

## **Slavery and slaving in Africa: with bibliography: Contact Dr D. Kembabazi**

Two slave systems: Internal Slavery/African slavery and External Slave trades: Transatlantic European slave trade and trans-Saharan Arab trade

Common features: trans-Atlantic, trans-Saharan and African slave trade: trade in men, women and children, slaves produced through violence and hereditary status of slavery.

The 'Arab' slave trades differed from the Atlantic trade in one important respect: Transatlantic: enslaved Africans were overwhelmingly used for productive labour (plantations and mines): Arab trade: captives mostly used in domestic servitude.

In general, trans-Atlantic slave trade preferred men, while Arab and African preferred women. Variety of treatment: violence common but not universal. Assimilation into households and kinship groups possible in Africa slavery

## **Slavery in Africa: scholarship**

Key debates

- Kinship "Absorptionist 'society' theory" Emphasizes the importance and role of people into society (anthropologists Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers). slavery not a product of conflict but as 'indelibly written into certain cultures,'
- The economy/market theory: Slavery as an economic choice
- Marxist theory: group struggles over wealth and power.
- Historians like Cooper: Focus on; 'who gained control over slaves, how they used slaves, and how they controlled slaves.'

Why?

This leads to new ways of looking at slavery "as part of historical processes" and helps us to see 'how new ways of employing slaves could transform economic power within a society' 'The ways people of all groups perceived and interacted with slaves.' 'The forms of slavery not as fixed structures' 'but as interactive processes, shaped by slaves as well as by slave-holders.' (Frederick Cooper, 'The Problem of Slavery in African Studies', Journal of African History pp. 103-25.)

This led to new research into the questions of agency, with scholars of women and gender taking a leading role in centring the experiences of enslaved.

## **Internal Slavery in Africa: Women, Gender and Slavery**

Majority of enslaved people were women and slavery experience was gendered. The institution of slavery mimicked existing social hierarchies.

Why were women preferred/more vulnerable to enslavement?

- Productive vs reproductive explanation
  - Production of goods and services

Reproduction: biological/sexual and social reproduction

- Biological/sexual: expansion of lineage (blood relations)
- Social reproduction: expansion of lineage (non-blood, fictive kinship, patron client relations)

Ref Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, 'Women's Importance in African Slave Systems', in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1983), pp. 3-25

### **Slavery aftermath: Legitimate commerce, Colonial Conquest: the ironies of the 19thC**

- 1802: Denmark declares its trade illegal
- 1807: Britain and America outlaw the slave trade
- 1810: British begin detaining slave ships of other nations
- Mid-1840s-1851: Cuba and Brazil take action.

Abolition was followed by increased enslavement: expansion of slaveholding in Africa, hence 19thC is described as a century of ironies.

### **Anti-abolition/Proslavery lobby groups in Britain:**

Slavery essential to British economy, more profitable than trade in ivory, gold, etc.

"[This is] a trade to the most advantage to this kingdom of any we drive, and as it were all profit, the first cost being little more than small matters of our own manufacturers, for which we have in return, gold, elephant's teeth, wax and negroes, the last whereof is better than the first, being indeed the best traffic, the kingdom hath, as it doth occasionally give so fast an employment to our people both by sea and by land." John Cary, Bristol Merchant

"The natural enemies of this country...have long known that the extensiveness of our commerce is the exhaustible source from which we draw that power, independence, and happiness we have long enjoyed. The first bold and political attempt, supported by a few discontented persons in America and our own country, was the occasion of blowing up flames of rebellion in the colonies..." Michael Renwick Sargant

"We ought to consider whether the negroes in a well-regulated plantation under the protection of a kind master, do not enjoy as great, nay, even greater advantages than when under their despotic governments." Michael Renwick Sargant

Other arguments:

- Slavery acceptable in the bible
- Africans were already enslaving each other.
- If Britain stopped trading in humans, its rivals, the French and Dutch would take over and Africans would be in a worse situation under these powers.

Slavery justified colonial conquest: proslavery justified slavery as 'rescuing' them their barbaric life, antislavery justified colonialism as rescuing them from barbaric life.

Abolition movement driven by various groups: Christian groups, former slave traders, former slaves such as Olaudah Equiano who wrote “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African” (1789)

The abolition of slavery by European slave-trading nations, c. 1790-1930, was a consequence of both moral and economic arguments.

- Slavery was against Christian ideals.
- Slavery was a stain on the image of Britain:

“I own I am shock’d at the purchase of slaves, And fear those who buy them and sell them as Knaves; What I hear of their hardships, their tortures, and groans, Is almost enough to draw pity from stones. I pity them greatly, but I must be mum, For how could we do without sugar and Rum?” *William Cowper, Pity for Poor Africans*

- Legitimate commerce profitable/better alternative

### **The aftermath: Legitimate commerce and colonisation**

The transition from the exports of slaves to agricultural products (‘legitimate’ commerce) has been described as a ‘crisis of adaptation’ i.e. adaptation to new ‘business model’ (using slaves on plantations)

19th century is described as a century of ironies because abolition increases slavery and also increased interference of Europeans in African affairs (colonial occupation)

On aftermath, the politics of slavery and how formerly enslaved African negotiated life after slavery see:

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