

GWYN CAMPBELL, SUZANNE MIERS and JOSEPH C. MILLER (eds), *Women and Slavery: Africa, North America and the medieval North Atlantic* (Volume 1) and *Women and Slavery: the modern Atlantic* (Volume 2). Athens OH: Ohio University Press (pb \$30 each – 978 0 82141 724 9 and 978 0 82141 726 3). 2007, 392 and 312 pp.

In her pioneering work on slavery in India, Indrani Chatterjee notes that ideas about slavery drawn from experiences in the Americas and the Caribbean led British colonial officials to 'divide the world made by the slave holders into neat little spheres – one where adult men laboured outdoors, and another where women and children laboured at tasks which could never be measured, and therefore remained undervalued as domestic labour' (in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *Abolition and Its Aftermath in the Indian Ocean World*, 2005: 151). The nineteenth-century colonial emphasis on both the western hemisphere and the male slave experience in shaping discussions about slavery has enjoyed surprising longevity. Even until relatively recently, the historiography of slavery has focused overwhelmingly on the Atlantic experience and the stereotypical image of the male slave 'toiling from sun up to sundown in fields and canebrakes' (Vol. 1, p. xv). The 27 articles in the two-volume collection *Women and Slavery* make an important contribution to ongoing efforts to redress this balance, both by supplementing the Atlantic experience with regional studies of slavery and slave systems in Africa and the Indian Ocean and by focusing on diverse experiences of female slaves, not only in the 'fields and canebrakes', but also in the home, the harem and the imagination. The numerous themes of the two volumes are too many and too diverse to do full justice to here, but what they share is a commitment to uncovering a history of female slavery that transcends the compensatory, instead employing insights about women's experiences of bondage in various times, places and contexts to help redefine our understanding of slavery as an institution.

The first volume, *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean world and the medieval North Atlantic*, focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on the experiences of female slaves in the domestic realm. In chapters ranging from sub-Saharan Africa to the medieval Norse Atlantic, from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to Madagascar and Mauritius, this volume clearly demonstrates that far from simply being a by-product of a trade in male slaves, in many societies women were the prime focus of the slave trade, as the acquisition of female slaves and the retention of their productive and reproductive labour was fundamental to the functioning of the domestic economy of the home. Among the themes explored in this context are the relative importance of productive and reproductive labour in shaping conditions of servitude, the vulnerability of slave women within the home and the often ambivalent relationships of power and exploitation that existed at the blurred boundaries between kinship and ownership, slavery, concubinage and marriage.

Compared to Volume 1's geographical and cultural diversity, Volume 2, *Women and Slavery: the modern Atlantic* deals with the more coherent milieu of the Americas – 'from Brazil to Barbados and Baton Rouge' (p. viii). Joseph Miller sees the chapters in this volume as sharing a 'distinctive general context of modernity' (p. viii). Unlike the cases explored in Volume 1, where the locus of community recognition and support for slavery lay in households, patronage and clientage, 'In the Americas these private and personal relationships receded into the background of the vast canvas of modernity, in which commercial relations among strangers, anonymous markets, and imagined communities like nations left individuals at the mercy of abstract categories and impersonal laws that defined and structured them' (p. xiv). The chapters in this volume

deal in various ways with women's experiences of these commercialized and impersonal structures of slavery, as well as with the more immediate relationships between slaves, owners and offspring. The chapters explore women's strategies for surviving or resisting slavery, the sexualization of female slaves, the later gendering of emancipated women, and, of course, the racialization of slave women and their children.

The chapters in both volumes employ a wide range of innovative historical, analytical and theoretical techniques and perspectives as well as diverse and inventive ways of using the insights they provide into female slave experiences to reposition our understanding of slavery more generally. To give just a few examples, Kenneth Morgan and Richard Follett both use technical medical and nutritional literature to explore issues of slave reproduction in Jamaica and Louisiana respectively, Sharifa Ahjum employs psychoanalysis to explore the relationships between the white father and slave family in the South African Cape, while Elizabeth Grzymala Jordan uses archaeological evidence on slave washerwomen in the same region. Katrin Bromber, Henrice Altink and Felipe Smith all use different literary productions as a basis for their respective studies of attitudes to female slaves in Swahili sources, Jamaican pro-slavery writings and Afro-American literature in the Jim Crow era.

As might be expected of volumes emerging out of a conference in honour of Suzanne Miers, whose contribution to African history and slavery studies has been so significant, the consistent quality, range and depth of the chapters offered here, together with the scope they provide for comparative study, make these collections a truly valuable resource for students and scholars alike. Although greatly overshadowed by their strengths, the volumes are not without weaknesses, however. In a volume that purports to cover the Indian Ocean region, the under-representation of the Middle East, Asia and especially India is surprising and disappointing. Recent studies of slavery in India by Indrani Chatterjee, among others, raise important questions about the relationship between kinship, gender and slavery that resonate strongly with the themes of these volumes and which might usefully have been included. In more general terms, while the individual volumes are structured in interesting thematic groupings that encourage the reader to make connections and comparisons over time and space – to think 'about women and about slavery in analytically historical and integrative terms' (vol. 1, p. xv) – the separation of chapters between the two volumes is more geographically and chronologically arbitrary. While completely understandable in practical terms, the decision to split the volumes between the 'modern Atlantic' and 'everywhere else' reinforces traditional dichotomies between the Atlantic plantation system and other forms of slavery. These reservations notwithstanding, illuminating resonances emerge across the volumes regarding the experiences of female slaves in the Atlantic, Africa and the Indian Ocean, especially in relation to issues of women's sexual exploitation and reproductive labour, the nature of racial and kinship boundaries and the challenges posed by norms and expectations of idealized domesticity, be these Islamic or Christian, empowering or oppressive, for female slaves trying to carve out family 'living space' under various slave systems. On the whole, then, these are accomplished, extensive and innovative collections that make a major contribution not only to slavery studies, but also to the histories of the various regions represented, to 'women's history', and to gender, race and area studies more generally.

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