



**BRITISH
ACADEMY**

for the humanities and social sciences

Slaveries Old and New: The Meaning of Freedom

The British Academy, 27 & 28 March 2014

Convenors: Dr Laura Brace, University of Leicester, Dr Mark Johnson, University of Hull, Professor Julia O'Connell Davidson & Professor Zoe Trodd, University of Nottingham

Day 1 – 27 March 2014

9.15 *Registration & refreshments*

9.45 **Welcome and Introduction**

Professor Julia O’Connell Davidson, University of Nottingham and Dr Laura Brace, University of Leicester

Session 1: Defining Slavery: Old and New

Chair: Dr Laura Brace, University of Leicester

Main purpose/theme of session :

This session will focus on the historical and political complexities and ambiguities of defining slavery and its relationship to inequality, exploitation and subordination. It will set up and frame the themes of the conference by exploring what is constructed as the opposite of slavery, the development of the binary between slavery and freedom, and the content of that freedom, particularly in relation to labour and belonging. Speakers from Philosophy and English will consider the connections between old and new slaveries, and reflect on the shifts and continuities in the ways in which slavery is socially imagined and politically contested.

10.30 Defining Slavery

Professor Tommy Lott, San Jose State University

11.30 *Refreshments*

12.00 Historical narratives of the slave trade and abolition

Dr Charlotte Sussman, Duke University

13.00 *Lunch break*

Session 2: Slave Trades and Abolitionist Movements

Chair: Professor Zoe Trodd, University of Nottingham

Main purpose/theme of session :

Human trafficking has commanded a great deal of public and policy attention over the past two decades, and is frequently described as a “modern slave trade”. This session examines similarities and differences between the phenomena now grouped under the heading of “trafficking” and slave trades historically, and between historical and contemporary movements to abolish such trade. It considers the significance of race ideas for understandings of ancient, transatlantic and “modern” slave trades; asks how contemporary abolitionism represents, explains, or conceals the global power relations that underpin the phenomena it condemns; explores what scholarship of the transatlantic slave trade might have to teach those concerned with restrictions on the freedom of migrants in the contemporary world; and addresses the intersections of gendered, racialized, and national identities in the production of the systems of political and economic domination that produce differential restraints on freedom.

14.00 Human trafficking as a modern slave trade? Silences and exclusions

Dr Nandita Sharma, University of Hawaii

15.00 Interrogating the State’s Roles in Today’s Slaveries

Professor Karen E Bravo, Indiana University

16.00 *Refreshments*

16.30 Ancient and West Indian Slavery Compared
Dr Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman, University College London

17.30 *Close of first day*

18.00 **Keynote Address: Domestic Work, Victims of Trafficking and the Politics of Modern Slavery**

Professor Bridget Anderson, COMPAS, University of Oxford

Chair: Dr Julia O'Connell Davidson, University of Nottingham

When cases involving the violent abuse of migrant domestic workers make the news, they are often described by journalists and politicians as “trafficking” and “modern slavery”. But the fact that migrant domestic workers more generally stand between a rock and a hard place, constructed as neither family members nor employees, caught between an excess of immigration regulation on the one hand and employment deregulation on the other, goes largely unremarked. Migrant domestic work vividly illustrates the interplay of race, gender, poverty, and immigration in the political production of what is – and is not – seen as “employment”, “trafficking” and “modern slavery”.

19.30 *Drinks Reception*

Day 2 – 28 March 2014

Session 3: Slavery, Debt and Dependency

Chair: Dr Julia O’Connell Davidson, University of Nottingham

Main purpose/theme of session :

Debt is a social relation (Graeber). People have historically moved, and they continue to move, in and out of relations and forms of indebtedness and dependency, some of which are deemed to constitute “slavery” or “bondage”, others of which are socially sanctioned and not seen to pose a threat to “freedom”. In anthropological terms, debt often sits on the borderline of what is construed as gift and commodity and so at the edges of different moralities of exchange. In addition to examining theoretical questions about the relationship between debt and slavery, this session focuses on contemporary research on migrant workers from Vietnam and children working in artisanal gold mining in Ghana. Lainez’s research draws attention to how forms of labour coercion can be legitimated within certain discourses of debt as gift or commodity, and Okyere’s highlights the need to understand the dependencies surrounding labour, including what are dubbed ‘worst forms of child labour’ in relation to the broader moral economies in which labour takes place. The session considers what this reveals about the distinction between “debt bondage” and “ordinary debt”, and “child labour” and “worst forms of child labour” implicit in contemporary abolitionist discourse.

- 9.30 Debt, Gift and Gamble: Economies of dis/affection and the meaning and limits of freedom;
Dr Mark Johnson, University of Hull
- 10.30 Informal Credit and Pledged Sexuality in Vietnam
Mr Nicolas Lainez, University of Singapore
- 11.30 *Refreshments*
- 12.00 Moral economies and child labour in artisanal gold mining in Ghana
Dr Sam Okyere, University of Nottingham
- 13.00 *Lunch break*

Session 4: Slaves, Wives, and Captives

Chair: Dr Mark Johnson, University of Hull

This session is concerned with those who are not seen to qualify for the full range of rights and freedoms that are in theory enjoyed by the modern liberal subject. Wives have historically been viewed as incapable of self-government; children and prisoners continue to be regarded in a similar way, albeit for different reasons. Because they are subject to the rule of others, these groups have troubled, and continue to trouble, the freedom/slavery binary, and in liberal societies, the ways in which their unfreedom is socially imagined is often profoundly marked by racial and (post)colonial thinking. The wives and children who are described as modern slaves as a consequence of forced and servile marriage are widely taken to be victims of an ‘uncivilised’ culture; forced labour involving prisoners is typically only a focus of concern for modern abolitionists when those prisoners are held by an ‘uncivilised’ or ‘rogue’ state. This session also includes attention to the practices of liberal democratic states and the parallels between slavery and ‘the prison-industrial complex’ (including immigration detention). This session will allow for reflection on the very different ways in which the metaphor of slavery can be invoked in contemporary campaigns against rightlessness, oppression and exploitation.

- 14.00 Freedom, the State and Immigration Detention
Professor Bridget Anderson, COMPAS, University of Oxford
- 15.00 Saving women from themselves: development interventions to combat child marriage in Eastern India
Dr Srila Roy, University of Witwatersrand

16.00 Final remarks (Tommy Lott, Charlotte Sussman, Nandita Sharma) and discussion

16.30 *Refreshments*

17.00 *Close of conference*