were added endorsements of colonial slave codes and other measures intended to protect the rights of owners in their African chattels. Although such mercantilist measures were sometimes criticized by contemporaries for encouraging misallocation of resources, they nevertheless ensured that support for slavery became ingrained in the politics and thinking of European nation-states.

One does not have to look far to uncover reasons for the identification of mercantilist states in Europe with the promotion of transatlantic slavery. As the economist Alfred Marshall noted almost a century ago, «silver and sugar seldom came to Europe without a stain of blood». Imports of both enriched Spain in the sixteenth century, while, according to the historian C.R Fay, London’s access to Brazilian gold through Portugal enabled the city to supplant Amsterdam as the financial capital of Europe in the eighteenth century. Precious metals were not, however, the only American slave-produced commodities to bring wealth to Europe in the early modern period. The tropical and sub-tropical regions of the Americas where slave arrivals from Africa concentrated – Brazil and the Caribbean – were among the wealthiest parts of the Americas as long as slavery was allowed to endure. They also proved, to be vital engines of growth of European trade in the century and a half after 1650 as sugar, tobacco, rice, and other-slave grown products dominated transatlantic exchanges and infiltrated even exchanges between political communities within Europe itself. In the same period, import duties on such


35 C. R. Fay, *Economic History mainly since 1700* (Toronto, 1940), 36.


37 D. Acemoglu, S. Johnson and J. Robinson, «The
products became a useful source of revenues for European states frequently embroiled in wars in which conflict between states in Europe was matched increasingly by conflict within their colonial territories. In this respect, American slavery and the trade in enslaved Africans that underlay its growth proved to be more than the ‘Great Pillar’ of Atlantic commerce, upon which Malachy Postlethwayt famously remarked in the 1740s.\textsuperscript{38} They were by that date woven into the fabric of European fiscal-military states, as mercantilism and African slavery became inextricably intertwined in the extension of European international society to the Americas.

Acknowledging contemporary writers who identified the enrichment and power of European states with transatlantic slavery, some historians have gone even further in linking slavery to the onset of industrialization in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century. The most notable exponent of such arguments was Eric Williams, who argued that profits from American slavery provided one of the central streams of capital accumulation that fertilized British industrialization.\textsuperscript{39} Williams has not been alone in seeing connections between slavery, commercial prosperity, and growth in the Atlantic Basin.\textsuperscript{40} He also went on to argue, however, that just as slavery nurtured British industrialization, so the latter, in turn, proved to be a critical factor in the rise of British anti-slavery and the birth of the abolitionist movement. We do not intend to evaluate the debate that both of Williams’ arguments have provoked. Anti-slavery attitudes in Britain, however, evidently existed before industrialization. Moreover, their mobilization into a political movement in the 1780s may have been more connected with the American Revolution than with industrial change in Britain at that time.\textsuperscript{41} Be that as it may, the organized abolitionism in Britain that arose from the 1780s and after 1815 became a national crusade against slave trafficking, and even slavery in the Americas was instrumental in shifting attitudes towards slavery in Europe as part of a wider reformulation of European identity. This, we would argue, was to have major implications for Europe’s relations with the rest of the world. The implications of British efforts to internationalize anti-slavery within nineteenth-century European international society are the subject of the next section of this paper.


\textsuperscript{39} E. Williams, \textit{Capitalism and Slavery} (Chapel Hill, 1944).


\textsuperscript{41} These are key themes in C. L. Brown, \textit{Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism} (Chapel Hill, 2006).
3. British Efforts to Internationalize Anti-Slavery

Within a decade of electing to outlaw slave carrying by its subjects, Britain embarked on an international effort to end the slave trade and eventually slavery itself. In due course this would extend to what we might call «the anti-slavery project», the international history of which came to be bound up with a reformulation of European identity and with the historical evolution of European international society in the ensuing century and beyond.42 British efforts to extend abolition of the slave trade were initially treated with suspicion by Europeans, but their ultimate acceptance of abolition and even anti-slavery – in principle if more reluctantly at times in practice – laid the groundwork for the incorporation of anti-slavery into the normative and institutional standards of European international society. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Europe’s commitment to anti-slavery included self-congratulatory efforts to differentiate between «civilized» and «uncivilized» peoples, and, as such, helped to legitimate imperial expansion between 1850 and 1914. In the context of imperialism, it is tempting to see anti-slavery rhetoric as a pretext for other agendas. There were cases, such as King Leopold’s activities in the Congo, which fit this mould, but it is important to bear in mind that the advocacy and implementation of anti-slavery was rarely a cost-free exercise. On the contrary, it typically involved foregoing economic opportunities; accepting the direct political and economic costs of legally abolishing slave-trading and holding; and absorbing the ancillary costs of introducing alternative (and often less competitive) labour systems and modes of governance. In most cases, the main economic calculation involved in debates over the introduction of anti-slavery measures revolved around efforts to minimise costs rather than maximise gains. To make sense of these political and economic costs we need to understand the relationship between anti-slavery, evolving ideologies of national and «civilizational» exceptionalism, and the acceleration of colonial expansion during the second half of the nineteenth century.

For half a century after 1807, Britain waged a major international campaign against the Atlantic slave trade. Denmark and the United States voluntarily relinquished slave trafficking before or at about the same time as the British, but other nations, notably France, the Low Countries, Spain, Portugal, and after its independence in 1822, Brazil, resisted British pressures to end their participation in an activity that they continued to regard as longstanding, legitimate, and economically valuable. In their efforts to internationalize abolition, the British resorted to a combination of diplomacy, bribery and naval action. Growing British economic strength through industrialization and global trade relations facilitated the fund-
ing of such action, but the costs of sustaining the campaign proved to be considerable. It has been calculated that by any reasonable assessment of profits and direct costs, the nineteenth-century costs of suppression were certainly bigger than the eighteenth-century benefits. Another assessment has suggested that the campaign absorbed annually some 1.8 percent of national income over a sixty-year period. This figure was close to six times the mean percentage contribution among OECD countries to development aid in 1975–1996. These calculations do not include the indirect costs to Britain arising from its unilateral withdrawal from slaaving; if Britain had continued in the trade of people, it would doubtless have gained from the pursuit of an activity that remained profitable both before and after 1807 and helped to nurture systems of American slavery, which themselves remained viable well beyond 1807. The idea that British (or any other) capitalists orchestrated legal abolition to advance their narrow material interests is extremely difficult to sustain.

The impact of British interventions to eradicate slave carrying – first in the Atlantic Ocean and later in the Indian Ocean – has been called into question. As is well known, British pressure and bribery resulted in both restrictions and the formal outlawing of the slave trade in France (1814, 1815), Portugal (1810, 1815, 1817), Spain (1814, 1817, 1820), and Brazil (1822, 1826, 1830), but this did not prevent a substantial and often illegal traffic in captives from continuing, usually with the tacit support of various political authorities. Some three million slaves left Africa for the Americas after British abolition, with perhaps two-thirds being moved illegally. At times, the flow of captives crossing the Atlantic came close to matching that reached at the height of the Atlantic slave trade before 1807. Further light on the efficacy of British suppression activities is provided by figures on recaptures of

45 Ibid., 636–637. If this figure is limited to untied aid, it falls to 0.23 percent. As the most generous country, Norway allocated around 1 percent of its gross national product, of which roughly 0.81 percent was untied.
Africans by British naval patrols, which totalled around 160,000 enslaved Africans. Although the great majority of those liberated gained their freedom as a consequence of seizures by ships operating under British orders, the numbers liberated were but a small fraction of those taken from their African homeland to the Americas.\textsuperscript{50}

Such findings highlight the difficulties under which the British operated after 1815 in trying to suppress slave trafficking in the Atlantic Ocean. Some of those difficulties reflected the geographical scope of Atlantic slaving activity and the near impossibility of effectively patrolling several thousand miles of African Atlantic coastline. Others reflected the robustness of demand for new African captives in slave economies in Brazil and Cuba, where imported Africans were needed both to expand plantation production and to replace those who died prematurely working in such regimes. Yet others reflected the international politics of British suppression activities and the refusal of some powers, including the United States, to allow the British rights of search of their vessels at sea or to prevent the use of their flags as flags of convenience to inhibit British intervention. In this respect, nations appealed to the norms and practices of European international society to frustrate or at least constrain Britain’s attempts to suppress slaving activities. Their use of such measures was perhaps reinforced by suspicion of British motives for pursuing suppression in the first place. On occasion, and most notably in the case of Portugal and Brazil, the British resorted to force to challenge the limits imposed on their behavior by international norms, but they were not prepared to do so consistently.\textsuperscript{51} This allowed a significant illegal slave trade to flourish, against which little could be done to ensure genuine compliance with existing agreements other than making further diplomatic entreaties or taking precipitous military action.\textsuperscript{52}

There is no question that the British experienced considerable difficulties implementing their suppression policies after 1815, but these difficulties do not in themselves invalidate the international significance of Parliament’s interdiction of the British slave trade in 1807.\textsuperscript{53} At the end of the Napoleonic Wars and within a decade of Britain’s own unilateral withdrawal from the slave trade, the British government was able at the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15 to get the Low Countries, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, and France to take symbolic steps against the slave trade.\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, it succeeded in getting a formal declaration built into the

\textsuperscript{50} Eltis, \textit{Economic Growth}, 97–98.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 84–85.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 148, 209.
\textsuperscript{53} Our argument here takes no account of the fact that, in the absence of British and US abolition in 1807–8, arguably many more Africans would have been carried into slavery in the Americas.
Act of Vienna denouncing the slave trade as ‘repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality’. Reinforcing this, the British anti-slavery movement organized a domestic petitioning campaign, which collected an unprecedented 750,000 signatures. They also made appeals to continental elites. Within just a few years of 1807, therefore, British activism had placed anti-slavery on the international political agenda, and despite the obstacles it faced in delivering suppression over the next few decades, succeeded in maintaining international pressure to end the traffic. Critical to this process were the effective ending of French involvement in the trade after 1831, the ending of Brazilian slave imports after 1850, and the closure of the Cuban market by 1867. This cumulative pressure, reinforced by naval power and, in Cuba’s case, by the American civil war, totally undermined one of the cornerstones of the extension of European international society to the Americas during the previous three hundred years. It is difficult to conceive how any other power in Europe at that time other than Britain could have accomplished that task. By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain stood at the apex of a complex array of bilateral and multilateral agreements, which included political authorities in parts of coastal Africa, most of Europe, and nearly all of the Americas. From here, ‘Britain was more than the center of the network. No country in the world in this era signed a treaty containing antislavery provisions to which Britain was not also a party’. For European powers involved in transatlantic slavery, decisions to end slave trading brought into question the legitimacy of the institution of slavery itself. Ending the transatlantic traffic also placed significant constraints on the long-term demographic and economic prospects of slavery in many parts of the Americas. Indeed, with the notable exception of the United States, slave populations in the Americas were rarely self-sustaining and required constant infusions of new captives to maintain their numbers. In many cases, therefore, closure of the slave trade precipitated demographic stagnation or decline, bringing to an end centuries of sustained expansion. It also signalled a gradual deterioration in the economic fortunes and relative performance of related slave systems. None of these developments made the abolition of slavery inevitable. But they did play a more qualified role in rendering legal abolition politically and economically feasible, and in fostering an international environment where the cumulative weight of previous commitments against the slave trade helped to channel political discourse towards

55 Miers, Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade, 10–13 (quotation 11).
58 Eltis, Economic Growth, 85–90.
procedural questions of when and how legal abolition should occur, rather than if it should occur at all.

Unlike the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, where Britain exercised a preponderant role, the abolition of slavery occurred in a variety of different ways. Two of these routes to emancipation are well known and provide in some respects the boundaries for others. The first was that of the British Atlantic Empire, where the abolition of slavery, like that of the slave trade before it, can be at least partially traced to a sustained period of popular mobilization, which saw a national commitment to anti-slavery crystallize before the passage of legislation outlawing slavery in 1833. This process had fainter echoes elsewhere, most notably in the northern USA and even at times in France and Brazil, but it was peculiarly British in both intensity and duration. At another extreme were the cases of Haiti and the USA, where the ending of slavery occurred through revolution and war, with the consequent spillages of vast amounts of blood and long-term legacies of economic and social dislocation. Historians have given much attention to British anti-slavery, not least because of its populism and pioneering nature, but we do well to remember that in practice in the century after 1788 more enslaved people of African descent living in the Americas were liberated through war than by the British route to emancipation.

In a third and even more common group of cases, embracing the abolition of slavery in the American colonies of all the major continental European powers, slave emancipation was driven not by popular mobilization in Europe or by war, but rather by notions of collective honour, civilized status, and cumulative external pressures. As Seymour Drescher and others have noted, in continental Europe anti-slavery typically received little or no popular support at the time of key legislative changes. With the partial exception of France, anti-slavery societies in mainland Europe comprised small elite groups with at best modest political influence or very little popular support. Unlike Britain and even the northern United States, there were no large-scale petitions, outpourings of anti-slavery tracts, or mass mobilizations. Outside of occasional outrages at the overbearing British, popular opinion was rarely aroused, leaving vested interests and political elites to grapple with international pressures. In these circumstances, legislative enactments against slavery were primarily dictated not by pressure from below, but instead by political elites responding strategically to cumulative external pressures, including a sense of national embarrassment at being labelled slave-owning. In this environment, anti-slavery attitudes in continental Europe appear to have deepened and solidified largely after national involvement in slave trading and related slave systems in the Americas had come to an end.

60 Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, 50–66.
This belated and thus somewhat passive support for anti-slavery was nonetheless symptomatic of a far larger transformation in both attitudes and identity. In this context, we need to remind ourselves that until at least the mid-eighteenth century, slavery was consistently considered a ‹progressive› institution that spared the lives of individuals who would otherwise have been slain and in doing so created opportunities for their religious or cultural redemption.\textsuperscript{61} The rise of organized anti-slavery fostered new models of cultural interaction, which severed these longstanding linkages between slavery and human progress,\textsuperscript{62} resulting in an unprecedented historical inversion, where the absence of slavery would come to be seen as ‹natural› or ‹normal› rather than exceptional. Centuries of European involvement in slavery would be casually downplayed or disregarded, and governments who continued to defend slavery were reduced to pernicious obstacles whose defeat was a necessary step on the way to wider social enlightenment. Over time, an integral part of economic and social order for centuries was recast as anomalous and anachronistic.\textsuperscript{63}

In order to shed light on this transformation, we turn to Bernard McGrane’s analysis of evolving forms of anthropological differentiation between European and non-European peoples. According to McGrane, nineteenth-century anthropology ‹was systematically governed by its peculiar valorization of time› or ‹its belief that civilization progresses, developing through stages from the primitive to the advanced›.\textsuperscript{64} In doing so, it established a distinctive basis for ethnographic evaluation in which ‹barbarian› and ‹savage› peoples would be widely viewed as representatives of stages in human history beyond which modern Europeans had progressed. Over the course of the nineteenth century, slavery came to be similarly depicted as a feature of an earlier, less developed stage in social evolution. This allowed the presentation of the history of anti-slavery in linear, teleological terms, sweeping aside centuries of orthodoxy and the historically anomalous, politically contingent nature of earlier political disputes. It also permitted slavery to be reduced to an earlier phase in human development, which was stripped of dynamism and contemporary resonance.

Seen in such terms, the abolition of slavery in the Americas was more than a discrete event or occurrence. It came to represent, instead, the unique virtues of European civilization and the Christian religion. The history of European models of superiority raises contentious issues.\textsuperscript{65} Among them are evolving notions of


\textsuperscript{63} Eltis, \textit{The Rise of African Slavery}, 274.

\textsuperscript{64} B. McGrane, \textit{Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other} (New York, 1989), 98.

This concept is commonly used to describe the distinctive features of large social groupings but can also be used to define «superior», or «civilized», forms of conduct and community. In the first variant, the term is commonly used to describe a variety of prominent social orders, which are each characterized as distinctive «civilizations». In the latter variant, the focus falls on the unique virtues of a singular, «superior» community that can be differentiated from «backward», «barbarous», or «semi-civilized» practices elsewhere. The second variant may contain a qualified, inclusive dimension, which holds that «uncivilized» peoples may acquire through emulation and adaptation the virtues necessary to become civilized.

Both variants are based upon forms of collective identification and differentiation. For Europeans, the abolition of slavery provided further confirmation of the unique virtues of their shared social order, providing an important demonstration of moral and social progress within the European world. It illustrated, too, what set European civilization apart from peoples in other parts of the globe. The fact that anti-slavery was seen as having universal application only strengthened ideas of taking «civilization» to non-European peoples. It might also be construed, as Drescher has recently claimed, as a badge or test of communal or national honour as political leadership sought to redeem or promote its «civilized» status. In this respect, anti-slavery as part of a redefined European international society would become an important ingredient in the mix of motives that re-energized European global expansionism and imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century.

4. Anti-slavery in the Age of High Imperialism

It is impossible to do more than offer some brief reflections on the relationship between anti-slavery and European imperialism from the mid-nineteenth century to 1914. Imperialism itself has understandably tended to attract a bad press from historians. Critics typically highlight issues of violence and bloodshed as part of the processes of economic exploitation, political oppression, and social discrimination that are seen to characterize Europe’s relations with non-European peoples. Seen against this background, the anti-slavery agenda that Europeans commonly sought to introduce in Africa and other parts of the world after 1870 can be easily dismissed as «little more than a hypocritical attempt to elevate base motives with...»

67 A prominent illustration of this perspective is S. P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (London, 1997).
68 Febvre, A New Kind of History, 220.
high-sounding clichés about the European destiny to better the condition of humanity.\textsuperscript{71} In this view, anti-slavery seems little more than a self-serving pretext to cloak baser political and economic interests.\textsuperscript{72}

The extravagant humanitarian rhetoric that sometimes accompanied European imperialism often bore little or no resemblance to practice, but this does necessarily imply that anti-slavery impulses behind imperialism were inconsequential rhetoric. Before the nineteenth century, the European states that had promoted slave systems in their own American colonies had displayed few qualms about supporting or sanctioning the various slave systems that they also encountered in parts of Africa, Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.\textsuperscript{73} Reversing this trend and seeking, in the wake of Europe’s own conversion to anti-slavery, to promote the same ideas and commitments outside Europe created a range of costs and complications in dealings with local political elites that could otherwise have been avoided. There is no question that the implementation of anti-slavery commitments routinely fell short of imperial rhetoric, but this does not in itself negate the fact that it can be difficult to identify compelling strategic reasons for embracing anti-slavery in the first place.\textsuperscript{74} Nor does it mean, that the anti-slavery agenda that Europeans sought to pursue internationally was in any way symptomatic of a more general \textit{benevolent} or \textit{benign} European imperialism. Such a proposition is difficult to reconcile with the wider bloody history of European colonial conquest, genocide, systematic exploitation and discrimination, and the promotion of other abusive labour systems in Africa and Asia.\textsuperscript{75} Exporting anti-slavery became, nevertheless, a European invention. Moreover, it is evident that in \textit{no} non-western countries did abolition emerge independently as official state policy and that \textit{no} non-western intellectual tradition showed signs of questioning slavery per se, as opposed to questioning the appropriateness of slavery for specific groups.\textsuperscript{76} In short, the historical record suggests that in many parts of the world European intervention from the mid-nineteenth century onwards put abolition of slavery on the local political agenda.\textsuperscript{77} In many cases, too, the abolition of slavery occurred on the imperial

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Adas} M. Adas, \textit{Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance} (Ithaca, NY, 1989), 199.
\bibitem{Bessis} Bessis, \textit{Western Supremacy}, 44–46, 68–82.
\end{thebibliography}
watch of European powers and in this respect represented a projection of Europe’s changing international society.78 This is not to condone European imperialism, for the imperialist package involved far more than anti-slavery. But it does invite questions about why Europeans insisted on pursuing anti-slavery action as part of their imperialist agendas after 1870. On this front, we briefly offer three potential lines of explanation. These are linked to the nature of organized anti-slavery itself, to the association of anti-slavery with national and ‹civilizational› identities, and to the emerging relationship between abolitionism, benevolent paternalism, and racism. We shall address each briefly in turn.

Historians have pondered many explanations for the successful growth of the anti-slavery movement in Europe. Part of its political success, however, probably lay in the ability of abolitionists to construct a compelling narrative that slavery itself was both a unique and exceptional evil, and an evil that could be resolved through sweeping legislative action.79 This involved a sharp distinction between slavery and most other forms of human suffering and maltreatment. In doing so, anti-slavery activists became strongly – some might argue, obsessively – committed to abolition while remaining relatively indifferent to many other ‹everyday› problems and practices. What applied to individual groups also applied in the international sphere. European powers pressing for legal abolition would construe their actions as being directed against an ‹exceptional› but bounded evil which lay outside the boundaries of ‹civilized› behaviour. From this standpoint, opposition to slavery did not necessarily preclude colonial conquest and other forms of forced labour, which continued to be widely regarded as entirely legitimate.80

A second point of connection between anti-slavery and European imperialism in the nineteenth century concerned evolving national and civilizational identities. As the initiator and most populist and aggressive international proponent of abolitionism, British anti-slavery was cosmopolitan in effect, but not always cosmopolitan by orientation. The passing of the Parliamentary acts outlawing the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in the British Empire in 1833 was accompanied by tremendous outpourings of self-congratulation. Abolition was hailed as an extraordinary, un-

79 Unlike endemic issues such as poverty and war, slavery would come to be construed as a problem that was both stark and solvable. J. Quirk, The Anti-Slavery Project: Bridging the Historical and the Contemporary (Philadelphia, PA, forthcoming), chapter 3.
80 A useful analogy may be provided by Richard Price’s treatment of the distinctive opprobrium surrounding chemical weapons. There is no doubt that chemical weapons can cause ‹horrible suffering. But most if not all other weapons share similarly dubious properties›. It is not immediately obvious that being ‹torn apart by burning shrapnel›, a normal part of ‹conventional› warfare, is any less horrific than being killed by chemical weapons, yet the latter have come to be accorded an exceptional status. R. Price, The Chemical Weapons Taboo (Ithaca, NY, 1997), 7.
paralleled national accomplishment. It validated British virtues.\textsuperscript{81} Pride in British achievements was further reinforced by the country’s leading role in the international anti-slavery cause, where the "noble work" of the Royal Navy was sometimes contrasted with the "perfidious" conduct of other nations, notably Spain, Portugal, and Brazil, who not only condoned but promoted an illegal slave trade despite various treaty commitments.\textsuperscript{82} Anti-slavery placed Britain in the vanguard of European civilization and at the forefront of human progress.\textsuperscript{83} But as other nations in Europe joined Britain in ending both transatlantic slave trading and slavery in their American colonies, they too could assume national responsibility for civilizing the world and advancing human progress. The interweaving of anti-slavery with growing European nationalism was arguably a potent mix in supporting renewed European expansionism after 1870.

In terms of a third point of connection, it is important to examine the motivations behind anti-slavery advocacy. In recent times, it has become common to view anti-slavery as being motivated by proto-egalitarian commitments to human (and racial) equality.\textsuperscript{84} The influence of these ideals can be easily overstated. It is by no means clear that human equality was the sole or even primary driving force behind European anti-slavery during the century after 1780. Some enlightened abolitionists were undeniably committed to human equality but, we would argue, those attitudes were unusual in an age when European societies were deeply hierarchical, reflecting enduring cleavages based on class, sex, religion, and race. As with others at the time, abolitionists sometimes called for an "inferior" category of persons.\textsuperscript{85} This did not, however, require human equality, only a more limited commitment to sufficient commonality.

In most cases, anti-slavery advocacy can instead be traced to the construction of slavery as a symbolic test of collective honour and national virtue, in which the status of slavery would come to be bound up in larger evaluations of the distinctive virtues (or vices) of particular communities. This dynamic would find expression in ideologies of benevolent paternalism, where those blessed with "superior" sensibilities or other attributes were seen to be duty bound to assist those less fortunate. There are signs of this orientation from the earliest days of British abolitionism, as in the famous Wedgwood medallion depicting the supplicant African, but it appears to have gained added strength from the mid-nineteenth century. One factor in this was the growth of racism. Racial arguments appear to

\textsuperscript{81} Davis, Slavery and Human Progress, 116–129.
\textsuperscript{82} Curtin, The Image of Africa, 271; Eltis, Economic Growth, 85.
\textsuperscript{83} Curtin, Image of Africa, 458–459; Said, Culture and Imperialism, 123–127.
have been of marginal importance in the early history of British anti-slavery, but following the end of the apprenticeship system in 1838, many Britons turned to racial frameworks to explain the subsequent “failure” of emancipation. By the 1840s, the “mighty experiment” of British abolition was not living up to earlier expectations and Brazilian slave-grown sugar was entering the British market. This dispiriting state of affairs was commonly attributed to the innate inferiority of the Negro race and epitomized an increasing focus on the causes and consequences of racial variation, linked, among other things, to the increasing prominence of essentialist models such as scientific racism and social Darwinism. This, in turn, had important implications for evolving notions of European superiority. If, as pseudo-scientific theories suggested, racial categories reflected unalterable dispositions, there was little that could be done to bridge divisions between racial groupings. Biologically and technologically endowed with “superior” qualities and capacities, Caucasian Europeans were morally entitled to rule over “inferior” peoples.

Given the rise of scientific racism, it may seem somewhat surprising that European states did not take steps to restore or extend legalized chattel slavery. If anti-slavery had rested on notions of human equality, it would have been reasonable to infer that essentialist models undermined the basic rationale for retaining or promoting anti-slavery policies beyond Europe. In this scenario, black Africans, who occupied the bottom rung of European racial hierarchies and received the most unflattering characterizations, would have been the most likely candidates for

87 On this point, Drescher argues that emancipation may well have begun as a mighty experiment, but ended up being framed a humanitarian sacrifice, as results fell well short of expectations.
90 It is important to note here that the term “race” was often employed interchangeably with other designations such as “nation” and “people”, often reflecting a more diffuse understanding of the concept than is currently in use.
92 There is no doubt that it is easier to retain an anti-slavery policy than create one, but this should not mean that legal abolition was irrevocable or set in stone. In an environment dominated by essentialist models of human difference, the notable lack of serious attempts to formally re-introduce slavery needs to be explained, rather than assumed.
(re)enslavement. Yet, instead of seeking formally to re-introduce slavery, Europeans sought to extend the outlawing of slavery world-wide. This strongly suggests that anti-slavery was driven by more than a commitment to human equality. We believe that anti-slavery advocacy depended less upon favourable conceptions of the ‹Other› than upon more durable conceptions of a virtuous Self. Racial theories helped reaffirm European exceptionalism or superiority while shifting explanations for non-European inferiority away from environmental factors and towards more fundamental physiological traits. In this environment, it would have been easy to envisage a return to slavery, except for the now firmly entrenched notion within European anti-slavery that benevolent paternalism extended to all peoples regardless of their assumed inferiority. This idealized worldview concealed a range of grievous sins, but restoring slavery would have destroyed its ideological foundations.

These overlapping arguments help to resolve some of the apparent tension between anti-slavery advocacy and European expansion by suggesting that European imperialism and anti-slavery after 1870 were not so much contradictory as complementary. In recent times, as Frederick Cooper has argued, the ‹tendency to see colonial conquests as violent and bad, and emancipation as gentle and good, has obscured their ideological relationship›. Rather than treating them as opposing forces, anti-slavery and imperial expansion should be conceived as overlapping expressions of increasingly deeply entrenched models of European superiority. Within intra-European settings, rivals would seek to promote their nation’s standing as ‹civilized› powers. In extra-European settings, these divisions would be partially subsumed by a common European identity and common ‹civilizing› mission. It is striking how, in the ‹Scramble for Africa›, Europeans fought for territory not among themselves but with local peoples, whereas fighting over American territory was an important feature of the European wars that characterized the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From a purely strategic standpoint, the advocacy and implementation of anti-slavery by Europeans after 1870 was a political and economic inconvenience, but from a normative standpoint it represented a key component of a larger ideological complex, which would most visibly manifest itself in an unprecedented expansion of European authority. By 1914, Europe

93 Adas, Machines as the Measure of Men, 297–307; Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race, 76, 109–156.

94 Instead of uncritically assuming that innate differences were responsible for variations both within and between particular communities, Enlightenment scholars primarily sought to explain variations through a range of structural factors such as climate, type of government and social background. R. Wheeler, The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture (Philadelphia, 2000), 24. See also Adas, Machines as the Measure of Men, 108–127, especially 109–110; D. Turley, The Culture of English Anti-Slavery, 1780–1866 (London, 1991), 22–23.

occupied «roughly 85 per cent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths». Unlike the first great wave of expansion of European rule after Columbus, which saw the spread of African chattel slavery to the Americas as a critical element in the re-peopling and European exploitation of the continent, the second wave of extension of European authority after 1870 was to play a vital – maybe indispensable – role in encouraging the legal abolition of slavery throughout the globe over the ensuing century.

5. Conclusion

For several centuries after Columbus landed in the Americas, millions of captive Africans became victims of Europe’s efforts to enrich itself by colonizing and re-peopling the so-called New World. Without Africans, the extension of European international society to the Americas would have been a much more protracted and uncertain venture. Yet, almost three hundred years after this process began, Britain, one of the principal slave-carrying nations, embarked on a campaign, initially without unanimity but eventually as a matter of national honour, to end both slave trafficking and slavery itself. In doing so, it set in motion a new dynamic, wherein the carrying of Africans into slavery outside the continent as well as slavery in Africa itself would emerge as part of a problem to be corrected rather than a legitimate vehicle for European enrichment. Britain’s efforts to internationalize its anti-slavery crusade took various forms and initially triggered a period of intra-European and even Atlantic-wide contestation. The struggle to end slave trafficking and slavery in the Americas proved costly, in both financial and human terms, but it left slavery in the interior of Africa largely unaffected before 1870. In due course, however, slavery in Africa would become in European eyes an emblem of African «backwardness» and an affliction to be excorised by European «civilization». The embrace of anti-slavery by Europeans did not lead inexorably or naturally to the «Scramble for Africa», but it did help to justify or rationalize decisions commonly made for other reasons, imbuing renewed colonial expansion after 1870 with a degree of coherence and conviction and offering confirmation of the benevolence of European rule. Ending slavery in Africa itself was to prove a slow process and remains incomplete even today. Successes in terms of slave emancipation in Africa, moreover, were by no means purely the outcome of European rule; enslaved Africans played their part too. But the fact remains that the imposition of European rule on Africa increasingly placed anti-slavery on local political agendas on a continent whence millions of people had been forced into slavery in the

96 Said, Culture and Imperialism, 6.
Americas before 1870. In redefining European identity in relation to slavery, British abolitionists also helped to redefine European international society and became the progenitors of an international movement that, two hundred years, after the Anglo-American moves to outlaw slave carrying in 1807–8, continues to be dedicated to ending slavery not only in Africa but throughout the world. This reflects a truly remarkable volte-face in European and indeed global attitudes since 1807 to the ancient institution of slavery.

Anti-Sklaverei, Europäische Identität und internationale Gesellschaft: eine makrohistorische Perspektive

L’anti-esclavage, identité européenne et société internationale: 
une perspective macro-historique

La mise hors-la-loi par le parlement britannique du transport d’esclaves par les sujets britanniques, à partir de 1807, eut de profondes conséquences internationales. Elle renversa un engagement de longue date des Britanniques dans le trafic d’esclaves tenu pour soutenir le colonialisme aux Amériques, et favorisa l’ascension des efforts non seulement pour mettre fin à l’esclavage au sein des colonies britanniques, mais aussi pour restreindre les systèmes d’esclavage des autres régimes. Le plaidoyer international britannique anti-esclavage s’est révélé difficile, coûteux et source de division politique. La contestation de l’esclavage défit les intérêts économiques des groupes pro-esclavages tout en soulevant des questions plus larges sur l’honneur collectif et la vertu nationale. Les élites européennes furent communément indignées de l’interférence britannique, mais au bout du compte, furent contraintes d’introduire des mesures anti-esclavages. Qui plus est, elles sont allées jusqu’à s’afficher publiquement pour célébrer leur humanité et pour minimiser leur engagement précédent dans l’esclavage, favorisant l’assurance que l’anti-esclavage était devenu une marque de la civilisation européenne plutôt que la seule et particulière préoccupation des Britanniques. Dans cet article, nous puisons dans une vaste littérature sur l’histoire et la théorie de la société internationale dans le but d’explorer et de comprendre l’évolution de ces relations entre l’anti-esclavage, l’honneur collectif et l’identité européenne au XIXème siècle.

Dr. Joel Quirk/Prof. Dr. David Richardson
Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation
University of Hull
Oriel Chambers
27 High Street
Hull HU 11NE
United Kingdom

e-mail: j.quirk@hull.ac.uk

e-mail: p.d.richardson@hull.ac.uk