General introduction

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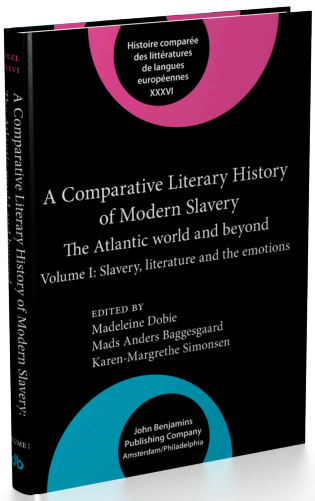

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General introduction

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> My Eboe name was Akeiso, the loss of which soon put an end to all recollections of my people — another name — a strange language, and a new master, confused my mind, and while ignorance of each made my labour more troublesome, yet the dread of punishment compelled me to work. (Browne and Sweet 2016, 216)

These words conclude a fragment of the narrative of the enslaved woman Florence Hall or Akeiso, presumably written in the early nineteenth century, found in the papers of the Jamaican planter Robert Johnston. In four short handwritten pages, the fragment tells a well-known but devastating story, comprising descriptions of Akeiso's childhood in Africa, her abduction, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and her arrival in the colonies of the new world. The text, known for decades, has been brought to renewed attention through the work of Nicole N. Aljoe, who advocates reading fragments such as this alongside longer and perhaps more well-known accounts of slavery in the Atlantic world in order to "address the long history of archival erasure by embracing the inherent multivocality of the accounts within [the archives of colonial slavery]." (N.N. Aljoe 2020, 626). This fragmentary document and others like it raise several central questions about the relationship between slavery and literature. The idea of literature is connected to the contemplation of polished works of art, complete in form and purpose. Though the colonial archive is vast and filled with documentation of the lives of enslaved people as property, as workforce, and as objects of exploitation, novels, plays and poems about the lived experience of slavery are much less abundant. Sparser still are first-person narratives that impart the feelings and embodied knowledge of enslaved people. This absence of the voices of the enslaved is at the center of these three volumes devoted to the historical relationship between slavery and literature. The contributions explore different critical approaches to reading against the grain and on the fringes of the archive to find voices surviving despite the under domination.

They also explore the capacity of literature to counter silences. Consider, for example, the Introduction to Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, which repeatedly enjoins the reader to imagine the most unthinkable forms of physical and mental suffering:

> Imagine two hundred human beings crammed into a space barely capable of containing a third of them. Imagine vomit, naked flesh, swarming lice, the dead slumped, the dying crouched. Imagine, if you can, the swirling red of mounting to the deck, the ramp they climbed, the black sun on the horizon, vertigo, this dizzying sky plastered to the waves. (Glissant 2010, 5-6)

In Glissant's account, the hold of the slave ship becomes the unknowable starting point for Caribbean culture – not only an abyss, but the *womb/abyss* that delivers a new culture based on the experience of slavery recreated through the powers of the imagination. As Glissant puts it in Manthia Diawara's documentary, *One World in Relation*: "On the slave ship we lost our languages, our gods, all familiar objects, songs, everything. We lost everything. All we had left was traces. That's why I believe that our literature is a literature of traces" (Diawara 2018, 27).

For Glissant, the Middle Passage is both an atrocity and the rupture that founded transatlantic black culture. It is also, in a broader sense, the experience of modernity. The experience of modernity. Building on the ideas of earlier black thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Aimé Césaire, he holds the disconnection from home experienced by the enslaved and their descendants to be paradigmatic of the fragmentations and displacements of the modern world. Slavery's close relationship to the development of capitalism and globalization makes it an integral, though still underestimated dimension of modern history (Baucom 2005; Williams 1944). Literature has been a crucial medium for processing this history, cultivating memory and demanding a public reckoning with this largely repressed past. Acting as one of the anchors of Atlantic world culture, it has been a bridge between past and present, harnessing loss of recollection to the recollection of loss.

This three-volume comparative literary history of modern slavery in and beyond the Atlantic world approaches the relationship between literature and slavery through a set of questions: What is the relationship between literature and the erasure of the voices of enslaved people during the more than 400-year history of modern slavery? How and to what extent has literary imagination, on all shores of the Atlantic, documented and compensated for this loss by describing a past that is both repressed and resistant to the imagination? To what extent does the archive of slavery require us to rethink the parameters of the literary? And how have perspectives, genres, rhetoric and modes of representation shifted over time? These volumes explore these and other questions, using a comparative a framework to bring into relation works from the fifteenth century to the present representing many of the geographical sites and contexts of modern slavery. 'Modern' forms of slavery are here understood as those that existed within the ambit of European colonialism with a main emphasis on the transatlantic slave trade, but with an outlook to different forms of slavery in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere as they relate to this central dimension of modern world history. The contributions approach slavery, not as an isolated phenomenon and object of representation, but rather as embedded in and generative of new forms of knowledge and culture.

Compiling a comparative literary history of modern slavery is inherently complex. Distributed across centuries and continents, the textual traces of slavery challenge fundamental building stones of the project of literary history, starting with the very concepts of history and literature. Though slavery was a major force in the shaping of the modern world, until relatively recently it has been a marginal, even repressed topic of both historical narrative and literary representation. A corpus of canonical or sub-canonical literary works that explore the horrors of slavery in most world contexts, predominantly authored by white authors and often stemming from the international movement for abolition exists, but it is surprisingly small. Even

more limited is the corpus of first-person narratives by enslaved or formerly enslaved people such as Olaudah Equiano, Juan Francisco Manzano, Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass. Because enslaved people were for the most part deprived of the means to express themselves in, many national/linguistic contexts lack even a single sustained narrative by an enslaved or formerly enslaved person. As Deborah Jenson and other scholars have argued, engaging with the cultural history of slavery means looking beyond published works to fragmentary testimonies such as those of Akeiso, as well as to the writings of slave owners and traders and colonial officials (Jenson 2011).

In these volumes, the concept of literature is thus understood in a broad sense to encompass not only theater, the novel and poetry but also autobiographical writing and paraliterary forms such as travel writing, orations and prayers. A few chapters devoted to non-textual artistic genres such as dance and music and to aspects of visual and material culture ranging from portraiture to clothing, hair and body culture are also included. This expansion beyond the traditional objects of literary history is important if we hope to reach toward the perspectives of people whose voices were largely silenced but whose labor, agency and creativity have left significant traces in material culture and cultural practices. However, to maintain consistency with the literary focus of this project, these diverse cultural objects are approached with a particular attentiveness to the modalities of representation and the specificity of form.

The contributions engage both with works written contemporaneously with the situations they depict and with those composed long after the fact. This vibrant and growing literary corpus addresses questions and imagines perspectives that are largely absent from archival records and dominant historical narratives and seeks to repair broken chains of transmission, whether through the medium of fiction or by means of what Saidiya Hartman calls 'critical fabulation,' i.e. the practice of supplementing of the fragmentary and marginal presence of enslaved people in archival records through the imaginative (re)construction of their identities and lives (Hartman 2008, 11).

Finally, the contributions reflect on the ways in which slavery and enslaved people are portrayed. Individually and collectively, they highlight the recurrence of certain themes, figures, and topoi as well as differences how various genres or modes (e.g. sentimentalism, tragedy, testimony, memoir, songs) approach slavery. Some track the circulation of racial tropes and topoi beyond individual texts and forms and across different modes of representation (Daut 2016). Others read against the textual grain, drawing attention to silences and oblique or displaced representations (Dobie 2010); (Sala-Molins 2006).

Slavery, literary history and the question of genre

The literary history of modern world slavery in the long period from the mid fifteenth century to the present comprises a huge diversity of forms and genres as well as shifting conceptual and political approaches to social hierarchy and to the discourses and practices of race. Some of the earliest European literary works devoted to slavery are tragicomic honor plays (Lope de Vega), picaresque novels (Cervantes), fictional travel narratives (Scudéry), romances (Aphra

Behn), and tragedies (Shakespeare). These representations were shaped by and themselves contributed to late-medieval and Renaissance concepts of servitude and race. In this early period, when Europeans were beginning to encounter the peoples of the Americas and parts of Africa previously unknown to them, different historical models and cultural representations of slavery merged awith each other. As Urvashi Chakravarty argues, in the English Renaissance, perceptions of slavery were informed both by encounters with captivity in the Mediterranean world and by the performance of comedies by Terence and Plautus in the English grammar schools (Chakravarty 2022, 3, 45). In this period, as feudal serfdom began to disappear from Europe, the enslavement of Africans became increasingly prevalent and the Spanish word *negro* and its cognates in French and other languages gradually came to be synonymous with servitude (Méndez Rodríguez 2010, 110); (Delesalle and Valensi, 1972). But representations of slavery from this period also manifest forms of orientalism that bear witness both to a fascination and an estrangement of the Muslim/African other (Dobie 2010; Wikstrøm in this volume).

Early modern literary texts depict Africans in diverse ways, sometimes featuring them as honorable and brave, but more often as dehumanized, inferior beings who could be enslaved but who could also be dangerous. The ambiguous portrait of the sometimes dignified, but potentially beastly and dangerous enslaved person runs as a thread through works of this period, from Lope de Vega's bitter portrait in his epic poem *La Dragontea* (1598) of savage, run-away slaves (*cimarrónes*) who have joined the British enemy and destroyed Spanish ships (Sanchez Jimenez 2007, 118) to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–11), in which the figure of Caliban, a monstrous, degraded figure has been as an embodiment of the hatred of a slave who dreams of killing his master (Cohen 2016, 45–46), to finally Aphra Behn's tragic romance *Oroonoko* (1688), in which the protagonist is depicted as an admirable, honorable African prince who, after being forced into slavery in America, turns into a dangerous and threatening force of destruction.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the high point of the Atlantic slave trade and the era that saw the rise of the international abolitionist movement, the number of literary works about slavery increased dramatically. Anti-slavery and abolitionist sentiments were expressed in forms ranging from parliamentary debates and speeches to novels, short stories and plays. The prose fiction and drama of this period, for example Olympe de Gouges's *Zamore et Mirza ou l'Heureux Naufrage* (*Zamore and Mirza; Or, The Happy Shipwreck*) (1784), Mary Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) combined, in different proportions, sentimentality, melodrama and the realism born of advocating for a specific historical cause. Some aesthetic modes crossed political boundaries, translating both pro- and anti-slavery viewpoints. Both before, and especially after the revolution in Haiti (1791), pro-slavery writers used Gothic tropes to depict the horrors of black resistance, using a racist vocabulary to depict the savage black avenger. On the other hand, gothic rhetoric was used by anti-slavery writers to depict the horrors of human bondage. Formerly enslaved Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797) famously depicts the slave ship as a gothic space, inhabited by "bad spirits" and horror-inducing white cannibals.

And a century later Antonio Frederico de Castro Alves evoked the horrors of the Middle Passage in his poem "O Navio Negreiro" (1869) as a plea for the abolition of slavery in Brazil.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789) is the most famous example of another development of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century: the coming to writing of formerly enslaved people who presented their case through letters, journalism and autobiographical texts that have been labeled collectively as 'slave narratives.' These works documented the brutality of slavery in often graphic ways (Olney 1984). Some, e.g. the narratives of Equiano, Francisco Manzano and Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), were highly eloquent, and came to be seen as the starting point of a Black literary culture (Blumenthal 2013). The labeling of these texts as 'slave narratives' has perhaps masked their formal diversity. As Philip Gould has argued, the generic field of the slave narrative in the eighteenth century included "spiritual autobiography, the conversion narrative, the providential tale, criminal confession, Indian captivity narrative, sea adventure story, and the picaresque novel" (Gould 2007, 2).

Slavery and the slave trade were international phenomena, and tropes associated with slavery correspondingly traveled across borders, becoming features of a transatlantic print culture. Marlene Daut distinguishes four principal transnational tropes that circulated in the wake of the Haitian Revolution: the racialized monstrous hybrid (often a threatening avenger); the tropical temptress; the tragic mulatto/a, and the colored historian. This last trope, perhaps the least obvious, denotes the "putatively inherent desire for "mulattoes" and "negroes" to dominate one another, not only physically, but politically and discursively as well" (Daut 2016, 6). As Daut's work helps to clarify, literary and broader cultural tropes relating to slavery and race were thoroughly intertwined. Literature draws upon stereotypical, racialized images of black people, sometimes to reproduce and reinforce them, and at other times to challenge their logic and explore their impact. Ezra Tawil has indeed argued that late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, "American culture might have assigned some of the task of defining race to historical fiction" (Tawil 2006, 14). What makes literature in all its many forms a privileged discourse for the study of the social imaginary of slavery is that it explores how race and racism are imprinted and felt on bodies and minds.

In the twentieth century, writers from all shores of the Atlantic rim have returned to the subject of slavery, exploring its shaping role in national and regional histories, and its afterlives in structural racism, anticolonial and antiracist political movements, and in the expressive cultures of the Black Atlantic. The Martinican Aimé Césaire, the Cuban, and others with them emphasized the need to counter dominant framings of slavery as a prerequisite for the development of political and poetic independence. Linking political decolonization to the decolonization of history, writers across the globe have tried to imagine the point of view of the enslaved as a way to counteract their erasure in mainstream historical narratives, both national and global. The publication of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) marks something of a watershed after which narrative fiction about slavery proliferated (Saal and Ashe 2020, 3). This substantial corpus, which includes but is certainly not limited to first-person narratives that are sometimes labeled as 'neo-slave narratives,' is transnational in scope, with contributions by writers from all over the world and Atlantic-rim continents in particular. Maryse Condé, Caryl Phillips, Octavia E. Butler, Col-

son Whitehead, Yaa Gyasi, Fred d'Aquiar, M. NourbeSe Philip, José Lins do Rego, Ana Teresa Torres, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Manu Herbstein are just a few of the writers who have written fictional and non-fiction works that center on slavery while experimenting with form and genre. As these examples illustrate, particularly in the wake of *Beloved*, slavery has been approached through a reinvention of narrative forms. Rejecting the constraints of realism, writers have deployed the experimental resources of literature in their approach to this topic. For similar reasons, academic engagement with this field has also embraced forms of writing that blur the line between literature and scholarship or adopt a situated personal relation to the history of slavery as the vantage point. Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001) and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* (2007) are among the influential examples of these practices.

Experiments with genre and form are closely articulated with the question of voice. Behind textual accounts of slavery are large repositories of oral culture that harbor an alternative archive of events. Literature is in constant dialogue with the oral transmission of the memory of slavery, and the boundaries between poetry, song and spoken word traditions are often fluid, as represented by the work and adaptation of poets such as the Cuban Nicolás Guillén, the Haitian Frankétienne and the Ghanaian Kofi Anyidoho. Far from being simply or predominantly a European or North-American phenomenon, the literary exploration of the history and memory of slavery is a global project inflected by local themes, questions and cultural traditions. It is a site of hybrid and transnational forms of expression, perhaps especially in the Caribbean, where creole languages and the idea of creolization have been shaping forces of literary depictions of slavery (N. Aljoe 2012).

Comparative methodology and historiographical challenges

The three volumes of this *Comparative Literary History of Modern Slavery* embrace the principle of comparative research that questions the limits of nationally-focused history and literary history. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes, "We gain greater knowledge of the nation, the state, the tribe, modernity or globalization itself, when we approach them as sets of relations and processes rather than as ahistorical essences" (Trouillot 2003, 5). The history of slavery in particular, as a transregional, multi-secular phenomenon, calls for a relational approach.

Yet the history of slavery has often been told as a national, colonial or imperial story. As Pieter Emmer, J.H. Elliott and others note, there has been a strong tendency towards national compartmentalization, especially in the case of the major imperial powers (Emmer 2011, 452–53); (Elliott 2002, 234–35, 239). The focus in historical and literary scholarship on specific nations and their empires represents, at least to some extent, a prolongation of imperial ideology since, as Homi Bhabha argues, it is central to the ideology of imperialism that there is "a global link between colony and metropolis" (Bhabha 2004, 304). While postcolonial studies, broadly defined, have advocated for the decentralization of knowledge away from Europe (Bhabha 2004, 126), the emphasis remains primarily on the asymmetrical relation between the 'metropole' and its former colonial subjects.

Comparative and transcultural (literary/cultural) histories are, however, beginning to dismantle this framing. They build on previous scholarship by W. E. B. Du Bois, whose *The Negro* (1915) was one of the first attempts at a cross-Atlantic cultural and racial history, Frantz Fanon, who in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) examined the sociological and psychological effects of colonialism and racism and called for a sweeping decolonization (Fanon 2004), and Paul Gilroy, who outlined the contours of the *Black Atlantic* (1993), integrating Africa and the African diasporas of Europe and the Americas into the narrative of Western modernity (Gilroy 1993). Since the publication of Gilroy's influential book, the interest in investigating cultural, economic and political relations among the four continents that surround the Atlantic has grown, leading David Armitage to pronounce in 2002 that "We are all Atlanticists now" (Armitage and Braddick 2002, 11). Though this claim was perhaps exaggerated, numerous important cross-continental, comparative historical studies have since then been devoted to the processes, goods and people that traversed national or imperial borders or have examined similarities and differences among various colonial contexts. Examples include the multivolume *Cambridge World History of Slavery* series (2011–2021) and works by historians including Robin Blackburn (Blackburn 2010), David Eltis, Frank D. Lewis and Kenneth L. Sokoloff (Eltis, Lewis, and Sokoloff 2004). Alongside these macro-histories of the Atlantic world, micro-histories have played an important role, making transregional processes and connections legible on the level of individual lives. Recent studies have followed family histories across several generations and continents, tracing webs of personal connection that span the Atlantic ocean (Scott and Hébrard 2012). Transcontinental histories of slavery and race have contributed to the project of building a shared sense of black heritage and identity, as the case of Du Bois illustrates. But this exploration of the unifying features of the Black Atlantic is complemented by work that highlights the heterogeneity of this space, described by Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi in *Recharting the Black Atlantic* (2008) as "a network of discrete but related, and inherently polymorphous, socio-political contact zones" (Oboe and Scacchi 2008, 2).

While African scholarship on the history of the slave trade was relatively slow to develop (Akyeampong 2001), (Keren 2009), in recent years, the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on the African continent has become a topic of increasing interest (Murphy 2012). New African perspectives on slavery and colonialism have developed in critical conversation with European and North-American approaches (Lovejoy, 2000); (Lauer and Anyidoho 2012), complemented by work on intra-African traditions and domestic forms of slavery (Saboro 2022).

In literary studies, comparison has been both an aspiration and an intellectual problem. While many scholars find the national framing of literary history to be limiting and often arbitrary, the worlding of literary studies poses numerous challenges, beginning with the limitations of our individual linguistic competencies. Emily Apter has characterized comparative literature as a 'translation zone,' arguing that comparison and translation are mutually dependent and subject to the same material limits (Apter 2006). These limits are particularly significant in the case of slavery, whose archive includes a large proportion of untranslated documents. A related issue is the phenomenon of 'untranslatables,' i.e. the question of what to do with terms and concepts that are central to the cultural and political life of one national/

regional/religious setting but aren't easily rendered meaningful in others (Cassin 2014). This dilemma becomes particularly acute in the case of concepts bearing on race since cognate terms of racial identification carry different connotations in different regional contexts and at distinct historical moments. Finally, while comparison cultivates openness to diversity, it is inevitably marked by relations of power and the asymmetrical distribution of academic resources. It is also almost impossible to avoid carrying the norms of one's own milieu into the examination of other contexts, as Radhakrishnan, Spivak and others have argued (Radhakrishnan 2009); (Spivak 2009). Slavery is a difficult topic, a violent history in which many voices have been muted, and whose afterlives have been equally conflictual. Given this, attention to the risks entailed in generalizing local categories and ideological norms is particularly necessary.

A Comparative Literary History of Modern Slavery. The Atlantic World and Beyond does not propose a general theory of literary comparison or seek to address problems identified by previous scholarship on comparative and world literature in a systematic fashion. Its strongest methodological affinity is perhaps with what Susan Stanford Friedman has called "juxtapositional comparison" (Friedman 2013, 40–41). By bringing together scholarship on related questions and themes but about different regions and historical moments and by researchers who are working in different national, linguistic and institutional contexts, it reveals similarities and differences without attempting to shoe-horn them into a single analytical framework. Through this approach, it takes to heart Friedman's warning about "the categorical violence of comparison within the framework of dominance" (Friedman 2013, 40).

Rather than attempting to solve the question of how to write a literary history of slavery or providing a comprehensive overview of the development of literary engagements with slavery, these volumes present diverse viewpoints on literary history and comparative method and create space for new critical connections across historical periods, regions and languages. While many historical and literary studies have focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the peak period of the slave trade and the era of abolition, *A Comparative Literary History of Modern Slavery* opens up the history of slavery at both ends, exploring also the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the afterlives and memory of slavery in the twentieth and twenty-first.

Collectively, the volumes explore literature and slavery across a vast range of historical, geographic and linguistic contexts, examine diverse objects of study, and deploy methodological perspectives that range from literary analysis to history, art history, cultural studies and musicology. They include chapters pertaining to most of the European powers engaged in the slave trade, including both large and minor slave-holding nations (Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Germany), and bearing on all corners of their empires in North and South America, and the Caribbean. They also include studies on slavery and literature in West Africa and South Africa, and the Mediterranean world. As noted above, many of the chapters trace connections among these different sites. Their temporal horizon stretches from the first moments of the Atlantic slave trade to the present. The set of texts and objects that are examined is thoroughly heterogeneous, including texts written in languages ranging from English to Spanish, Portuguese, French, Danish, German, and Dutch, and it encompasses an enormous range of forms and genres. Comparisons are made both within

and between chapters, both explicitly and as a function of juxtaposition. These include comparisons among different national and imperial contexts, dominant and minor colonial powers, different forms of slavery (domestic slavery, plantation slavery, indenture, captivity and ransom), and among different literary genres, modes and forms. Comparisons are, as such, made at many different levels, and are often oriented towards both theme and form. Collectively, the contributions map the contours of the imaginative history of slavery. They ask how literature represented and shaped the history of slavery and abolition, how it created a social imaginary of oppression and resistance, or inspired alternative or counterfactual ways of seeing, and how it today memorializes past slavery and reorients our historical understanding.

Pasts and presents

If all historical writing is informed and shaped by its own present, this is particularly true for the history of slavery. The origin stories of most of the nations of the Americas for a long time downplayed the role of slavery, along with the contributions of Afro-descendent people. In the European context, scholars including Louis Sala-Molins and Walter Mignolo have portrayed slavery as the repressed dark side of the Enlightenment and the idea of Western modernity (Sala-Molins 2006), (Mignolo 2011). Over the past few decades, however, slavery has been established as an important subject of academic study, a required and at times contested topic of secondary education, and a site of artistic representation and public commemoration. Scholars and activists have shown that current distributions of wealth and power are interwoven with the history of racial capitalism (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021). Some have adopted the language of 'abolition' to challenge regimes of policing, incarceration and other forms of coercion and injustice that have deep roots in the violent enforcement of slavery and segregation (Davis 2006). These shifts have been accompanied in the United States, France and Brazil, among other countries, by strenuous backlashes and the emergence of politicized forms of memory politics and historiographical debates. In the US, when the '1619 project,' a Pullitzer-Prize winning initiative sponsored by the *New York Times Magazine*, undertook to re-center slavery in the nation's history, it rapidly became a focus of political attacks, catalyzing a wider rejection of 'critical race theory,' i.e. the argument that racism in the United States is systemic and historically cumulative, with roots in the history of slavery.

The rise in the historical study of slavery has been interwoven with efforts of public commemoration as well as the expansion of the academic study of memory (Cottias 2021). As Ana Lucia Araujo demonstrates in *Slavery in the Age of Memory. Engaging the Past*, all three Atlantic-rim continents have seen a growing interest in the public memory of slavery (Araujo 2021). This trend is reflected in the proliferation of memorial sites (Bernier and Newman 2008), (Aje and Gachon 2021), (Holsey 2008), and museums that feature family artefacts, and in the explosion of genealogical and DNA research into family history by people seeking to retrace the origins and journeys of their ancestors. The focus on memory and inheritance has contributed to the vibrancy of slavery studies and their expansion beyond academic circles, but the strong connection between past and present has also factored into the intense politicization of

the history of slavery. As Wilhelmina J. Donkoh notes, different groups of people have come to see themselves, in one respect or another, as stakeholders in the history of slavery (Donkoh 2017, 190). The second volume in this series in particular references and analyzes memory studies and memory politics as an inescapable framework of scholarship.

Many contemporary scholars incorporate the inevitable influence of the present on the reconstruction of the past into their methodology. The historian Myriam Cottias, a contributor to Volume 1, argues, following Howard Zinn, that history "n'est pas seulement le passé mais beaucoup le présent, il ouvre une réflexion sur la sensibilisation des citoyens à l'injustice, ce qui peut, peut-être, les inciter à lutter contre elle" [is not only the past but also to a great extent the present, it opens up a reflection on how citizens become aware of injustice, which can, perhaps, incite them to fight against it] (Cottias and Diptée 2020, 5). Cottias also emphasizes the role of the imagination and artistic creation in combatting archival silences and locating sites of resistance within the colonial order: "Dans la sphère artistique…les possibilités de combler le silence des archives, d'imaginer le passé sont illimitées ; aussi est-il plus facile d'y trouver des éléments subversifs de l'ordre colonial" [In the artistic sphere… the possibilities for counteracting the silence of the archives and imagining the past are limitless; it's also easier to find there elements that subvert the colonial order] (Cottias and Diptée 2020, 2).

Structure

The textual residues of slavery are transregional and multilingual, distributed across four centuries, and marked by many silences. Many of the most compelling accounts of enslavement were written long after the fact. Given these characteristics, the present volumes do not aim for historical or regional coverage, but rather combine an historical with a topic-oriented approach. Each volume explores a single theme or set of questions, examined from a variety of perspectives by scholars working on different periods, regions and languages. Rather than effecting an historical synthesis, this juxtaposition reveals multiple overlapping literary-historical chronologies. The first volume is devoted to slavery, literature and the emotions. The second turns to the theme of personal and public memory, and the third examines slavery with regard to practices of authorship and literary culture. While these three broad thematic frameworks are by no means meant to encompass all dimensions of the literature of slavery, they accommodate a wide range of current scholarship.

Volume I examines affective responses to slavery across national, historical and linguistic contexts. It includes chapters on the sentimentality that has long been acknowledged as a central feature of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century abolitionism, but it also widens the aperture of enquiry to explore other emotional registers. How has literature approached the relation between slavery and fear, anger, love and even humor? The contributions to this volume consider the various kinds of work that emotions perform in texts about slavery. Historians of the emotions have asked, in different ways, whether emotions have a history (Reddy 2001). Taking a literary approach to this question, this volume asks which genres, tropes, and images have expressed and activated emotions in relation to slavery. Many contributions consider how emo-

tionality is related to personal life stories, family structures and issues such as gender and race. Others explore the distinction sometimes drawn between emotion and affect, particularly with regard to the representation of racialized identities.

Volume II focuses on the relationship between the history and historical representation of slavery and processes of personal and collective memory and memorialization. At different historical moments, and most particularly since the 1990s, slavery and its social and cultural legacies have been important subjects of commemoration, scholarship and artistic exploration, and sites of sometimes polarized public debate. The memory of slavery has also been shaped by processes of decolonization occurring on every continent. The volume considers how literature has intersected with these processes, exploring, for example, its contributions to the formation of social identities that are tied to the history of slavery. The contributors also ask who the subjects of the memory of slavery are, i.e. who narrates on behalf of whom and to what ends. The study of memory in contexts marked by violence has been dominated by the concept of trauma. Several contributions examine the ways in which literary texts explore or are shaped by modalities of traumatic experience such as delayed cognition and the compulsion to return to an inaccessible moment of shock and rupture.

Volume III considers slavery in connection with practices of authorship and sites of literary culture. It explores the different voices that we hear in discourses on slavery and the conditions of writing about this subject. The volume addresses the relative absence of the voices of enslaved people as fundamental condition for the literary study of slavery, but also surveys the materials that do exist, asking, for example, in what other kinds of texts (e.g. letters, legal and financial documents) enslaved people expressed themselves. Some contributors also ask how the formerly enslaved took up authorship as free colored writers, for example in newspapers, journals or other forms of expression, and how questions of authorship were tied to agency and political subjectivity. Agency is often equated with gaining a voice, but the volume also addresses uncredited or collective forms of authorship, including the use of anonymity and pseudonyms as ways of addressing a complex political situation. Several chapters address how literature was produced, circulated, read and discussed throughout the colonial system. This includes, for example, the existence of libraries in plantation colonies, or the uses of literature in schools and missions. Another important set of questions bears on translation, including the transfer of language, knowledge and stories from an African to a plantation context, or the movement of texts among different colonial systems. Finally, this volume includes studies of the afterlives of the translational processes in Creole literatures and transatlantic diasporas.

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The project builds on the foundations laid by several generations of scholars of slavery and its traces in personal and public memory and in literature and other forms of cultural expression and, more broadly, on previous exercises in comparative literary history. It is inspired by and indebted to ongoing conversations about race, racism and identity politics and recent decolonial studies of history and the arts. The editors thank the many colleagues whose work has served as a model and inspiration. We thank, more particularly, the members of the coordinating committee of CHLEL for their valuable feedback on the project, along with all of the contributors, researchers and translators who have been involved in this project in different ways since its inception in 2015. This includes all the participants in the workshops preparatory, the researchers affiliated to the Centre for the Study of the Literatures and Cultures at Aarhus University, as well as Myriam Cottias and fellow researchers connected to the CIRESC, and Shanny Peer and the faculty and staff affiliated with the Maison française of Columbia University. In connection with Volume Three, we thank our Ghanaian colleagues in the research project 'Authoring Slavery — Authorship and Agency in Narratives of Slavery,' supported by the Independent Research Fund Denmark. This includes Kofi Anyidoho and Helen Yitah at the University of Ghana, Legon, Emmanuel Saboro and the Centre for African and International Studies at the University of Cape Coast, and William Nsuiban Gmayi of the The Ghana Museums and Monuments Board. We would also like to thank Alex Balch and Charles Forsdick at the Centre for the Study of International Slavery in Liverpool for their contributions to a couple of very fruitful seminars in Aarhus and Liverpool that paved the way for these volumes. Finally, we would like again to acknowledge the Velux Foundation for their generous support of the project.

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