



# Slavery past and present

Shaping understanding of  
historic and modern slavery  
through research



Cover image: "Combatting Human Trafficking," mural by survivors of slavery in West Bengal, India, 2016, from the AHRC Antislavery Usable Past project, courtesy of Joel Bergner and local partners.

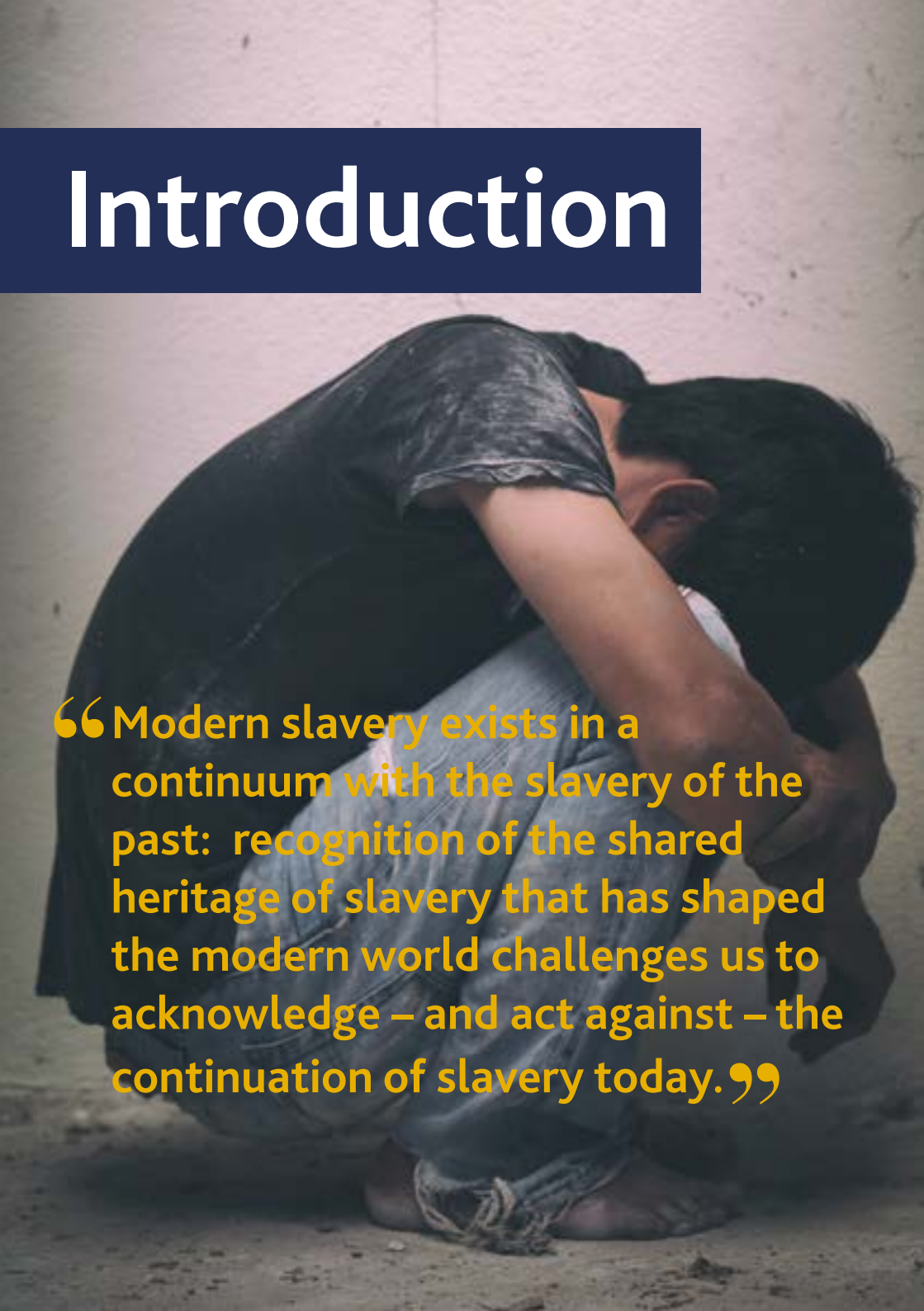


# Contents

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Introduction	4
Definitions of slavery	6
Historical slavery and its present-day legacies	8
Slavery, child labour, and trafficking in modern history	14
Mobilising against modern slavery	18

# Introduction



“Modern slavery exists in a continuum with the slavery of the past: recognition of the shared heritage of slavery that has shaped the modern world challenges us to acknowledge – and act against – the continuation of slavery today.”



**It is estimated that there are 46 million slaves alive today and ending slavery by 2030 is one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. We are now in the midst of history's fourth great anti-slavery movement and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded research is changing the debate around slavery past and present. In this leaflet we highlight how the Arts and Humanities can provide tools with which to address the problem of slavery in the present and to come to terms with its legacy from the past.**

Researchers from our community have provided the legal definitions of slavery that are used in international courts of law and NGOs across the globe. Their work has also highlighted the ambiguity of the language that we use, which allows trafficking and forced labour to be hidden in plain sight. Historians who have studied the longer term histories of slavery and forced labour have revealed startling continuities in the patterns of employment and the experiences of labourers across centuries and continents which the anti-slavery movement has yet to address. But the history of anti-slavery movements and abolitionism is also a powerful tool in itself – it is a 'usable' past that is a resource upon which

modern campaigners have successfully drawn for both empowering inspiration and practical strategy. Modern slavery exists in a continuum with the slavery of the past: recognition of the shared heritage of slavery that has shaped the modern world challenges us to acknowledge – and act against – the continuation of slavery today. AHRC researchers have produced outstanding work that analyses how we remember and acknowledge the institution of slavery that shaped the emergence of modern British society and our relations with the wider world. The impact of their work reaches far beyond academia and has influenced policy makers from the UN to

“ AHRC researchers have produced outstanding work that analyses how we remember, interpret and acknowledge the institution of slavery ”

the British Government; it has informed award-winning television programmes; it has provided the basis for hugely successful Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) and lesson plans in schools. Slavery as an institution has always been predicated upon the movement of peoples across countries and continents. The modern anti-slavery movement is similarly a global network and this is reflected in the international frameworks of research, advocacy and engagement that our funding has supported.

# Definitions of slavery





**Definitions of slavery** have been heavily contested in modern times. From indentured labour to forced marriage, slavery takes many different forms and encompasses different communities and people. A definition of slavery must be flexible enough to include various forms of exploitation, but be precise enough to be used and referenced in a court of law. The Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines on the Legal Parameters of Slavery, which are now used worldwide for courts by NGOs and charitable organisations, were drawn up as the key output of an AHRC-funded networking project,

**Slavery as the Powers Attaching to the Right of Ownership**, led by Professor Jean Allain of Queen's University Belfast. This network brought together academics and anti-slavery leaders to establish a decisive legal definition of slavery, which could be used in courts of law and as a central reference point in international law for the first time. These guidelines were also vital in informing the drafting of

the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 and are informing anti-slavery campaigners across the globe, including Anti-Slavery International, the world's oldest human rights organisation, Free the Slaves, the leading US-based anti-slavery organisation, and Walk Free, which seeks the eradication of slavery in our lifetime and has produced the annual Global Slavery Index. This index which estimates the prevalence of slavery across 167 countries is intended to be used by NGOs, businesses and public officials to help develop policies which aim to end modern slavery. The lead author is Professor Kevin Bales, Principle Investigator on the AHRC Antislavery Usable Past grant (2014-2019). The Bellagio-Harvard guidelines will also inform decisions regarding the allocation of the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery which has commitments of over \$2 billion to be used to aid anti-slavery groups, and to support governments and activists in defeating modern-day slavery.



# Modern Slavery Act 2015

# Historical slavery and its present-day legacies





**The historical institution** of slavery has left an indelible impact upon modern society and the question of how we acknowledge its past, remember its history and communicate that understanding to a wider public remains a fundamental challenge. AHRC-funded researchers have approached the legacy of historical slavery – rather than simply the history of slavery – in innovative ways that have made a vital contribution to public debate.

In 2015 the AHRC-funded project **The Structure and Significance of British Caribbean Slave-Ownership 1763-1833** provided the basis for the BAFTA winning BBC TV series *Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners* presented by historian David Olusoga and watched by 1.6 million viewers. This project, led by Professor Catherine Hall of University College London, which also drew on research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in 2009, showed how the profits from Caribbean slave ownership were spread throughout British society and economy during this critical period in the development of modern Britain. At the core of the project is a publicly accessible database of 46,000 compensation claims made by slave owners following the Emancipation Act of 1834, which itself was named History Today's Digital History Project of 2015 and has since become a widely-used

teaching tool in schools and universities. The Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave Ownership at UCL, which was established as a result of these AHRC and ESRC projects, continues to initiate and inform much wider discussion of the true legacy of slave ownership in shaping society today, both regionally and nationally.

Its findings have underpinned the work of several National Commissions in the Caribbean and have been adopted by The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to aid government negotiations over Britain's colonial slave past.



*Presenter and Historian David Olusoga working on the BAFTA award winning BBC series 'Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners'*

Susanne Seymour of the University of Nottingham led three AHRC Connected Communities projects examining the historical impacts of slavery and colonialism on the British countryside.

**Historicising and Reconnecting Rural Community: Black Presences and the Legacies of Slavery and Colonialism in Rural Britain, c. 1600-1939**

unpacked the conventional image of the countryside and ideas of (white) British identity through a review of published literature and heritage initiatives and the identification of new archival materials.

**Global Cotton Connections** addressed key gaps in the slavery and colonial history of Britain's rural cotton industry and current strategies to represent this, through archival research and working collaboratively with Nottingham Slave Trade Legacies and Sheffield South Asian heritage groups in the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site. **Practising Reparative Histories in Rural Heritage Sites** was a collaboration between cotton mill and country house heritage

professionals, BAME community groups and academics to install community-led exhibition materials on slavery and colonialism at Cromford Mills, Derbyshire, and the poem-based film, *Blood Sugar*, addressing slavery at Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire.

In Bristol, a former hub of the Atlantic Slave Trade, archaeologists, writers and literary scholars were brought together by Dr Josie Gill of the University of Bristol, to develop new ways of understanding what it would have been like to have been enslaved between the 16th and 19th centuries. The aim of **Literary Archaeology: Exploring the Lived Environment of the Slave** was to enhance public understanding of slavery as well as exploring the potential of innovative inter-disciplinary working between archaeological science and literary studies. Public events have been successful in making audiences question how knowledge about slavery is produced and to think about what is needed to re-write the history of slavery in a way that acknowledges the experiences of the slave. Creative writers used archaeological evidence to create stories of the lives and experiences of slaves which have also been incorporated into the audio guide for the Georgian House Museum in Bristol.



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*Dr Shawn Naphtali Sobers, University of the West of England, filming 'Blood Sugar' with the Nottingham Slave Trade Legacies volunteers and poet Michelle 'Mother' Hubbard at Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, in January 2018.*

Recognition should be given to the work of anti-slavery campaigns and movements in the past which paved the way for modern antislavery movements, particularly charities, governments and NGOs who are similarly looking to eradicate the practice of enslaving/trafficking/labour enforcing, today. The importance of looking to the past as a source of knowledge – and inspiration – for modern day campaigns and policy making lies behind the work of the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation, one of the world's leading slavery research centres, which was awarded the Queen's

Anniversary Prize in 2015. Its director Professor John Oldfield (University of Hull) led a project on **Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution, c.**

**1760-1833** which examined the global roots of anti-slavery and the networks which bound together activists on both sides of the Atlantic. By looking into how abolitionists interacted and the challenges they faced, the project reconstructed these 'circuits of knowledge', and created a better understanding of how transatlantic abolitionism worked.

This research has helped to inform exhibitions and outreach activities at the National Maritime Museum and the Wilberforce House Museum in Hull, while a follow-on grant has created a multi-media educational resource, **Stolen**

**Lives**, that introduces children to the complexity, life experiences and scale of slavery past and present through songs and lesson plans. The research team working on this project also provided text and expertise to the British Council in the preparation of a new permanent exhibition on contemporary slavery at the National Museum of Sierra Leone in Freetown. The British Council is also planning to translate selections from *Stolen Lives* into local languages for local schools as part of its Connecting Classrooms project.



# STOLEN LIVES

*Stolen Lives is a thought-provoking, creative project which looks at the issues of historical and contemporary slavery through a combination of music, songs, words, images, film and animation.*

Slavery constitutes a crime against humanity, whether in the past or in the present, and AHRC-funded research has directly addressed the question of what international apologies and reparation should be made to formerly enslaved communities. Nicola Frith from the University of Edinburgh has explored the French state's attempts to come to terms with the difficult past of slavery at home and overseas in **Mapping Memories of Slavery: Commemoration, Community and Identity in Contemporary France**. Her project investigated how those most affected by this history view the efficacy of the state's commemorative practices and its intention to offer moral reparations to the descendants of enslaved communities. In a further project funded by the AHRC **Reparations for Slavery: From Theory to Praxis** Frith is focusing upon the legacy of slavery for Afro-descendant communities.

This project connects scholars and activists with the aim of addressing the negative impact of the history of slavery on Afro-descendent communities. In October 2017 it led to the launch of the International Network of Scholars and Activists for Afrikan Reparations (INOSAAR) in Brixton. INOSAAR, which is a collaboration between The University of Edinburgh, Wheelock College (Boston, US) and PARCOE (Pan African Reparations Committee Europe), will unite the efforts of scholars and activists around the world in addressing the question of

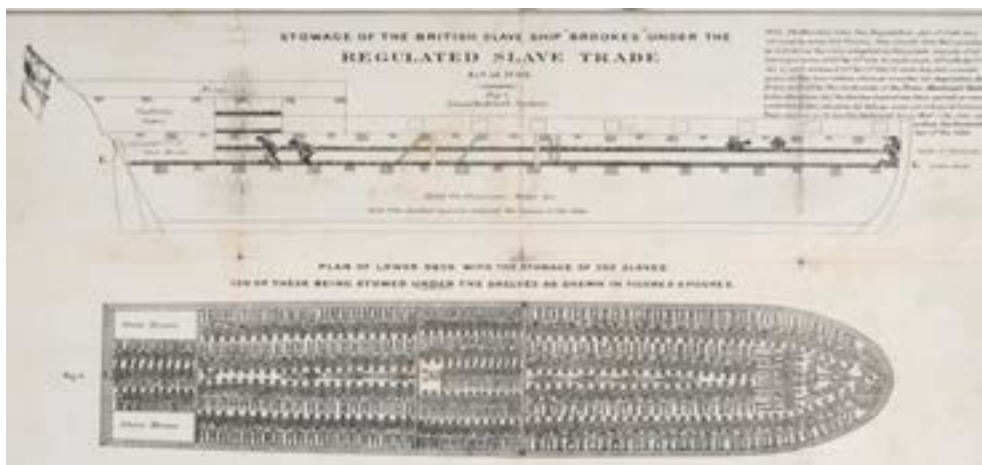
reparations and engaging with the African heritage communities to which they are ultimately accountable. The aim is to bring about substantive policy changes by challenging public and political thinking about reparations and supporting a global push for governments to face up to the long-lasting consequences of enslavement and colonialism.

Issuing an apology for a historical wrong, however, does not always provide closure. Dr Arman Sarvarian from the University of Surrey has led an AHRC-funded project **Apologies for Historical Wrongs: When, How, Why?** which examined the functions and forms of apologies in dispute settlement and reconciliation processes arising from conflicts and traumas on a national and international scale. His work has challenged the notion that apologies for wrongdoing can provide a terminus to a linear dispute settlement process. His findings have been used primarily by charities and non-governmental organisations campaigning for official government apologies, recognition of history and/or reparations for historical wrongs to re-evaluate their strategies and goals.

Understanding how audiences remember problematic pasts is essential if we are to deal constructively with those legacies. Laurajane Smith of the University of York developed new methods of capturing audience receptions of problematic pasts – such as slavery – through a

study of the 2007/8 commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade entitled **Commissioning, Production, Content and Audience Reception of Bicentenary Events Commemorating the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the UK, 1807-2007**. The project was principally concerned with identifying and understanding how 1807 was marked by different agencies and communities in Britain and the consequences of this for the expression of national, local and community identity, and for

the development of a range of social debates addressing multiculturalism and social inclusion. As a result of this Knowledge Exchange project the team compiled a toolkit which enables users to detail how audiences responded to the representation of enslavement and abolition in 2007. The toolkit can assist in the development of exhibitions or wider programmes of engagement, but also provides an insight into how museum visitors engage with traumatic pasts.



*Stowage of the British Slave Ship 'Brookes' – this image was the inspiration for La Bouche du Roi: An iconic artwork by Romuald Hazoumé which was acquired by the British Museum in 2007 to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.*

# Slavery, child labour, and trafficking in modern history



**The issues of human trafficking and forced labour** have, for centuries, been a global issue and have taken many different forms. The existence and abuse of children's rights in terms of child labour have to be considered as part of the wider system of slavery and forced labour. Dr Peter Steinert's project **Child Forced Labourers in National Socialist Germany and German Occupied Eastern Europe, 1939-1945** is the first comprehensive study of young forced labourers in National Socialist Germany and German occupied Eastern Europe. It draws on the testimonies of former forced labourers, as well as archival sources to uncover the experiences of the young victims and to analyse the ideology and policy of the perpetrators. In addition to opening up new research questions on forced labour outside the German Reich in general, and on the role of children in particular, his research has had a direct impact on the political work of the Polish Association of Children of the War who advocate for the rights of former child forced labourers. Both the German and Polish governments have previously denied these children any form of compensation, or any of the social and economic benefits granted to officially recognised forced labourers. The Association regards Steinert's research as of "great importance in getting the same national and international rights and privileges as enjoyed by forced labourers deported to Germany" (Letter, Stowarzyszenie Dzieci Wojny w Polsce to Prof Caroline Gipps, Vice-Chancellor, University of Wolverhampton).

AHRC-funded research has raised important questions regarding children's legal rights in EU governance and practice today, and examined relevant case law to inform

new legislation. In **Children and the European Union: Rights, Welfare and Accountability** Dr Helen Stalford drew on a range of disciplinary perspectives (including politics, international human rights, the sociology of childhood, social policy and human geography) to provide the first detailed analysis of children's rights and a critique of the case law and legislation that has emerged within the European Union. Her research adds a unique children's rights perspective to broader debates around EU competence, citizenship, governance and participation.



Wikipedia Creative Commons

*Young Polish girl wearing the P symbol. It was a requirement in Nazi Germany for Polish forced workers to display a visible symbol marking their ethnic origin.*



Customs and practices have changed across times and cultures, as human beings move (at their own volition or in forced scenarios) globally and adapt to their new cultures and environments. Understanding nineteenth-century Indian migration around the Indian Ocean offers a long diverse history of Indian labour mobility. **Becoming Coolies: Rethinking the Origins of the Indian Labour Diaspora, 1772-1920**, led by Professor Crispin Bates of the University of Edinburgh, challenges the assumption that the 'first wave' of migration between the 1830s and 1920s was a form of colonial coercion or 'a new system of slavery' in which those involved had no say, whereas the 'second wave' of migration beginning in the 1950s was somehow more 'legitimate'. From the 1830s millions of Indians moved around the Indian Ocean within the British and French empires, often replacing African

slave labour. They had few rights, no passport and no option to return home unless they completed labour contracts of up to five years with a single employer; for some, however, it enabled them to escape caste, gender, or religious persecution. The project is opening up possibilities for radically reinterpreting the nature and importance of migrant agency in the early formation of the Indian Diaspora in a way that sheds light on contemporary migration patterns and the present day culture of the South Asian diaspora. As Professor Bates argues in an essay for the website *Open Democracy*, there are clear parallels between the limited rights and exploitation of indentured migrants in the nineteenth century and the would-be migrants of the twenty-first century who – due to exclusionary legal regimes and the instability of war – are forced into the hands of people smugglers in order to cross into Europe.



*East Indian Immigrants, Guyana 1870 – 1900. From the 1830s millions of Indians moved around the Indian Ocean within the British and French Empires. Often replacing African Slave labour. Image Courtesy of the National Archive.*

UK National Archives.

The AHRC has also funded projects which discuss the agency of those being trafficked and forced to work in a gendered and historical setting. **Trafficking, Smuggling, and Illicit Migration in Gendered and Historical Perspective, c 1870-2000** opened up the emerging study of the history of illicit and clandestine migration by examining the history of trafficking in the 19th and 20th centuries in a comparative and global perspective.

Principal investigator Dr Laite and Co-Investigator Dr Hetherington produced a comparative study of trafficking and clandestine migration in the Russian empire and Britain throughout the late 19th century and early 20th century. An open-access web resource that illuminates this largely unexplored history provides trafficked people and illicit migrants the means through which to conceptualize their own experiences collectively and historically.



# Mobilising against modern slavery




"Overcoming," mural by survivors of slavery in Kolkata, India, 2016, from the AHRC Antislavery Usable Past project.

*f/Joel Bergner and local partners*



## The AntiSlavery Usable Past

(2014-19), led by Professor Kevin Bales of the University of Nottingham (with Professor Zoe Trodd at Nottingham's Rights Lab) and Professor John Oldfield of the Wilberforce Institute, has been funded by the AHRC under our Care for the Future: Thinking Forward Through the Past theme. It moves beyond the nostalgia for past antislavery victories to uncover lessons from the successes and failures of abolitionist movements in the past and apply them to contemporary antislavery efforts. This 'usable past' of antislavery examples and methods shows that the mistakes of earlier movements can be avoided and the lessons that are learned can offer tools to 'care for the future'. At the heart of this project are the voices and narratives of formerly enslaved people: in the movement's campaign materials, in their own strategies (drawing on the belief that narratives can be analysed for antislavery ideas and solutions), and in their leadership structures (where former slaves are taking a more central leadership role).



This research has led to numerous advisory seminars with NGOs and policy-makers, interactive digital archives, exhibitions, public events, and

policy briefings. One NGO testimony explains: "The Antislavery Usable Past has been an incredibly valuable resource for us. Building a formidable movement against modern slavery relies on a critical understanding of the past. First, there's movement leadership. We now understand how abolitionist leaders operated, what helped them succeed, what stalled their progress, and the nature of the opposition, whether direct, sympathetic, or apathetic. Analysing the critical power pressure points and the order in which they were accessed has helped us to structure and fortify the backbone of the modern anti-slavery movement. Second, because a truly successful movement is powered from the ground-up, we have found tremendous value in understanding the psychology of the rank and file in past abolitionist movements. We now know what were tipping points and what were the characteristics of the peoples' chosen heroes and how they could have had expanded to achieve more efficient exposure. Understanding these lessons provides us with almost a blueprint of how we should build and advance our movement against modern slavery to achieve even more efficient and sustained progress."

### **The Antislavery Usable Past project**

has also contributed to the Global Slavery Index and has also influenced societal attitudes towards antislavery campaigning, not least through the engagement of more than 10,000 learners from 150 countries in the first MOOC about contemporary slavery. The course, titled Ending Slavery: Strategies for Contemporary Global Abolition, educates participants on the lessons of past abolitionism and asks them to help design a new blueprint for ending slavery by 2030. The course has been integrated into the professional development requirements of several NGOs and embedded in at least five undergraduate courses in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia and was shortlisted for the Learning on Screen Awards 2017. Building on the success of the course, the team has launched the world's first distance MA on contemporary slavery, training antislavery workers around the world, which includes a dedicated module on the Usable Past.

In a related project, **Modern Slavery: Meaning and Measurement**, co-funded by the ESRC, Professor Bales is leading a team to study and analyse how slavery is defined by different 'user groups', including contemporary survivors of slavery, with the intention of bringing usability and clarity to these different

definitions. Accurate definitions are crucial to arrive at accurate estimates of the numbers of workers enslaved, and these estimates underpin the effective planning and success of antislavery campaigning. This is particularly the case in richer countries where better law enforcement and the rule of law mean, paradoxically, that the practice of slavery is well-hidden. The project, which also includes Sir Bernard Silverman, former Chief Scientific Advisor to the Home Office as a co-investigator whose work is further testing the application of Multiple Systems Estimation techniques which have already been successfully used in the UK, where the Home Office altered their resource allocations and anti-crime strategy based on the more accurate estimates provided by Professor Silverman. The resource allocation and policy recommendations of the Modern Slavery Act (2015) were also informed by these new estimates. The potential now exists to extend this approach to enforcing law, making policy and serving survivors in numerous other countries and has been adopted by the Dutch and Spanish governments, as well as the United Nations (UN) Office on Drugs and Crime. Professor Bales has also given evidence to a US Government review, a Cambodian Government review, and an Australian Government review, while the project's outputs were cited in a recent UN Report.

**Negating Humanity: Modern Slavery**

**in its Historical Context and its Implications for Policy**, led by Dr Kristofer Allfeldt, University of Exeter, is a project co-funded with the ESRC that directly addresses the question of how slavery is defined by focusing upon the long term of impact the 1910 White Slave, or White Slave (Mann Act) in America and, more recently, the implications of the UK's 2015 Modern Slavery Act. The research team is examining how the Act has been enforced, which crimes it has focussed upon and how its implementation is shaping and influencing the terms of debate. In addition to academic outputs (including an edited volume of essays arising from the first UK conference of Historians Against Slavery to be published by Cambridge University Press) the investigation aims to act as a pilot project to establish how academics can work together with NGOs and law enforcers to make policy on modern slavery more responsive and targeted to their needs. A network of journalists, leading policy makers, law enforcers, and scholars has been created and has already met twice to discuss the problems of defining slavery in a post 'abolition' world and the ways in which media reports influence the policing and prosecution of modern slavery. A final meeting between the Principle Investigator and Co-investigator with Devon and Cornwall Police and the

PACCS will assess the project's findings suitability for a policy briefing document.

Dr Alex Balch from the University of Liverpool is currently leading the AHRC funded **Antislavery Knowledge Network: Community-Led Strategies for Creative and Heritage-Based Interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa** in collaboration with Professor Trodd (University of Nottingham), Professor Oldfield (University of Hull), Professor Charles Forsdick (University of Liverpool), and Dr Wazi Apoh and Dr Benjamin Kankpeye in the Department of Heritage Studies at the University of Ghana. This offers the first extended effort to address slavery as a core development challenge in sub-Saharan Africa via innovative approaches from the arts and humanities that deliver community-engaged antislavery work. Focusing on the idea of 'activated community memory,' it champions the use of heritage as a resource for social change. The network aims to demonstrate that participatory arts-based strategies, rooted in heritage, can empower Global South communities to play a central role in tackling contemporary slavery.

The network was launched with an initial programme of three pilots in African countries shaped by historical slavery that are also sites of contemporary enslavement: Ghana, Sierra Leone and

the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All three pilots have developed models for what works in different national and local contexts, via diverse methods of in-country partner collaboration. Together, the pilot programme and further commissioned projects connect the long history of slavery, antislavery's unfinished work, and the symbols of heritage to current antislavery challenges.

The project is shifting the politics of anti-slavery campaigning towards a community-led approach by showing that the process of recovering and re-contextualising marginalised heritage can fuel antislavery resilience. The project is showing that cultural engagement can build confidence and

develop key skills in communities, and that arts projects offer an alternative to a campaigning approach, providing more imaginative ways of engaging with development issues. The team is measuring a shift on the part of its NGO and policy partners towards factoring in creative and cultural programmes to their work, including integrating ideas, suggestions and solutions from enslaved people themselves. It is already charting an increase in the number of at-risk people whose participation in creative, cultural and heritage-based programming has built resilience to exploitation by enabling rights awareness, developing leadership skills and accessing new networks.



*Cape Coast Castle slave fort in Ghana. Ghana has been shaped by historical slavery but is also a site of contemporary enslavement.*







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