Trans-African Slaveries
Friday-Saturday, 26-27 June, 2015
Seminar Room 1, MISR

Workshop Program

Organized by the Ifriqiyya Colloquium, Columbia University, and Makerere Institute of Social Research, Kampala

Each session will last 90 minutes, and will be organized as follows:

Presentation: 30 minutes
Discussants: 10 minutes each
Discussion: 40 minutes
Presenter’s Response: 10 minutes

Attendance will be limited to 50 persons. Those who wish to attend should register with the library and also pick up papers from the library.

DAY 1: Friday, June 26

9 – 10.30 Chair: Mahmood Mamdani
Ann McDougall, University of Alberta, *Visions of the Sahara: Negotiating the History and Historiography of Pre-Modern Saharan Slavery*

Abstract: This paper taps into two historiographical issues identified by the Trans-African Slavery Network: “the ways in which the tendency to normalize trans-Atlantic Slavery as historically the standard mode of slavery has conceptually influenced the study of pre-modern slaveries”; and the need “to engage critically the notion of ‘Arab slavery’ as non-African”. It will do so in the context of what should be thought of as ‘Saharan Slavery’.

Discussants: Abdul Sheriff, Brink Messick

Tea: 10.30 – 11.00

11.00 – 12.30 Chair: Brink Messick
Dahlia Gubara, *Tales of Bondage, Bonded Tales: Some Thoughts on the Historiography of Arab-Islamic Slavery*

Abstract: This article examines the historiographical and conceptual postulates animating the burgeoning scholarship in the Euro-American academy on what may be termed Arab-Islamic slavery (or AIS). It weaves together various threads of analysis on the constitution of the Arab, the African, and Islam as organizing categories in the production of historical narratives. Inherent to these, is the racialized philological production of civilizations as
subjects of history that begins in late eighteenth-century European thought and morphs into an enduring universal epistemic paradigm. The article explores iterations of this paradigm in AIS historiography, and its recurrent effectuality through the unstated association of ideas (such as race, slavery, history, geography) as they are enacted in the generic plots, protagonists and polemics that such narratives evoke and propagate. Highlighting the types of cognitive violence and ‘real-world’ provocations which ensue from such accounts, it foregrounds the constitutive interplay between what scholars do, and the political contingencies of the globalized world we presently inhabit and have the task to interpret and inscribe. It contributes to the Kampala meeting of the ‘Trans-African Slaveries’ research network by affirming the necessity of formulating of an alternative grammar of concepts to the development of a critical research agenda that seeks to apprehend histories of bondage before and outside of Europe.

Discussants: Indrani Chatterjee, Ann McDougal

Lunch: 12.30 – 2.00

2.00 – 3.30 Chair: Pamela Khanakwa, MISR
Indrani Chatterjee, University of Texas at Austin, How to Break Out of Orientalism when studying Africans in South Asian Pasts

My paper will survey two distinct historiographical traditions on African slaves and freedmen living and working in premodern South Asia. One tradition was represented by Mughal historians such as Khafi Khan (Muntakhab-ul-lubab) and Saqi Musta’ad Khan (Maasir-i-Alamgiri), who were especially attuned to the valor of male African-derived (‘Siddi’) slave-soldiers and commanders in the Mughal empire in the late seventeenth century. Yet, this historiographic tradition paid less attention to the African ‘origins’ of these slaves and far greater attention to the deeds of valor that earned these men a reputation and badges of distinction in the Mughal bureaucratic corps. This tradition combined attention to calendric event with judgements based on philosophical (akhlaqi) traditions that assessed both masters and slaves in the same way. In contrast, the Anglophone and British historiographic representation of the same slaves from the late eighteenth to the twentieth century insisted on the ‘Africanness’ of the slaves, while blurring their contributions to the emergent states, armies and navies that they peopled. Furthermore, Anglophone historiography since the late 19th century has discussed ‘African’ slaves both in trans-African and in transatlantic networks as though these persons had neither Islamic, Zoroastrian nor Christian religious histories, nor legal or moral expectations rooted in those histories. The latter tradition of historiography has permitted Anglophone historians to remain focused on the economic, ideological and political motivations of a British abolitionist public and Parliament while saying nothing at all of religiously-based legal expectations of Africa-born slaves. My paper will comb through some of the Mughal historiography of the seventeenth and eighteenth century to highlight the potentialities of pluralism in the history of African slavery, both in Africa and elsewhere.
Discussants: Ann McDougal, Abdul Sheriff, Dahlia Gubara

Tea 3.30 to 4.00

4.00 – 5.30 Chair: Florence Ebila, MISR
Abdul Sheriff, former Director, ZIORI, Transition from Domestic to Plantation Slavery in the Early Islamic Period

Abstract: Slavery is not fixed status but a historical process, and it has been more widespread than is often assumed. Some anthropologists have gone so far as to argue that “slavery is the rule and freedom is the exception.” Over the past two millennia in the western Indian Ocean it has gone from small-scale slave trade and domestic slavery during the first centuries of the current era to plantation slavery in southern Iraq that led to the mighty Zanj Rebellion before breaking up into domestic and military slavery in the Middle East and India; and being reincarnated on the plantations Zanzibar and the Mascarene islands to generate a new life on clove and sugar plantations at the ‘rosy dawn’ of the capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Discussants: Yonas Ashine, Ismael Montana

Dinner

DAY 2: Saturday, June 27

9.00 – 10.30 Chair: Adam Culver, MISR
Yonas Ashine, MISR, Bringing the Slaves Back In: Slaves and State Formations in the Horn of Africa

Abstract

This paper is about slaves and states in the Horn of Africa in pre-modern Ethiopia, circa 1270 to 1855. Owing to high diversity of pre-modern states in the region, a focus is given to Northern Highland Christian state, its internal social stratification as well as its interactions with other different pre-modern states such as sultanates and non-Christian southern kingdoms. Representing slaves only as objects in long distance trade Feudalism, as a heuristic device for example, silences the social and political places of slaves and slavery in the intra and inter-state relation in the Horn of Africa. Moreover those scholars who attempt to design a local heuristic device, tend to cut slaves and slavery out of the public history. Teshale Tibebu’s work can be an exception to this both in the utilization of local terms as a heuristic device and also in an elaboration of slaves as social groups in Ethiopian history. Teshale treated slavery in a binary: as “Household slavery in Ethiopia and the slave trade out of Ethiopia” mainly to the Arab countries.

This research locates slaves in the social class of those who rule/fight, pray and produce. By depicting the mode of interaction between states, it locates slavery at the heart of the Geber system –the Ethiopian version of mode of production. Moreover it shows how slaves produced and participated both in war and tribute collection as elements of
tributary system that connected numerous states in the horn of Africa. I primarily observe that slaves played a defining role as an army during pre-modern state formation. The role of slavery in agriculture appears secondary, mainly because the agricultural mode of production greatly depended upon the small holding peasantry rather than the slaves. Slavery as an institution also played a great role in the strengthening of the long distance trade route, which was used to export slaves- the hitherto main export. Slaves were both essential and numerous in the administrative activities of the palace and courts. Yohans Aefwork’s Tobya which is published in 1907, the first Amharic novel, is used as an ethnographic site to study the nexus of the state formation and slavery.

Discussants: Indrani Chatterjee, Dahlia Gubara, Mahmood Mamdani,

Tea: 10.30 – 11.00

11.00 – 12.30 Chair: Lawyer Kafureeka, MISR
Ismael M. Montana, Northern Illinois University, USA, The State and Assimilation of Enslaved West Africans in Husaynid Tunisia

In 1705, local Tunisian elites and Ottoman militia comprised mostly of Kulughlus (offspring of mixed marriage between local Tunisian and members of the Ottoman military-administrative elites) established a dynasty rule with a large degree of de-facto-autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. Rulers of this newly Husaynid Dynasty reorganized the state’s administrative structure along the line of a policy that Tunisian historian Mohamad Hédi Chérif, termed “déturquisation,” and which cemented their ties with indigenous notables, both in the political and religious spheres. In order to consolidate their rule and control of the local populace, the Husaynids, among several measures, laid a foundation for plural Islam which fused the West African Stambali-Bori cult practiced by enslaved Africans into the Husaynid religio-political platform of societal integration. The Husaynids inducted Sidi Saad al-Abid (an ex-slave from Borno) into a sainthood to serve as a rallying figure for the enslaved West African communities (who settled in Tunis as a result of the trans-Saharan slave trade). Additionally, the Husaynids promoted a judicio-administrative apparatus designed towards their control as well as administration. Hence, an effort to integrate them into the formal structure of the state’s religio-political scheme.

While a number of historical research has greatly expanded our understanding of the Husaynids’ acculturation and integration of mamluks imported from the Near East into Tunisian society, few scholars, however, have examined the process of assimilation and integration of enslaved and freed slaves communities of sub-Saharan African descents. Using the Stambali-Bori cult—a fusion between the Hausa spirit possession cult of Bori and popular and Islam adhered mainly by enslaved West African communities—as a unit for analysis, this paper argues that the Husaynids’ attitudes towards the Stambali-Bori practice has, from the early eighteenth century onwards, been marked by their desire to integrate and regulate these self-consciously class of enslaved Blacks of Tunis by means of spatial control. What religio-political strategies of social control or mechanism did the
Husaynids use to integrate the enslaved West Africans into the formal structures of the state? How did the enslaved West Africans themselves respond to Husaynids’ mechanism of assimilation and societal integration? And to what extent did the process shape the enslaved West Africans identity within the contours of the Husaynids’ religio-political platform of societal integration? The paper explores these questions to shed light on the Husaynids’ attitude towards Black slaves.

**Discussants:** Ann McDougal, Brink Messick

**Lunch 12:30 – 2.00**

2:00 – 3:00 **Chair:** George Bob-Milliar, MISR
Mahmood Mamdani, Makerere Institute of Social Research and Columbia University, *The Sidis of Gujarat: Indians of African Descent*

**Abstract:** An ethnographic foray into the community of Indians of African descent in contemporary Gujarat, India, this essay explores questions of history, politics and identity in the contemporary world.

**Discussants:** Indrani Chatterjee, Abdul Sheriff

3:30 – 4:30 **Chair:** Brink Messick
*(contributions from colleagues unable to attend)*

Fatima Harrak, University Mohammed V, Morocco *Some Scholars-State Disputes for the definition of slavery in North West Africa*

Slavery in North West Africa dates back to Roman times at least. Prisoners from the incessant wars around the Mediterranean were enslaved and used as workers and domestics. Few among these enslaved captives were black but, as trans-Saharan commerce with sub-Saharan Africa grew in the post-Roman era, North Africa became an important source of both black and white (Berber) slaves, first supplying Christian Constantinople, and after the eighth-century, the expanding Islamicate.

Founded during the 8th century on the northern shores of the Sahara by the Kharijites (dissident Muslim sect) as a trade entrepôt Sijilmassa quickly became the northern terminus of the western trans-Saharan trade routes and a source of sub-Saharan gold and labor. The Berber Almoravid dynasty (11th c.) capitalized on this trans-Saharan trade to build an empire which extended from Spain to the confines of the Sahara. One of their strategic arms in this expansion was the ‘horse cavalry’ made up of black and white (European) slaves which they developed. This institution was replicated by their successors, the 12th century Almohads, under the name of ‘abid al-Makhzen (slaves of the state). But it was under the centralizing Saadien (16th C.) and Alawi sharifian dynasties (from the 17th C.) -- which rivaled with the Ottoman Caliphate-- that slaves became a central piece in the power equation in the gharb al-Islami (Islamic West). A veritable Court slave culture -- which extended later to local centers of power, including...
the Sufi tariqa-s (zawaya)--was developed: concubines, wet nurses, mothers of princes, queen mothers, eunuch harem-keepers, male soldiers (including European captives/slaves), State administrators... The Saadian conquest of Songhai (1591) was led by a Spanish ‘emancipated-slave’ and his “Andalusian squadron” and the Alawi sultan Mawlay Ismail (1672-1727), himself born of a slave mother, created a veritable black slave army, the ‘Abid Sidi al-Bukhari.

After a rapid presentation of the nature and evolution in time of slavery in this region, I will stop at a few moments in this history when disputes between the ‘ulama and the State about the definition of a “slave” ushered in a debate about the nature of individual humanity and dignity.

Hisham Aidi, Columbia University

Mamadou Diouf, Columbia University

Tea: 4.30 – 5.00

4:30 – 5:00 Contributions from Colleagues unable to attend (cont.)

5:00 – 6:00 Chair: Mahmood Mamdani
Sum up Session