

# Slavery: dialogues across time and place

12  
MAY  
2017

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH BEEHIVE 2.22

10 am – 5 pm

This interdisciplinary symposium brings together participants working on human trafficking and forms of coerced labor from antiquity to today. Join in the conversation!

Attendance is free of charge. The event is supported by the School of History, Classics and Archaeology and the Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies.

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## 9:45 Welcome remarks

### 10 – 11:15 am: Panel 1

Brycchan Carey, 'The Natural History of Slavery: an Evolving Genre'

Siobhán McGrath, 'Modern Anti-slavery as Development: A Critique'

Micaela Langellotti, 'Slavery and social attitudes in early Roman Egypt'

Chair: Fionnghuala Sweeney

11:15am – Coffee break

### 11:30 – 12:30: Panel 2

Ulrike Roth, 'Women, children, families: from Roman slavery to medieval serfdom'

Jane Webster, 'Beads for the slave trade: a biographical approach'

Chair: Annie Tindley

Lunch break

### 1:45-2:45 pm: Panel 3

Louise Waite, 'Tracing responsibility: The precarity of irregular migrants in the UK and intersections of modern slavery'

Vanessa Mongey, 'The Republic and the Pirates: slave trading in the Caribbean'

Chair: Micaela Langellotti

2:45 pm – Coffee break

### 3 - 4 pm: Panel 4

Hannah Durkin, 'The Story of Sallie "Redoshi" Smith, the Last Middle Passage Survivor'

Simon Corcoran, 'Roman legal sources and slavery: problems and possibilities'

Chair: Vanessa Mongey

### 4 - 5pm: Roundtable



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## ABSTRACTS

“I couldn’t just walk away like the people does now, you know. It was what they call, we were slaves. We belonged to people. They’d sell us like they sell horses and cows and hogs and all like that.”

—Fountain Hughes

### **Brycchan Carey (Northumbria) 'Unnatural Empire: Slavery, Natural History, and Abolitionist Literature'**

I will outline the argument of my forthcoming book *Unnatural Empire*, which shows how in seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century Britain, one of the best places to find information about Caribbean slavery was in natural histories. These initially had a sceptical attitude towards slavery but increasingly worked to normalise—indeed, to naturalise—slavery to the region. Consequently, I argue, the earliest abolitionist writing adopted, adapted, and subverted the natural history to raise awareness of the cruelty of slavery. I will briefly consider writing by such as Richard Ligon, Hans Sloane, Anthony Benezet, and James Ramsay, before concluding with observations on the legacy for political discourse of the relationship between naturalism and abolitionism in later British writing.

### **Siobhán McGrath (Durham) 'Modern Anti-Slavery as Development: a critique'**

This presentation will argue that trafficking, forced labour and slavery are now being framed as a 'problem of and for development' or a 'development' issue, e.g., in the Sustainable Development Goals. I am doing a discourse analysis of two reports (2014 Global Slavery Index and 2015 Trafficking in Persons) to reflect on this and to set this in the context of historical understandings of abolitionism in relation to colonialism and development.

### **Micaela Langellotti (Newcastle) 'Slavery and social attitudes in early Roman Egypt'**

In Roman Egypt the role of slavery has traditionally been viewed as marginal and with a strong domestic character. However, some groups of documents, mainly from the villages of the Arsinoite district (modern Fayum), give us a deeper insight into the nature and role of slaves in this newly created Roman province, attesting to the importance of slaves not only in domestic settings, but also in more organised economic sectors. By using this material, this paper re-evaluates how far Roman rule affected slavery in Egypt in the first two centuries AD and begins to answer the following questions: Was there a certain 'Roman attitude' towards slaves? How far and in what way was the development of different types of slavery in the Roman Empire a reflection of different social and economic institutions?

### **Ulrike Roth (Edinburgh) 'Women, children, families: from Roman slavery to medieval serfdom'**

One of the most significant developments in the history of slavery and forced labour in Europe is typically seen in the transition from (Roman) slavery to (medieval) serfdom. This transition is closely associated in the scholarly imagination with a shift from the exploitation of primarily male slaves to dependent family groups. In contradistinction to modern slaveries, the family is seen as indicative of the end of slavery and the onset of serfdom, with the Roman imperial period constituting a middle phase, leading to the decline of slavery in the late antique period, and the rise of serf family groups in the early medieval period. Yet, a focus on the female slave, enslaved children and, hence, the slave family throughout the Roman period shows this 'transition narrative' to be seriously lacking, and 'the slave family' as a distinct element of Roman slavery from the Republican period onwards. Moreover, the study of enslaved women, children and families affords a radical re-appraisal of our understanding of the internal organisation of slave exploitation, especially regarding the slaves' working conditions, and the masters' control mechanisms, but also, and more broadly, of the nature of slavery, serfdom and forced labour: this is the focus of my work.

### **Jane Webster (Newcastle) 'Beads for the slave trade: a biographical approach'**

Millions of beads were produced in Europe and shipped Africa to be incorporated in the 'sortments' bartered for human cargoes. Like all commodities manufactured for the slave trade, beads have very complex biographies whose 'chapters' include manufacture, purchase, shipping, barter, and a new life in Africa which frequently involved not simply 'use', but re-making. A tiny proportion of these objects also have biographical epilogues, in that they have been excavated, or collected, and are today curated by museums and private collectors. This contribution shows how primary documentary sources, excavation data and museum-based analysis can all be interwoven in writing the extraordinary biography of the 'trade bead,'.

### **Louise Waite (Leeds) 'Tracing responsibility: The precarity of irregular migrants in the UK and intersections of modern slavery'**

This presentation will consider modern slavery and state policies directed towards a group that is often constructed as being 'on edge': 'undocumented' or 'irregular' migrants. The UK government has signalled its clear goal to 'create a hostile environment' for such precarious immigrants. This is not a new policy; hostility and discomfort already characterises the experience of many migrants with varying compliance with immigration regulations, particularly people seeking asylum. Principles of discomfort and hostility have been developed through more than a decade of restriction through successive policies. The Immigration Act 2014 and Immigration Act 2016 appear to extend these principles to broader groups of migrants – but irregular migrants will feel the sharp end of policy changes. This presentation will argue that the specific restrictions introduced or proposed in recent legislation will deepen experiences of labour exploitation, unfreedom and modern slavery for irregular migrants. These changes are likely therefore to generate an environment of even more hostility towards migrants in general and irregular migrants in particular, providing the context for labour exploitation to flourish. This outcome is quite contradictory with government claims to wish to rid the UK of the 'scourge of modern slavery' through the Modern Slavery Act, 2015.

### **Vanessa Mongey (Newcastle) 'The Republic and the Pirates: slave trading in the Caribbean'**

In the early nineteenth century, countries started to outlaw the slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean at different times and slave trading and piracy became indistinguishable in the eyes of the law. The West Indies became the theaters of international campaigns for the suppression of the trade and for the policing of the seas. This paper shows how the fight against West Indian piracy shaped U.S. foreign policy and inter-American relations.

### **Simon Corcoran (Newcastle) 'Roman legal sources and slavery: problems and possibilities'**

Historic legal sources, especially Roman legal sources, are filled with references to slaves, but are not always easy to use. Laws, especially when codified, can be narrowly normative, while documents may be formulaic. Further, the long survival of legal traditions can give the illusion of continuity. Nonetheless, the creation and survival of much legal material can still give a window onto not only the dominant ideology about, but also the social realities of slavery, as well as providing opportunities to trace the repurposing or evolution of language and institutions over time and place, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, and from the Old World to the New.

### **Hannah Durkin (Newcastle) 'The Story of Sallie "Redoshi" Smith, the Last Middle Passage Survivor'**

In her 1979 autobiography, *Bridge Across Jordan*, civil rights leader Amelia Boynton Robinson recalled life experiences shared to her 43 years earlier by Middle Passage survivor Sallie "Redoshi" Smith. Redoshi was imprisoned on the *Clotilda*, the last known slave ship to reach the US, and the lateness of her encounter with Boynton Robinson suggests that she outlived all other Middle Passage survivors. Her story has previously been thought to be lost. This paper highlights the significance of Boynton Robinson's record of Redoshi's life. Such material is fragmentary and based on four-decade-old remembrances. Yet it still serves as an incredibly rare female narrative of the traumas of the Middle Passage and slavery, highlighting the sexual exploitation that Redoshi endured, but also her resistance to abuse and determination to retain her West African heritage. The account also help to shed light on the fate of other *Clotilda* survivors.