Islamization of Africa III:
“Muslim Identity: Slave Trading and Slavery”

Oct 12:
‘An Arab Abolition’? Images and Imaginings
The Europeans of the nineteenth century trumpeted their opposition to the violence of the slave trade in Africa, identified it with Arabs and Islam, and used it as a justification for their “humanitarian” occupation of Africa [in other words, colonial rule].
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- exaggeration to say ‘colonialism’ rooted solely in this process BUT was crucial to how European powers ‘saw’ and ‘understood’ Muslim societies

- key ‘players’: missionaries (eg. David Livingstone), European representatives (eg. diplomatic consuls), Anti-Slave Society Reporter (magazine), ‘abolitionists’ – church societies
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18th-19th centuries, Atlantic Slave Trade generated British, French Abolitionist movements

- 1787 ‘Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade’

- developed ‘paradigm’/discourse of Trade:
  - horrors of capture
  - death rates of infamous ‘middle passage’
  - cruelties/debasement of slave markets
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Iconography: medallion ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’ (1787)
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- second famous icon encapsulating the horrors: ‘the middle passage’ (slave ship *Brookes*, 1799)
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How did ‘Atlantic Trade’, abolition come to affect Saharan, North African, Indian Ocean slave trades?

- movement fundamentally Christian: those in slavery, if freed, could be brought to God – it was the ‘duty’ of Christian Britain

- corollary: to continue slaving/slavery was by definition ‘un-Christian’

- association ‘slave trade/slavery’ with being non-Christian easily transferrable to those who were truly non-Christian: namely, Muslims
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-to bring ‘other’ slave trades (in hands of Muslims) to notice of public, government -- presented them in similar terms, used same paradigm as for Atlantic Trade

But: looking into ‘Islamic World’ meant encountering ‘the Orient’:

- discourse and goals of Abolitionists rooted in Atlantic Slave Trade encountered discourse and assumptions of Orientalists...

[for full development of this argument, see McDougall ‘Discourse and Distortion’, Additional Readings; what follows is partial discussion.]
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From Ottomans to ‘Arabs’ to ‘Mohammadens’:

- key dynamic: European involvement Ottoman Empire

- needed to address slave trading and slavery in Ottoman Empire, being fed by these ‘other’ trades

- but slavery so integral to Ottoman society, government, military, could not just be ‘eliminated’
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- led to ‘othering’: Ottoman slavery ‘different’ from Atlantic slavery

- European and Ottoman intellectuals developed ‘oriental slavery’: opportunities for social advancement and/or manumission, the harem

- not like ‘normal’ (Atlantic) slavery
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1840 Report: “The peculiar nature of the institution in the East”:

- argued that attempts to abolish slavery as Abolitionists campaigned for in Americas, Caribbean would create social upheaval [understood to mean ‘which would undermine British commercial interests …’]
1869 British official [argued]:

“As long as the detestable social system which is part of the Mohemmedan religion continues, female slavery must remain in connection with it. ... The difficulty of dispensing with female slaves in the Harems necessarily existing in Mohemmedan countries, appears... to make it impossible to sweep the atrocious institution away.”
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Something called ‘Islamic slavery’ was created by the West, for the West -- in contra-distinction to ‘real’ [understood as New World] slavery.

- defined not in terms of Islamic law or custom [as we have discussed it] but in terms of ‘Orientalism’ [as previously discussed, Edward Said etc.]:

\[
\text{Islamic Slavery} = \text{Oriental Slavery}
\]
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Attention returned to question of ‘trafficking’ (trade):

- Saharan, North African and East Africa trades

- used ‘orientalist’ (erotic, barbaric) images coupled with ‘abolitionist’ (Atlantic Slavery) images, both in literature and art

- trades became ‘Mohammedan’ because they fed into the Muslim East
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- the ‘commodities traded’ were assumed to be mostly women and children because they were intended for the harems and ‘depraved’ activities of the Orient

- the traders were ‘Mohammedans’ – understood to be ‘Moors’ (drawing on older references to Muslims in Spain, “Almoravids”) or in more recent terms, ‘Arabs’: cruel, merciless, greedy
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Anti-Slavery Society (est. 1823 – had own magazine ‘Anti-Slavery Reporter’):

- active in North Africa, seeking reports of cruelty in Trans-Saharan slave trade

- James Richardson sent to convince Moroccan Sultan to ‘cease and desist’ in interests of ‘legitimate’ commerce and Christianity [seeking to ‘Christianize the benighted – the slaves’, many of whom were probably Muslim!]
Introduction to his (latterly published) book: reveals level of religious bias

“Why should we respect… any community of Mohametans? Have we effaced from our memory their treachery and inhuman cruelty in India; their utter worthlessness in Turkey. … Civilisation cries aloud for retribution on a race whose religion teaches them to regard us as ‘dogs’. … We should hunt them out of the fair lands they occupy and force them back on the deserts which [sic] vomited them forth on our ancestors ten centuries ago”.
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Richardson returned to Sahara on behalf Anti-Slavery Society:

- estimates of volume of trade, ‘colourful’ descriptions of conditions of trade, calculations of mortality became major source of information in Europe, highly publicized

- number of Europeans exploring Sahara increased: each requested to return with information for Anti-Slavery Society
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Diplomatic Consuls across North Africa (French, British) served same purpose: not all agreed on nature of trade

For example, in Morocco, one consul fed abolitionist rhetoric enthusiastically:

“[slaves in general were] *invariably badly treated*” … [concubines in particular suffered] the most degrading treatment that can be conceived. Imagine unprotected young females some of whom are handsome, in the hands of savage barbarians, who have virtually the power of life and death over their victims, for no inquiries are ever made into the causes of death and the only restraint therefore is the slave owner’s pecuniary interest in his slave”.

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While another consul (also in Morocco):

- argued that slaves were generally better off than the poor

- girls and women in harems were comparable to poor girls and poor women ‘selling themselves’ [on the streets of cities] in Europe
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“For a public imbued with firmly entrenched expectations about what constituted ‘Mohammedan’ slavery and the Saharan trade that supported it, it was this rhetoric, not considered reflection that resonated.”

[from conclusion, McDougall ‘Discourse and Distortion’]
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Connection of issues to Ottomans inevitably drew British into East African (Red Sea, Indian Ocean) Trades:

- main ‘publicist’ was Missionary David Livingstone

- East African trade regarded as ‘Indian’ affair (distinct from Atlantic ‘European’ affair)

- Livingstone (following on his travels into East, Central, Southern Africa) brought it to attention of Anti-Slavery Society
David Livingstone

- spoke in terms of slave caravans --‘coffles’: cruelty of Moors (traders) who killed helpless women, children who could not keep up (‘all about greed, not humanity’)

– likened situation to ‘middle passage’ of Atlantic trade (conditions, mortality rate etc – sure to ‘resonate’ with readers)

- reinforced with iconography (‘illustrations’)

David Livingstone

Missionary, Explorer, Anti-Slavery Campaigner

“The Life & Explorations of Dr. Livingstone” (book cover)

[Note Iconography and images of ‘Africa’]
“We passed a woman tied by the neck to a tree and dead, the people of the country explained that she had been unable to keep up with the other slaves in a gang, and her master had determined that she should not become the property of anyone else if she recovered after resting for a time. I may mention here that we saw others tied up in a similar manner, and one lying in the path shot or stabbed, for she was in a pool of blood. The explanation we got invariably was that the Arab who owned these victims was enraged at losing his money by the slaves becoming unable to march, and vented his spleen by murdering them; but I have nothing more than common report in support of attributing this enormity to the Arabs.
Nevertheless:

- Through drawings added to his publication (below), this ‘common report’ became ‘observed fact’, adding to Abolitionist/Orientalist iconography.
From Livingstone’s *Last Journals* ...

“Gang of Captives...(above left)

“Abandoned Slaves (above right)

“Slavers Revenge their Losses” (right);
“On asking Ali [his Somali guide] whether any attempts had been made by Arabs to convert those with whom they enter into such intimate relationships [Ali had taken a ‘native’, Makonde wife], he replied that the Makondé had no idea of a Deity—no one could teach them, though Makondé slaves when taken to the coast and elsewhere were made Mahometans.
“Since the slave-trade was introduced this tribe has much diminished in numbers, and one village makes war upon another and kidnaps, but no religious teaching has been attempted. The Arabs come down to the native ways, and make no efforts to raise the natives to theirs; it is better that it is so, for the coast Arab's manners and morals would be no improvement on the pagan African!”
David Livingstone

- in this text, Livingstone had also noted a good many ‘light coloured’ among the Makonde, “but only one had the Arab hair…” he further observed

- here, ‘Somali’ clearly conflated with ‘Arab’

- in turn, ‘Arab’ debased as far as possible (in Christian missionary Livingstone’s eyes): ‘no improvement on pagan Africans’
"It would be better if you kept your people and cultivated more largely," said I, "Oh, Machemba sends his men and robs our gardens after we have cultivated," was the reply. One man said that the Arabs who come and tempt them with fine clothes are the cause of their selling: this was childish, so I told them they would very soon have none to sell: their country was becoming jungle, and all their people who did not die in the road would be making gardens for Arabs at Kilwa and elsewhere.”
David Livingstone

- point of text to admonish ‘people of interior’ (Makonde and others) for allowing ‘Arabs’ to draw them into killing their ‘own’ for the sake of commerce but..

Clearly speaking not of ‘Arabs’ per se, but Swahili and Omani at Kilwa and elsewhere along the coast

- characterization of ‘Arab’ permanently entered literature: even today, referred to as ‘Arab’ slave trade

[see ‘Notes on David Livingstone’, Additional Readings, for further excerpts; also link to full e-book ‘The Journals of …’]
For Livingstone (and those who read him), Coastal Merchants all ‘low-coast Arabs’:

- clearly disparaging

But who were these so-called Arabs in fact?
Empire Builders, Slave Traders
East - Central Africa (c.1850-1900)

Mirambo  
Tippu-Tib  
Msiri  

[see ‘Notes on Slave Traders’, Additional Readings]
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‘Arabs’ and ‘Mohammedans’ of East African Slave trade:

- few ‘Arab’ at all

- sons of ‘Arab’ fathers, African mothers

- or of Swahili (coastal Muslim) fathers, extensive ‘mixed’ families

- Omani connection strongest after 1840: Omani Sultan moved capital to Zanzibar
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Should ‘new immigrants’ to East, Central Africa be considered ‘Arabs’?

- multiple sectors of society were Muslim with different origins, different politics

- many were economic competitors (eg. Mirambo and the ‘Swahili-Omani’ town of Tabora)

Characterization of slave trade created an ‘Oriental Arab’ in East Africa whose identity was as shifting as it was imagined!
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‘Arabs’ and ‘Mohammedans’ of West African and Saharan Slave trade:

19th century, three *jihad* leaders responsible for most Saharan slave trade:

- Uthman dan Fodio (*Sokoto Caliphate – Case Study, Oct. 15-19*)
- Al-Hajj Umar (*Middle Niger ‘Umarian Empire’*)
- Almamy Samori (Samory) Toure (*jihad Upper Niger, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea*)
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As in East Africa:

- these men were Muslim
- they were involved in slavery and the slave trades

*But they were in no way ‘Arab’!*
Uthman dan Fodio (1754-1817)

Uthman Dan Fodio:
led Jihad that created
Sokoto Caliphate

Contributed 1000s
Slaves to Trans-Saharan Slave Trade
Almamy Samori Toure (1830-1900)

Major Source of Slaves into Sahara

Captured by the French, 1890
(below)

Area of Samori’s Empire
Depiction of Capture of Samori in Colonial French Publication

(compare with Photo, Previous slide)
Al-Hajj Umar (1796-1864)
Al-Hajj Umar (1796-1864)

Al Hajj Umar’s Empire ‘Tukolor Empire’
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“This illustration of the cruelties and hardships of the slave trade within Africa now gave European abolitionists an image which drew them into the African continent as none had had before”

[Patrick Manning, Slavery and African Life, p. 158 – echoes Robinson]
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Little matter that the images were indeed *imagined*, or that these ‘Arab’ traders were not ‘Arabs’ at all.

Images attached ominous ‘Mohammedan Arabs’ to a romanticized ‘Africa’, to the cruel slave trade, and to the suffering, pitiful female and child slaves.

Images gave Abolitionist and Orientalist discourse the substance its nineteenth-century audience sought.
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Typical Images of the ‘Arab’ Slave Trade – situated in imagination, not place!