

DRAFT PROGRAMME

The Politics of Victimhood: Trafficking and Modern Slavery, 29th March 2012

For more than a decade, politicians, journalists, NGO workers, and even some academics, have been telling us that human trafficking is a vastly profitable global criminal business that claims millions of victims at any given moment in time, that it represents one of the most serious human rights problems in the contemporary world, that it is a modern slave trade. Over the same time period, critical scholars and activists have been pointing to the immense definitional and political problems associated with the term 'trafficking', and observing that the figure of the 'trafficking victim' (especially that of the 'trafficked sex slave') is most often worked in the service of extremely conservative moral agendas on prostitution, gender and sexuality, as well as in support of more restrictive immigration policies and tighter border controls (Chapkis, 1997, 2005; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Doezema 1999; Anderson and O'Connell Davidson, 2002; Aradau, 2004; Kapur 2005; Weitzer 2007, to mention but a few).

This seminar explores how the figure of the Victim of Trafficking is constructed against that of the Migrant (Anderson), the Debtor (Testai), the Prostitute (Cheng), the Migrant Domestic Worker (Johnson), and the Migrant Worker (Shah). However, the aim is not to simply restate the now well established critique of dominant discourse on 'trafficking', but rather to reflect on how the 'trafficking as modern slavery' agenda has impacted on research and policy in particular contexts. It asks what the recent emphasis on 'trafficking as modern slavery' has meant for political analysis and understanding of specific sectors and contexts in which various forms of abuse, exploitation and oppression are known to take place (e.g., Filipina migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia; migrant Filipina entertainers in Korea; female migrant workers' informal economic action in India; Nigerian migrants in street prostitution in Italy); and how to re-open the possibilities for political struggle against unfreedom and injustice that this discourse closes down.

Programme

10.00 – 10.30 **Registration and Coffee**

10.30 – 1.00 **Victimhood: Domestic Workers, Prostitutes, Children**

Welcome and Introduction: Julia O'Connell Davidson

- **Mark Johnson**, University of Hull, 'Caged in and breaking loose: intimate labour, the state and migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries' (with Christoph Wilcke, Human Rights Watch)

Abstract

In this paper we demonstrate how the notion of privacy inscribed in the system of sponsorship for migrant workers in a number of Arab states places the relationship of intimate labour in the home outside of national and international regulatory frameworks, make domestic workers vulnerable to extreme forms of coercion and exploitation and maximizes the advantage of both receiving states and their citizens at the expense of the basic rights of those employed to work in their homes. While activist groups and NGOs attempt to mobilize sending states and apply international pressure to change the formal system to increase workers rights and regulate employers' power, on an everyday basis what serves to remind employers of the negotiability of the contractual relationship is the spectre of the 'freelancer'.

- **Sealing Cheng, Wellesley College, USA 'Sex Trafficking Dreams: The Symbolism of "Prostituted Women"'**

Abstract

"Prostituted women" emerged as a new population in South Korean society with the introduction of the 2004 anti-prostitution acts that highlighted the crime of sex trafficking. The laws were groundbreaking in recognizing that women in prostitution could be victims rather than criminals. They also propelled a range of state and NGO efforts to define who are eligible victims of sex trafficking, and how they could start their lives anew as "self-supporting" women workers. For women activists in particular, "prostituted women" became the 21st century symbol of the struggle against sexual and economic exploitation under the globalization of patriarchal capitalism. The commodified and subjugated female body comes to embody a range of values and desires that need to be rehabilitated if not purged. This paper discusses this construction of the "prostituted women" in relation to the increasing collusion of interests between the neoliberal state and the women's movement in South Korea. It further examines how the imagined victim of sex trafficking conceals the making of a more "killable" population, and circumscribes any effective critique of capitalism and escalating inequalities.

- **Iman Hashim, 'Child Trafficking'**

Abstract:

By drawing principally on research carried out with children and their families in Ghana, and especially the differing migratory trajectories of a number of different girls and boys, this paper aims to illustrate the diversity of experiences and outcomes of children's migration and the fluidity of the boundaries of categories (such as trafficked or fostered) used to describe it. In doing so, the paper demonstrates how the dominant and dominating discourse on 'trafficking' and on 'the child' have combined to either stigmatize children and their families, or to invisibilize much of children's migration independently of their parents, consequently making it difficult to address the very real needs of many mobile children.

- Discussion (chaired by Julia O'Connell Davidson)

1.00 – 2.00 LUNCH

2.00 – 4.30 Victimhood: Debtors and Migrants

- Bridget Anderson, COMPAS, University of Oxford, 'The politics of violation: anti-trafficking and immigration control'

Abstract

One of the ways of managing liberal discomfort when faced with immigration enforcement is to posit it as a response to human rights violations. In the same way that immigration controls far from being racist, are necessary to prevent racism, so they are not human rights violations, but are a means of preventing them. Responses to 'trafficking' present the UK as a site of free labour and space of equality that is free from 'slavery', but they also reveal anxieties about the nature of the market, and its compatibility with ideas of the nation. I'll argue that the presentation of the Victim of Trafficking (VoT) as embedded in social relations of power and control contrasts with the more general portrayal of the economic migrant as a self-interested rational actor. While the apparent de-politicisation of economic migration comes about by the emphasis on 'facts' and data, the de-politicisation of trafficking comes through the focus on values, which place the plight of the victim of trafficking beyond politics. I will concentrate on the case of trafficking as 'modern day slavery' to examine the implications of the usage of the language of slavery, and the ways in which it can limit responses to very real challenges. 'Trafficking' is not only increasingly presented as a human rights focussed response to difficulties of enforcement, but has introduced the language of harm prevention into the centre of immigration control. The 'humanitarian border' has moved into the heart of political space.

- **Patrizia Testai**, 'Debt, bondage and victimization: historical reflections and narrative analysis'

Abstract

In this paper I will focus on debt as a way to enslavement, as it appears in the literature on sex trafficking. I will look at debt in its economic, social, political and moral meaning through an analysis of some literature coming from social economy and anthropology. I will explore the links between debt and stigma, and links between debt and poverty, access to, and control of, labour, capital flows, gender, migration and sexuality. At the end of this literature review I will present some interview abstracts coming from data I collected while doing my PhD. These interviews concern both views about debt coming from professionals working in protection programmes for victims of trafficking and views coming from victims of trafficking and from migrant women prostitutes. By way of concluding I will reflect on questions of power, agency and victimhood in human relations involving debt in general and, in particular, focusing on processes of indebtedness occurring within global migration and 'trafficking'.

- **Svati Shah**, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. "Sex Work and Political Economy in South Asia: Notes on Structuring Discrete Worlds"

Abstract

In this paper, I review scholarly and policy work on sexual commerce in South Asia, with a view toward examining the ways in which political economy both does and does not figure

in the ways in which sexual commerce is produced therein. I argue that the dominant perspective on sexual commerce in the region conflates prostitution and human trafficking, and that this conflation is achieved through the use of a liberal individualist frame for understanding any contexts for how specific cases of prostitution are manifested. I offer an alternate framing for sexual commerce in the region, one that gives primacy to both the question of migration, and to the lens of political economy. Rather than foreclosing an accounting of harm, this critique places harm, agency, and class in relation to one another, under the signs of livelihood and economic precarity.

- Discussant: **Srila Roy**, University of Nottingham

5.00 – 6.00 Roundtable discussion

Slavery and Property, 30th March 2012

This seminar is part of a British Academy –funded project called ‘Beyond Sale or Purchase: The Properties of Slavery in 18th Century Abolitionist Discourse’.

The project explores ideas about slavery, freedom and ownership as they were developed in the writings of the British abolitionists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in particular during the 1790s. It focuses on the use the abolitionists made of arguments drawn, directly or indirectly, from the ideas and writings of John Locke about original rights, arbitrary power, life and liberty, and voluntary contracts, to oppose slavery, and in particular on Locke's ideas about contract and consent, and about owning a property in the person.

The project then goes on to explore the long-term consequences of this one-sided understanding of slavery as the opposite of freedom, which is just not complex enough to accommodate the historical, political and economic aspects of this institution, or to engage with the relations of inequality and subordination that survive abolition. This ‘Slavery and Property’ event addresses the conceptual and historical boundaries of property, freedom and ownership and takes the idea of exploring the properties of slavery onward into new areas beyond the immediate British, 18th century context of the underpinning research.

Programme

10.00 – 11.30 Welcome and Introduction: **Laura Brace**, University of Leicester

Nandita Sharma, University of Hawaii at Manoa

The Neoliberal Politics of Immigration: Fetishizing “Modern Slavery” and Disavowing Unfreedom

Abstract:

In this paper, I bring the discursive practices of “anti-trafficking” in dialogue with those of neoliberal immigration policies in the United States and Canada. I argue that it is not a coincidence that in today’s politics of immigration, certain migrating ‘women and children’ are portrayed as “modern slaves” while national state policies that organize conditions of vulnerability, super-exploitation and, often, unfreedom for large numbers of migrants are ignored and even rendered unpolitical. In both tropes, coercion, agency and freedom – and their absence – cast a long shadow. In this, we see the long after effects of the abolition of the slave trade on contemporary ideas of migration. With the post-abolition world-side movement of people made to labour as indentured, “coolie” labour, labour migration and the employment relations that “coolies” were enmeshed in were both framed in the terms of voluntary and individual contract. Consequently, the social relations of empire and of a globalizing capitalism were obscured as were the ongoing use of both economic and extra-economic coercion. A sense of migrants’ ‘possessive individualism’ continues to affect the way that international labour migration and ‘trafficking’ are framed. Indeed, with the postcolonial hegemony of the global system of national states, the decontextualization of migration and the depoliticization of migrants’ exploitation have intensified. Both the migration as well as the conditions of unfreedom that many migrants find themselves in today are considered “voluntary” while ‘anti-trafficking’ discourse further depoliticizes border controls by recasting the state practice of deportation as a form of humanitarianism (i.e. “sending the victims home”). Both wilfully ignore the work that national state borders do in organizing conditions of unfreedom, vulnerability and exploitation while depending on them to do the work of global capital.

11.30 – 1.00 **Charlotte Sussman**, Duke University

“England’s Cattle” and Eden’s Exiles: Slavery in the Context of Other Forms of Eighteenth-Century Coerced Mobility

This paper looks closely at an aspect of New World slavery often taken to be its defining feature: the fact that slaves captured in Africa were involuntarily and brutally transported across the Atlantic. It places that brutal transatlantic movement at one end of a continuum of mobility running from entirely coerced to entirely free human travel and considers the place of that continuum in cultural definitions of subalternity. It proposes that just as a binary between slavery and freedom developed, so too did a sharp distinction between free and coerced mobility. The paper argues that as well as being understood as a product of colonization (so that subaltern persons are those whose native lands are controlled by others), subalternity during the long eighteenth century might also be productively considered in terms of a person’s vulnerability to being moved, not only from his or her native place, but perpetually. Indeed, such unwilling mobility was the norm for this period; a recent study has determined that during the eighteenth century “four out of every five migrants from both Europe and Africa sailed with the expectation of being in some kind of servitude at the completion of the voyage.”

The paper’s title is drawn from one commentator’s suspicion that the (failed) Census Bill of 1753 disguised the State’s plan to involuntarily move English subjects:

To what end then should our number be known, except that we are to be pressed into the fleet and the army, or transported like felons to the plantations abroad? And what purpose will it answer to know where the kingdom is crowded and where it is thin, except we are to be driven from place to place as graziers do their cattle? If this be intended, let them brand us like oxen and sheep, let them not insult us with the name of men.

The paper will examine this belief that all coerced mobility devalued and dehumanized those subjected to it in conjunction with another way of understanding the subject position of the person who has been moved involuntarily: the discourse of exile. Drawing on texts from *Milton’s Paradise Lost* to *Equiano’s Autobiography of Gustavus Vassa*, the paper will look at the way representations of mobility framed debates about slavery and freedom, personhood and dehumanization.

1.00 – 2.00 LUNCH

2.00 – 3.15 **Tony Burns**, University of Nottingham

“The Right to Have Rights”: Slavery, Freedom and Citizenship in the Thought of Aristotle, Hegel and Arendt.’

I associate slavery with a certain type of social relationship which is sanctified and legitimated by positive or civil law. The essence of this relationship is that within it an individual human being (the slave) is ‘objectified,’ or treated as if she or he is an inanimate object or ‘thing’; a ‘tool’ or ‘instrument’ which is put to use as a ‘means’ to promote the ‘ends’ or purposes of another human being (the master). In a society, and at a time, when no distinction is made between morality and politics, between natural law and civil law, and between natural rights and civil rights, this implies that the slave could not have any juridical

status or standing at all. The slave is literally 'outside' of the law – excluded from all political society, not only from the rights but also from the duties which are associated with the status of citizenship.

To be a 'citizen,' on the other hand, is to be included rather than excluded from political society. It is to possess the legal rights and duties which are held in common by all of those who are members of the same political community and who live together under the same system of civil law. The citizens of such a community respect or reciprocally recognize one another as equals; and they are all treated as equals by the laws of that political community. It is because an individual possesses this legal status, or a recognized political identity as a 'citizen' of a particular political community, that she or he can be characterized as a 'free being' and *not* a slave.

In my paper I shall consider the political thought of Aristotle, Hegel and Arendt in the light of the above remarks. In all three cases I am interested in the following question: what is it, for the theorist in question, that provides the ground or basis of the entitlement to citizenship? Why, in their view, *ought* a particular individual to be included as a member citizen of some political society or other, rather than excluded from all political society as slaves are? In virtue of what qualities or characteristic features does an individual possess what Arendt refers to as the 'right to have rights'?

- Discussant: **Simon Thompson** (University of the West of England)

3.15 – 4.00 **Laura Brace**, University of Leicester

'The Properties of Slavery'

At the heart of the abolitionist response to slavery lay the problem of the ownership of freedom and the limits of commodification. The 'true owner', Thomas Paine declared, 'has a right to reclaim his goods that were stolen, and sold; so the slave, who is the proper owner of his freedom, has a right to reclaim it, however often sold'. Does this political understanding of slavery give away too much ground by conceding that freedom could be bought and sold? This paper explores some of the meanings of property that underpinned slavery, and the underlying understanding of power that brought together personhood and property in particular and contested ways. By investigating how antislavery discourse bound itself to the social contract, and so to a world-view that relied on the division between the industrious and the 'no-where industrious', and on a market economy based to some extent on compulsion, the paper makes some links between old and new discourses of slavery and explores the limits of what counts as slavery in antislavery discourse.

4- 4.30 **Roundtable and Discussion**

Speaker Biographies:

Bridget Anderson is Deputy Director and a Senior Research Fellow at COMPAS. She is the author of *Doing the dirty work? The global politics of domestic labour* and is currently writing a monograph *Us and Them: the Dangerous Politics of Immigration Controls*. She also co-

edited with Martin Ruhs, *Who Needs Migrant Workers? Labour Shortages, Immigration and Public Policy*. Bridget is particularly interested in citizenship, in immigration enforcement (including 'trafficking'), and in low waged labour, migration and the state. She has worked closely with migrants' organisations, trades unions and legal practitioners at local, national and international level.

Tony Burns is Associate Professor in Politics in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham. He is author of *Aristotle and Natural Law*, published by Continuum Press and of *Political Theory, Science Fiction and Utopian Literature: Ursula K. Le Guin and "The Dispossessed"* (Lexington Books). He is currently working on a volume, jointly edited with Simon Thompson (University of West of England), entitled *Global Justice and the Politics of Recognition* which is to be published by Palgrave.

Sealing Cheng is Associate Professor in the Women's and Gender Studies Department, Wellesley College. She received her doctorate in Anthropology from Oxford University. Her research focus is on sexuality, sex work, migration, and human rights. Her book *On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers in U.S. military camptowns in South Korea* was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2010. Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Health and Human Rights, Feminist Review, Sexualities, Anthropological Quarterly, and Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*

Iman Hashim holds a D.Phil. in Development Studies and presently is a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Sussex, working on children's independent migration from rural north-eastern Ghana to rural and urban central Ghana. Her current work builds on long-term ethnographic research undertaken in a farming community in north-eastern Ghana, where she focussed on children's lives, looking especially at the work of children for their own households, as well as on community attitudes toward education and children's experiences of education. She has published articles in *Development & Change, Gender and Development, Cahiers de Recherche sur l'Education et les Savoirs* and co-authored a book with Dorte Thorsen entitled *Child Migration in Africa* published by Zed Books and the Nordic Africa Institute. She also has worked for national and international non-governmental organizations as a program and a research officer.

Mark Johnson is Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Hull. He works on issues related to gender and sexuality and movement and identity. He recently completed a major AHRC funded project on Muslim Filipinos living and working in Saudi Arabia. Recent publications include, *Diasporic Journeys, Ritual, and Normativity among Asian Migrant Women* (Routledge, 2011, with Pnina Werbner, eds).

Svati P. Shah is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Professor Shah completed her Ph.D. in Columbia University's joint Anthropology and Public Health program in 2006. She is currently completing her monograph, entitled *Street Corner Secrets: Sex, Work and Migration in the City of Mumbai*. Her interests include the politics, histories, political economy and 'cultures' of sexuality in South Asia and in the globalizing zones of rights-based activism.

Nandita Sharma is an Associate Professor in the department of Sociology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her research interests lie in the study of human migration, unfree labour, national state power, ideologies of racism and nationalism, processes of identification and self-understanding, and social movements for justice. Nandita is an activist scholar whose research is shaped by the social movements she is active in, including No Borders movements and those struggling for the (now global) commons. She is the author of *Home*

Economics: Nationalism and the Making of 'Migrant Workers' in Canada (University of Toronto Press, 2006) and recently co-edited (with Bridget Anderson and Cynthia Wright) a special issue of the journal, *Refuge* entitled, "No Borders as a Practical Political Project" (2011).

Charlotte Sussman is Associate Professor of English at Duke University, where she specializes in eighteenth-century British Literature. She is the author of *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1833*, (Stanford University Press, 2000), *Eighteenth-Century British Literature, 1660-1789*, (Polity Press, 2011) and is the co-editor, with Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, of the collection, *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780-1830*. (Liverpool University Press, 2008). She is currently working on a book project entitled, *Imagining the British Population: British Literature in an Age of Mass Migration 1660-1838* and has recently written on the topic of exile in "Epic, Exile and the Global: Felicia Hemans's *The Forest Sanctuary*" (*Nineteenth Century Literature* 65.4 (March 2011): 481-512).

Patrizia Testa has gained her PhD in the History Department of the University of Nottingham, exploring historical and sociological meanings of, and links between, slavery and trafficking through an empirical investigation on the legal and social processes of assistance and protection of victims of trafficking. Her research interests lie in narrative constructions of marginalities and victimhood in the context of global migration and the highly gendered services sectors of prostitution and domestic work. Recently she has explored current European policies of return migration as applied to victims of trafficking and refugees and she currently collaborates with the Italian online resource centre on refugee rights, Contextus.org, where she edits a specific link on trafficking.