SOAS History Department, Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies, Centre for Media and Film Studies, Centre of African Studies, in cooperation with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, the European network of EURESCL: Slave Trade, Slavery, Abolition and their Legacies in European Histories and Identities (7th PCRD) and the CIRESC ‘Centre International de Recherches sur les Esclavages, Acteurs, Systèmes, Representations’

HISTORY ON FILM
SLAVERY & THE AFRICAN DIASPORA FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

30 January, 20 February and 27 February 2013

School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)
Khalili Lecture Theatre (Main Building, Basement)
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1 0XG

Our film series and panel discussions with the filmmakers propose to make visible people of African descent in India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Brazil, Benin and along the Swahili Coast in East Africa. By including films from the South Atlantic World, Indian Ocean World and Africa, we aim to throw light on the points of origin and destination of slaves. Rarely in the history of slavery has it been possible to correlate the trajectories of the home societies of slaves and the slave regime at the destination. Slavery has also been all too often studied in isolation from Africa. The focus has mainly been on the North Atlantic World. Indeed, the cultural dimension of Diasporas has long been observed in the North Atlantic World, but it has received only scant attention within the context of emancipated slave communities elsewhere.

By combining the two oceanic worlds, the films and the discussion panels aim at questioning these biases. They examine the processes of integration and assimilation in the different African Diasporas, and how these communities produced diasporic cultural spheres which today surely constitute memoryscapes of the history of slavery.

Organised by Dr Marie Rodet (SOAS), Dr Shihan de Silva (Institute of Commonwealth Studies), Dr Parvathi Raman (SOAS), Dr Dina Matar, (SOAS), Angelica Baschiera (SOAS).
DAY 1: Wednesday 30 January 2013: Silences & Taboos: Ethical Dilemmas in Making African Slavery Visible on Film (Khalili Lecture Theatre)

17:00-17:15: Introduction
Dr Marie Rodet (SOAS)
Dr Shihan de Silva (Institute of Commonwealth Studies)

17:15-17:45: Keynote: Professor William Gervase Clarence-Smith:
Global Slavery: Definitions and Debates

17:45-18:00: Discussion

18:00-18:30: Film: Yesterday’s Slaves: Democracy and Ethnicity in Benin by Eric Komlavi Hahonou & Camilla Strandsbjerg (2011, 29 minutes)

Having recently gained political status, the Gando people of Northern Benin still face political marginalisation and social stigma even in the town of Kalélé where they form the popular majority. The Gando are formed of former slaves and descendants of slaves, as well as children who are entered into servile fosterage due to communal suspicions linking certain birth defects to sorcery. By studying the Gando in Kalélé, this film encourages the reassessment of identity construction and analyses both the inclusive and exclusive nature of citizenship.

18:30-19:30: Discussion
Chair: William Gervase Clarence-Smith (SOAS)
Eric Komlavi Hahonou (Roskilde University)
Lotte Pelekmans (Leiden University)
Marie Rodet (SOAS)
DAY 2: Wednesday 20 February 2013: Memorialising African Slavery in Brazil on Film (Khalili Lecture Theatre)

17:00-17:15: Introduction

17:15-18:30: Film: A Present Past: Afro-Brazilian Memories in Rio de Janeiro by Hebe Mattos and Martha Abreu (2012, 43 minutes)

*A Present Past* highlights the strong oral tradition of slave descendants from the former plantations of the Souza Breves family, in the South of the State of Rio de Janeiro. It rescues vivid details about the illegal trade of slaves and the experiences of slaves and freed ancestors.

18:30-19:00: Film: Ebony Goddess: Queen of Ilê Aiyê by Carolina Moraes-Liu (2012, 20 minutes)

*Ebony Goddess: Queen of Ilê Aiyê* follows three women competing to be the carnival queen of Ilê Aiyê, a prominent and controversial Afro-Brazilian group with an all-black membership. The selection is based on Afro-centric notions of beauty, in counterpoint to prevailing standards of beauty in Brazil, a country famous for slim supermodels and plastic surgery. Contestants for the title of Ebony Goddess dress in flowing African-style garments, gracefully performing traditional Afro-Brazilian dances to songs praising the beauty of black women.

19:00-20:00: Discussion

Chair: Shihan de Silva (Institute of Commonwealth Studies)
Hebe Mattos (University Federal Fluminense/Brazil)
Camillia Cowling (University of Edinburgh)
Matthias Röhrig Assunção (University of Essex)
DAY 3: Wednesday 27 February 2013: Transmission of Cultural Heritage of Slavery in the Indian Ocean on Film (Khalili Lecture Theatre)

17:00-17:15: Introduction

17:15-17:45: Film: A Hidden Guarantee: Identity and Gule Wankulu between Mozambique and Somalia by Francesca Declich (2008, 17 min)

Gule Wankulu is an African Masquerade danced from Mozambique to Somalia. Francesca Declich films here how this ritual dance continued to be practised by descendants of slaves in Somalia until the 1990s. It helped them to maintain their own heritage and to alleviate their uprooting. It was mostly danced within secret societies and in some specific cases even allowed some slaves to run away.

17:45-18:45: Film: Sidis of Gujarat: Maintaining Traditions and Building Community by Beheroze Shroff (2010, 53 minutes)

The traditions of the Sidis (Afro-Indians) of Gujarat in North India: annual urs celebration to consecrate the sacred stream at the shrine of the Sidi Saint, Bava Gor, Khichdi (rice) ceremony to Mai Mishra (sister of Bava Gor), Balka ceremony (where Sidi men & women are initiated as Fakirs) and goma dance (both as spectacle and as sacred ritual), are captured in the film. Along with the celebration and festivities, Sidis voice their concerns as they struggle to maintain their traditions and also earn a livelihood with dignity.

18:45-19:00: Film: Maldives: African Migration and Bodu Beru (Big Drums) (5 minutes) introduced by Shihan de Silva

This film shows the musical traditions that were introduced to the Maldives by African migrants. Bodu Beru (meaning big drums) has now become a popular form of music and tourist attraction in the Maldives.

Film: Sri Lanka: Afro-Sri Lankans and their musical traditions (5 minutes) introduced by Shihan de Silva

In this film, members of the largest Afro-Sri Lankan community are playing manhas and singing in creolised Portuguese, the language of trade and commerce for three hundred and fifty years on the island. Their unchoreographed dancing connects them to Africa, an imagined homeland.

19:00-20:00: Discussion

Chair: Marie Rodet (SOAS)
Francesca Declich (University Urbino)
Beheroze Shroff (University of California, Irvine)
Shihan de Silva (Institute of Commonwealth Studies)