

## P24: After Abolition: Slavery, Labour, and Social Stratification in Ethiopia since 1942

**Organizer(s):** Alexander Meckelberg, PhD, UCL: [alexandermeckelburg@yahoo.de](mailto:alexandermeckelburg@yahoo.de)  
 Benedetta Rossi, Prof., UCL. Email:

The abolition of slavery was a multi-layered process that arguably took decades. Finally, 1942 marks the official end of the legality of slavery in Ethiopia. While measures against the illicit slave trade and human trafficking expended in post-liberation Ethiopia, no policies were implemented to provide formerly enslaved people with economic opportunities. Access to land or the labour market was not part of the jurisdiction, and neither was the transition to wage labour. Freed slaves remained trapped in precarious relationships within the families they had lived with, became serfson the land of their former masters or migrated to cities and plantationsin search for employment. A widely accepted proposition is that the institution and the attached statuses of slaves vanished over time. However, new research highlights the persistent intergenerational legacies of slavery. We are interested in papers that discuss the economic strategies of slaves after abolition.What are the consequences of abolition? How did slave status affect the lives and choices of freed slaves? What were the economic and social trajectories of formerly enslaved persons? What were the institutional and societal discourses on emancipation?

\*\*\*

### Socio - economic Impacts of Slavery in Kafa: A Historical Insight

**Zegeye Woldemariam**, A PhD fellow in History and Cultural study, Gotha Transcultural Studies College, University of Erfurt, Germany: [zegeyets@gmail.com](mailto:zegeyets@gmail.com)

Like other Abyssinian polities, the historical kingdom of Kafa had practiced slavery and Bonga, the capital of the old kingdom of Kafa, was one of the suppliers of slaves long before their integration into the Ethiopian empire. Kafa was also seen as the only state to deliberately breed slaves on royal estates in the early nineteenth century. In the kingdom of Kafa, the state involvement in the slave trade was such that the king institutionalized an office to oversee the slaves and slave trade, the *guucheraashoo* (supervisor of the slaves and slave trade) for both domestic consumption and internal trade prior to 1897. After the incorporation of Kafa into the Ethiopian Empire, tenants in the areas occupied by the people of Kafa continued to be subjected to labour obligations, which continued as servile labour and one of the featuresof social stratification until the 1970s. The people of Kafa had their own social stratification or social division experiences based on *toommo* (clan) system. *The guuchiashiyaroo* (clan of slave or subordinate people) which include the occupational casts and the slaves as well as slave descents who were social and economically marginalized. Even marriages and other social bonds between these clans were completely banned until 1974. It was after the Ethiopian Revolution, that the subaltern status of these clans gradually decreased somehow. Although it seems not formal, there had been a transformation in which those slave descents and cast clans were trying to integrate themselves with other clans of Kafecho since recently.

\*\*\*

### Critical Translation and Edition of Selected Letters on the Abolition of Slavery in Ethiopia, 1942-1943

**Ahmed Hassan**, Addis Ababa University, IES: [ahmedh20019@gmail.com](mailto:ahmedh20019@gmail.com)

Translation is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text. The purpose translating any source material is to achieve

accessibility for academia and the general none communicators of the very language the original text is written. In short, translation in itself involves interpreting the meaning of a text and subsequently producing a new text, equivalent to the original text but in another language. It is, in fact, a written transposition of concepts from one language to another. It needs bi or multilingual gift for someone to do so. The follows the editorial task. Editing any text including letters is to correct, revise, and get ready for publication. In the course of field research, between October 2021 and January 2022, the present writer identified two written in Arabic written letters at Dawway (Southern Wallo) and at Qoraré in Ifat. Sheikh Adem Essoyé composed the former in June 1942 and the latter was a certain Al-Haj Umera Ibn Sheikh Musa who composed it in March 1943. Although these two letters appeared on the scene at different time and by different composers, their common objective was about abolition story of slavery and slave trade in Ethiopia and in particular in the vast region of North-Easter Shewa and Southeastern Wallo. The intention of translating and editing these two letters is to bring to light its contents representing the interplay between the local and top-level voices regarding the abolition. It is almost acceptable for the researchers in the field that these are original sources towards the comprehension of the story of abolition and the eventual development of historical literature on the diverse methods of the abolition of slavery in Ethiopia.

\*\*\*

#### **Practices of Slavery and Slave Trade among the Oromo of Wallaga: The Case of Manasibu District and its Environs since the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1974**

**Oljira Tujuba**, Kotebe University of Education: [oljiratuj@yahoo.com](mailto:oljiratuj@yahoo.com)

The objective of this paper is to investigate the nature of slavery practices and slave trade in Wallaga with particular emphasis of the Manasibu Warada, Western Wallaga, and its environs. Existing literature and oral sources significantly mention the details of slavery practices related to both domestic activities and trade. The particular period of concern is since middle of nineteenth century to 1974. In this period, although slave trade was came to an end, it is difficult to approve that domestic slavery was abolished. There are ample evidences that the practice of domestic slavery persisted for that matter until 1974. This paper will bring to light the process of longstanding domestic slavery; and, the related trade in slave in this area of Wallaga. The methodology to realize this paper will be qualitative one based on which primary and secondary sources will play key role.

\*\*\*

#### **From Slavery to Tenancy: The Condition and Status of Former Slaves in Wolaita of Southern Ethiopia, 1942-1975**

**Bosha Bombe, PhD in History**, Department of Anthropology in Arba-Minch University, Ethiopia. Email: [bombebosha@gmail.com](mailto:bombebosha@gmail.com) [bosha.bombe@amu.edu.et](mailto:bosha.bombe@amu.edu.et)

From Slavery to Tenancy: The Condition and Status of Former Slaves in Wolaita of Southern Ethiopia, 1942-1975 Bosha Bombe Reta (Ass. Prof. PhD in History)<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the present study is to examine the situation of former slaves in the post abolition period, some attempted radical reform programs to transform the condition of former slaves (slave-tenants) and the outbreak of the Great Ethiopian Revolution and the major impacts it wrought on the lives of former slaves and their masters in Wolaita of southern Ethiopia. The research is mainly based on oral history. In the post liberation Emperor Haile Sellassie issued legal abolition of slavery in 1942 without providing livelihood opportunities for former slaves, and as the result majority of them remained with their former masters with a status of tenant but in a real sense they were in slavery. The transition of slaves into tenant status was endorsed in the general context of

Ethiopian feudalism that outweighed in the south following the emperor's agriculture and land policy in the post liberation period. In the state of tenancy the situation of former slaves remained unchanged, and there was no significant structural change observed until the outbreak of the Great Ethiopian Revolution in 1974 and the subsequent agrarian land reform in 1975. The revolution and the decree led to emancipation of slave-tenants from economic exploitation and political and social marginalization.

\*\*\*

### **Marriageability and Alleged Slave Descent in Western Ethiopia**

**Sophie Küspert-Rakotondrainy**, University of Birmingham:  
[sak994@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:sak994@student.bham.ac.uk)

The society of Begi and Kondala districts in the Oromia Regional State and Mao Komo special district in the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State can be categorised as patrilinear and exogamic. Researchers, politicians and local people usually believe ethnicity and clan membership to be the main criteria for who can marry whom. However, besides ethnic logic, the prestige of an individual's family ancestry is significant for decisions related to kinship and affinity. This paper argues that "honour" as a value of the social informs relationships; the judgement of an individual's "purity of ancestry" impacts their future chances. Alleged slave descent plays a major role for an individual's marriageability in the area until today although we cannot know for certain if alleged slave descendants really do descend from enslaved ancestors. Their social position could, instead, be caused by asymmetric power relations of newer origin, e.g. through labour dependencies. Individuals' social status – and, hence, marriageability – is further influenced by the territorial division of the area into regions and districts which recognise different nationalities as indigenous or "titular". This study is part of my ethnographic fieldwork in the area between June 2020 and July 2021. It explores social hierarchies and discusses how individuals negotiate their identities, which are at once ethnically stratified and morally judged. Investigating marriage practices provides insights into social hierarchies and different (and parallel) systems of ranking and offers an example of how identities are performed in practice.

\*\*\*