

The Experience of Enslavement:

Embodiment and Positionality in Comparative Perspective

Benedetta Rossi

University College London

What are the promises and pitfalls of a comparative approach when focusing on the experiences of enslaved persons? What does comparing individual experiences entail, methodologically? Individual biographies can be seen as less amenable to comparison than institutions. It is not only that each person's experiences are unique, but also that experience is shaped by culture and language. It is often argued that historians of slavery should try to include the "voices" of enslaved persons in their sources. But disembodied "voices" in translation are not very informative. People's (perceived) options and choices are shaped by the type of body they have; by their ideas and worldviews; and by the meanings attributed to their ideas and bodies by those around them (who may well speak different languages than those enslaved). This seminar considers what is comparable and generalizable in the individual journeys of enslaved persons, and how historians can study enslavement as lived experience.

Discussant: **Minu Haschemi Yekani** | Freie Universität Berlin

February 23, 2022, 5-7 PM CET

Online Lecture + Discussion via Webex
Please register for the event: r.pfaff@fu-berlin.de