



*Call for papers/Convocatoria/
Appel à contributionn*

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New and old slaveries

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Demostration in Avenida Paulista, S. Paulo (Brasil), October 2017
«Slavery has not disappeared, we have nothing to commemorate!»



Immigrants detention centre. Tripoli (Libia), October 2017

The term "slavery", as well as other related expressions, such as "slave trafficking" and "slave trade", most of the times evoke images from the past.

Yet, the pictures that we have chosen as epigraphs - that is, as inscriptions that are "up, above" and therefore are there to open a text, but also (graphic and iconic) representations symbolically engraved in contemporary times - seem to contradict the comforting statement that we live in a "post-slavery" time.

Slavery, meant as the total control of a person upon another one, is not over at all, as scholars of various fields such as sociology, economy, and philosophy keep on stressing, and as narrators, poets, artists, and journalists from the Northern and Southern emispheres of the world keep on denouncing.



It really looks like contemporary times are not immune from the heavy and complex legacy of slavery, from its production of racial, class and gender stigmata, from its pervicacious biopolitical technologies, from its forms of violence and supremacy.

In spite of the fact that the juridical abolition of slavery has represented a fundamental step in the process of civilization, believing that this has caused its effective disappearance is clearly naïve: "Slavery is not a monstrosity of the past that we managed to get rid of, but something that continues to exist all over the world even in developed countries such as France or the United States. There is no place on earth where slaves do not keep on working and sweating, building and suffering" (Kevin Bales, 2000, p. 9).

It really looks like year 2018 does not have much to commemorate (as the Brazilian protesters in the picture remind us), apart from a theory of chronological coincidences that marked the stories of slavery and those of the processes of emancipation from it: on January 1st, 1808, Britain ended its involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, and on the same day the abolishment of slavery was officialized also in the USA; on May, 13th, 1888, princess Dona Isabel from Brazil signed Imperial law no. 3.353, passed into the annals of history as "Lei Áurea", which abolished slavery in Brazil, the last Western country to do so; on December 10th, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved by the United Nations General Assembly, and it reads "nobody must be kept in slavery or servitude; slavery and slave trafficking must be forbidden in all their forms" (art. 4).

According to the classical divisions which claim that the forms of slavery have historically known different juridical and legal reconfigurations in compliance with the different economic and social conditions, we can talk about a "slavery of ancient times" (classic and medieval ancient times) and a "slavery of modern times".

If, simply put, the former is based on a legitimization of a natural order that distinguishes the "free man" from the "slave" that the Roman law will systematize, the latter is based on social motivations, and, however, is not detached from juridical-normative apparatuses and from processes connected to "nature", as it is inextricably linked to the project of modernity (of the State-Nation, of colonialism, as well as citizenship, in a specific excluding form). Slavery of modern times – which is the result of the wider colonial project – is indissolubly intertwined with the rhetoric of the "race". The main element that the two (rather different) realities of the "slavery of ancient times" and the "slavery of modern times" have in common is the ascertained legal property; slaves are objects of property, a property protected by the law and the legal system that, consequently, can be asserted by their owner.

As has been recently observed (Casadei 2017), in the contemporary scenario it is possible to single out various forms of slavery. Next to well-known modalities, such as those related to forced and dehumanizing labour, as well as the phenomenon of the slave trade (see Pérez Alonso [dir.] 2017; Bianchelli 2017), we can find unprecedented, specific, features. The main reference is to the women and children who are



imprisoned and forced to prostitution with the use of violence, which brings about a peculiar form of sexual slavery (see O'Connell Davidson 2005; Kara 2009; MacKinnon 2011; Patterson 2012) as well as forced and early marriages, a phenomenon of enslavement connoted by gender-based violence, so that very young girls are given in marriage against their will (see Bello 2016; Tagliani 2017a e 2017b).

An important aspect within the context of contemporary slavery refers to the situation of migrating men and women who are looking for a job and often become the victims of criminal organizations and trapped in forms of subjugation that involve the confiscation and segregation of their body, in the utmost violation of every human right (see Milazzo 2017; Sciorba 2017).

Our world is made of old and new slaveries. As the editors of this issue, we are interested in the theoretical and critical investigation of the historical and socio-economic realities that have brought about "slavery" as well as the cultural (literary, artistic, etc.) representations that have deconstructed its rhetoric and discourse, that have discovered their practices and policies, that have redeemed the individuals' and communities' silences, that have returned the forbidden memories and the silenced voices.

We invite scholars to take the challenge – at the crossroad of specialisms – to tell us about realities and forms, simulacra and imaginary, memories and post-memories of old and new, visible and invisible slaveries, each one from their own linguistic and cultural perspective and with the methods of their own discipline.