

BSA Report 2023- Slavery and Modern Slavery Study Group

- **Account balance at the end of 2023** - £200
- **Number of members** – 44 (7 BSA members / 37 Non BSA members)
- **Convenor details**
 - Dr Angelo Martins Junior, University of Birmingham
 - Dr Pankhuri Agarwal, University of Bath
 - Dr Samuel Okyere, University of Bristol
- **Aims of the group**

The SMS Study Group is convened by UK-based sociologists from global south countries and hopes to facilitate dialogue between global south and UK based scholars, and in particular to provide an intellectual space in which to:

 - develop a critique of 'the new abolitionism';
 - foster critical and nuanced research on the phenomena dubbed 'modern slavery', including but not limited to “trafficking”, “forced labour”, “debt bondage”, “worst forms of child labour”, “sexual exploitation”, “forced criminal activities”;
 - encourage attention to the extensive and forcible restraints on freedom that are sanctioned by liberal democratic states and so stand outside dominant discourse on 'modern slavery' (e.g., through immigration detention, immigration controls, workfare, prison industrial complex, etc.);
 - explore the relevance of scholarship and debates on the afterlives of slavery and colonialism for all of the above.
- **Past and future activities**

Online Roundtable and Launch of the Study Group, 18th April 2023, Online

There are two very different conversations about slavery now, one on “modern slavery” that antislavery campaigners and NGOs largely drive, the other on the “afterlives of slavery” driven by activists and scholars who think critically about race and colonialism. This study group is interested in both conversations and the connections between them. The launch event brought together a panel of researchers whose work highlights problems with the discourse of “modern slavery” in several different contexts.

Chair: Julia O’Connell Davidson

Panellists

- Angelo Martins Junior on Sub-Saharan African migrants
- Insa Koch on county lines in the UK
- Pankhuri Agarwal on bonded labour in India
- Samuel Okyere on working children in Ghana

- Sharmila Parmanand on sex work in the Philippines

TALK: Conversations with IRiS on Migration, Citizenship & Coloniality: Thinking decoloniality through an intersectional lens, 24 October 2023, University of Birmingham

The talk addressed the concepts and practices of coloniality, post-coloniality and decoloniality, exploring the similarity and differences between them. It will examine the ways in which the figure of the 'migrant' has become demonised in both popular and political discourse. Questions of ethnicity, nationalism, national identity, and belonging are central to thinking about borders and were discussed in some detail as well as the problematic of how diasporas are created, mobilised, and politicised.

Soeakers: Professor Avtar Brah (Birkbeck College, University of London) in conversation with Dr Nirmal Puwar (Goldsmiths University) and Dr Angelo Martins Jr (University of Birmingham)

Seminar/talk - Freedom Without Exclusions: Land, Labour, and Liberty for All, 4th December 2023, University of Bristol

The ERC funded project, 'Modern Marronage? The Pursuit and Practice of Freedom in the Contemporary World' (MMPPF), draws on histories of Atlantic World slavery to explore the ambiguities of freedom as an ideal and a lived experience today. This event emerged from one of its studies, which focused on contested visions of slavery and freedom in contemporary Ghana.

US- and British-based antislavery campaigners have paid much attention to 'modern slavery' in Ghana over the past decade, especially 'child slavery' in the fishing industry and artisanal mining, and promoted interventions to 'rescue' child workers. Yet for many members of the communities affected, the problem is not that they are enslaved, but rather that they have been dispossessed of subsistence land as a result of recent land grabs by multinational corporations and other companies.

At this event, Sam Okyere and Raphael Godlove Ahenu Jr will spoke about contestations over land, labour and liberty in Ghana, and the ways in which different ideas about slavery, freedom, and political community are mobilised, both in different sorts of claims to social, economic, and political resources, and in efforts to legitimate or delegitimize them.

Contributions from Nandita Sharma and Alf Nilsen alerted us to the exclusionary logic that underpins the idea of autochthonous links to territory and how this can also be reflected in certain claims to indigeneity. This raised important questions about what it would mean to imagine freedom otherwise - without territory, labour exploitation, and the exclusion, even unfreedom, of those made as "outsiders." That is, how we might locate both a material and ethical grounding for genuine emancipation for every being on our one and only planet.

Discussant: Vicky Hattam

Featuring Sam Okyere (University of Bristol); Raphael Godlove Ahenu Jr (Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Global Media Foundation - GLOMEF); Alf Nilsen (University of Pretoria); Nandita Sharma (University of Hawai'i at Manoa); Vicky Hattam (The New School for Social Research)

Seminar - Conversations with IRiS on Migration, Citizenship & Coloniality, 16 November, University of Birmingham

Speakers: Professor Andrew Geddes (Director of Migration Policy Centre, EU) *in conversation with* Professor Michaela Benson (Lancaster University) and Professor Nando Sigona (University of Birmingham)

Stuart Hall Readings: Les Back on ‘Listening to Stuart Hall’ Wednesday 22, November, University of Birmingham

In 2007 Les Back visited Stuart Hall at his north London home to talk about his writing and work on race. That long recorded conversation included reflection on his time in Birmingham and his role in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies to his thought on what came to be referred to as a the ‘Migrant crisis’. The conversation was published in 2009. In it Les Back acknowledged the limitations of mere transcription of Stuart Hall’s unique voice to the page: “What is hard to represent is how much laughter that conversation contained. Sometimes it was simply a joyous way of punctuating thought, at other moments the mirth was sardonic and satirical. I hope the conviviality of Stuart’s style of listening and talking is not muted in the transposition of his words to the page.” Through edited highlights from original recording Les Back invited us to listen with him to Stuart’s voice and reflect on the lasting relevance of his thinking.

This seminar was an invitation to consider those published texts—essays, interviews, memoir—in which Hall reflected on his own social, cultural and political formation; on the trajectories, conjunctures and articulations to which he attended and which he intervened in. Further, we invited those interlocutors—former students, comrades, sisters and brothers—with whom Hall was in dialogue or debate, enabling him to ‘shift the terms’, ‘intervene’, and ‘clarify’, to speak to these texts, their relationship to Stuart Hall, and the legacy of his work on theirs and beyond.

Future activities

What happened after the Boohoo Scandal, 2nd July 2024, Leicester

This event will discuss the [report](#) published by one of the convenors on the aftermath of modern slavery allegations in Leicester. More details to follow.

More details are available on the events tab of the webpage - <https://www.britsoc.co.uk/groups/study-groups/slavery-and-modern-slavery-study-sms-group/events/>