

--Conference / Call for Papers--

Entangled Histories: Slavery and Its Legacies in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern Worlds

Organizers:

Dr. Behnaz Mirzai, Professor of Middle Eastern History at Brock University, Canada

Dr. Eckart Woertz, Director of the GIGA Institute for Middle East Studies, Germany, and Professor of Contemporary History and Politics of the Middle East at the University of Hamburg

Keynote Speaker:

Dr. Bonny Ibhawoh, McMaster University, Canada, Expert-Rapporteur, United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development, UN-OHCHR Project Director, [Participedia](#)

A two-day multidisciplinary conference titled “Entangled Histories: Slavery and Its Legacies in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern Worlds” will be held on July 16–17, 2026 at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) and the University of Hamburg in collaboration with Brock University, Canada. It will explore the complex economic, political, and cultural relations of communities in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Middle East regions against the backdrop of the slave routes that once led through their territories. Methodologically, it aligns with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) [Slave Route Project](#) that explores the impact of the forced migration of enslaved people throughout the modern world and its lasting significance today. The conference will bring together scholars and policymakers to address various topics related to comparative slavery in these regions.

Nineteenth-century colonial policies not only changed international boundaries but also patterns of settlement and identity, namely by modifying existing economic, social, cultural, and ideological systems throughout the examined regions. The slave trade led to the establishment of diasporic communities in the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and Middle East; this caused numerous incidents of political and economic instability, leaving a legacy of social stratification, cultural stereotypes, and discriminatory practices. The conference aims to foster a deeper understanding of the social, religious, economic, and historical dimensions of the trade in regions where military, female, and domestic slavery were dominant, as compared to the transatlantic slave trade’s more prevalent orientation toward the plantation. Other topics dealt with will include the “Islamic factor” in the slave trade, revealing its complexity in the modern era. Among key aspects here is the phenomenon of Muslims featuring alongside other enslaved communities, which should interest policymakers and scholars well beyond Islamic Studies, Area Studies, and disciplinary fields of study. This unique forum will offer an opportunity for scholars and policymakers to discuss commonalities and differences between the trans-Saharan, Indian Ocean, and Middle Eastern slave trades.

The dispersal of enslaved people's descendants globally and the perpetuation of stereotypes and social practices related to slavery highlight the importance of comparative approaches to the study of it. Promoting recognition, justice, development, and the human rights of descendants and appreciating their cultural contributions and economic exploitation will strengthen efforts to achieve greater equality and democracy at a universal level. The need to recognize the ethnic diversity to be found in the examined regions has drawn the attention of political and social scientists, historians, as well as anthropologists. Interdisciplinary in nature, the conference will go beyond regional studies of ethnicity and identity by including Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the Middle East, offering a comparative approach to systems of slavery and proffering new research methodologies hereon.

Papers on the following general themes will be considered:

- Slavery memorialization and commemoration
- Slavery, abolition, and liberation
- Islamic law and slavery
- Colonialism, slavery, and legacy
- Slavery, racism, and discrimination
- Slavery, justice, and human rights
- Slavery, culture, and arts
- Slavery and economics
- Post-emancipation and integration/assimilation
- Master-slave relations

Presented papers will be published in a special issue of an academic journal or edited volume. Proposals will be reviewed by the committee and, if accepted, the travel costs (air ticket and accommodation) of each participant covered. Please submit a proposal (350 words) and a brief CV with relevant publications to Dr. Behnaz Mirzai: bmirzai@brocku.ca. The deadline for submissions is September 30, 2025.