

A HISTORY OF SLAVERY, RACE, AND ISLAM IN THE EYES OF CHOUKI EL HAMEL¹

CHOUKİ EL HAMEL'İN GÖZÜNDEN KÖLELİK, İRK VE İSLAM TARİHİ

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Melek EYİGÜN

Dr., T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Milli Saraylar Başkanlığı, eyigunmelek@gmail.com,

ORCID: 0000-0001-8968-7600

Abstract

"Black Morocco", written by Professor Chouki El Hamel, sheds light on the history of slavery in North Africa. It describes the enslavement of blacks, their integration into the political system in the name of Islam, and the role of male and female slaves in Moroccan history, with an emphasis on the period of Ismail Mawlay (1672-1727). The book deals with the history of slavery and racism in Morocco, which is at the centre of the intra-African enslavement policy between the north and west of the African continent, through the relations of religion, tradition and politics. The book analyses the issue of slavery within the specific political and social structure of the continent.

While "Black Morocco" reveals the reflections of a human tragedy that is thought to be a thing of the past in today's world, it also draws attention to the approach of religious scholars to slavery, race and gender issues from past to present.

The book shows that the struggle for survival of peoples whose rights to life have been restricted and who have been uprooted from their social identities can be a way and a procedure to uncover the cultural codes in their memory in order to rebuild themselves.

Keywords: North Africa, race, slave, gender, Morocco.

Öz

Profesör Chouki El Hamel tarafından kaleme alınan "Siyah Fas", Kuzey Afrika'daki kölelik tarihine ışık tutuyor. Siyahların köleleştirilmesini, İslam adına siyasi sisteme entegre edilmelerini ve kadın kölelerin Fas tarihindeki rolünü İsmail Mevlay (1672-1727) dönemine vurgu yaparak anlatıyor. Kitap, Afrika kıtasının kuzeyi ile batısı arasındaki Afrika içi köleleştirme politikasının merkezinde yer alan Fas'taki kölelik ve ırkçılık tarihini din, gelenek ve siyaset ilişkileri üzerinden ele alıyor. Kitap, kölelik meselesini kıtanın kendine özgü siyasi ve toplumsal yapısı içinde analiz ediyor.

"Siyah Fas", günümüz dünyasında geçmişte kaldığı düşünülen bir insanlık trajedisinin yansımalarını ortaya koyarken, geçmişten günümüze din âlimlerinin kölelik, ırk ve toplumsal cinsiyet konularına yaklaşımına da dikkat çekiyor.

Kitap, yaşam hakları kısıtlanan ve toplumsal kimliklerinden koparılan halkların hayatta kalma mücadelesinin, kendilerini yeniden inşa etmek için belleklerdeki kültürel kodları ortaya çıkarmanın bir yolu ve yordamı olabileceğini gösteriyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kuzey Afrika, ırk, köle, cinsiyet, Fas.

"Black Morocco" is a study that reveals the historical course of slavery, race and gender issues in North Africa in the context of the relationship between religion and politics. It traces the transmission of the subconscious from the past to the present. The study aims to reveal the silenced history of North African

¹ Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 354 p.

slavery, and endeavors to reveal the demand for truth and justice of the living memory outside the official memory constructed by the power within the scope of remembering and forgetting. The author reflects his professional ethical concerns throughout the work by going beyond the historiography constructed in accordance with the modernity's understanding of history. Accordingly, he opens historical facts to discussion in the context of confronting the past and tries to present the necessity of this without pragmatic political concerns and free from prejudices.

In the introduction to the book, El Hamel presents his reasons for tackling the subject within the framework of humanitarian and emotional reasons, which not only arouses academic curiosity in the minds of the readers, but also encourages them to question human conscience and moral norms. Through a little slave girl he encounters in the house of a scholar in Mauritania, the author presents his thesis that slavery is rare but its effects are profound with the sincere warmth of a narrative beginning. He takes the reader on a journey from the footsteps of the present to the past. Thus, he increases the credibility of his thesis by establishing a logical relationship between the reliability of the source and all the data of scientific research methods.

In the first part, the author prepares the theoretical background of the subject by giving a general information about the concept of slavery before Islam and the provisions and practices related to slavery in the oldest known legal texts. He takes the Qur'an, the main text of Islam, followed by the Hadiths and the early tafsir corpus as primary sources. He states that the Qur'an and Hadiths contain provisions that create the ground for the abolition of racism, slavery and concubinage over time. He interprets the views of Islamic jurists and sectarian leaders from different periods on the subject. He then explains how the power structures that fed on these sources brought slavery, racism and concubinage to life in North Africa. He draws on a rich literature from Morocco's official state archive, local and foreign sources, travelogues and other secondary works. In order to challenge the traditional historiography of slavery in Islamic and Moroccan societies, which classifies blacks according to their genetic and physical characteristics, he sheds light on Islamic sources based on the chronological and epistemological framework and the methodology of Islamic sciences.

The book conceptually examines the religious and etymological origins of the words "race" and "slave", and questioned how they have been discussed in the historical process and in different understandings. One of the author's main arguments is that Islamic law, which claims that men have rights over the sexuality of female slaves, contradicts the Qur'anic verses on this subject. In this regard, each word in the verse is analyzed individually and a linguistic/semantic analysis is made.

While the author includes the views of Sunni teachings on slavery and the views of different sects in the early period of Islam, he also shares the views of heterodox religious sects. El Hamel's example of anti-slavery movements from Islamic history is the Kharijites, one of the generally accepted sects outside the orthodox understanding of Islam, known for their harsh interpretation of Islam and the extremism of their beliefs. He noted that the Kharijites, the first political-religious sect to emerge in the seventh century, were probably the first group to insist on the principle of social justice in the name of Islam. The author, who does not hesitate to instrumentalize different views to support his ideas in line with pragmatic goals, presents slavery in the context of racism from a broad perspective within the framework of all schools and belief groups in Islamic history.

El Hamel dates the reality of the enslavement of blacks in Africa as early as the seventh century. This may raise suspicions in the minds of readers that the author is trying to present Islamic history from a Western perspective or in a way that will convince Christians. However, the author's main objection to the enslavement of the people of the region who were defeated in the wars of the North African conquests that began in the seventh century is that the legitimacy of this practice is based on religion. El Hamel draws

attention to the paradox of the perpetuation of slavery and its traditions, which religion disapproved of and encouraged the gradual abolition of, in the name of preserving the power of the ruling power in the early Islamic conquests, which claimed to spread all the values encompassed by religion for the salvation of humanity. Author's point is reminiscent of the debates on the evolution of the purpose of the holy conquest movement, which had the mission of spreading the universal message of Islam, towards a political and commercial purpose.

From the example of Morocco, the author examines the religion-based political and social practices of enslavement movements in Islamic societies in the context of racialization. He pointed out that Islam explicitly rejects racism and argued that many commentators and Islamic jurists who interpreted the Qur'an served to legitimize the continuation of racism, not to overthrow its deep-rooted cultural prejudices. El Hamel's most important paradigm is the thesis that from the first Islamic conquests in North Africa, pre-Islamic racial prejudices were legitimized through religious arguments in order to preserve social and political order. In addition, the attempt of the political to shape the religious sphere for pragmatic reasons is revealed through the phenomena of slavery and race based on historical facts.

El Hamel presents the religious and mythological origins of the unity of the concepts of race, slavery and curse with striking anecdotes. He draws attention to the traditional and cultural structure invented through a myth. He questions the effort to associate the need for a founding mythology and tradition for the institutionalization of slavery with religion. The author strikingly demonstrates the need for a myth to legitimize the slavery of black Muslims in Islamic law, where disbelief is considered a justification for enslavement. This is an important observation that reveals the constructability of cultural collective memory and prejudices that serve to deny the black race their natural right to freedom. It is also noteworthy for revealing the fact that prejudices that harbor negative dogmatic convictions are the reasons that prepare the ideology of superiority underlying the mentality that exploits blacks as the "other".

In the second part, the author focuses on the intra-African history of slavery. He sheds light on the policies of Mawlay Isma'il through the relationship between power and religion. He also questions the role of the ulema in illegal enslavement, who were able to maintain their social and political status as long as they legitimized Mawlay Ismail's policies. He highlights the paradox of integrating the enslaved into the system by giving them an identity through Islamic rituals and rites, contrary to the message of Islam during this period.

One of the features that distinguishes this study from other studies on race and slavery in African history is the diversity of primary domestic and foreign sources on race and slavery practices during the reign of Mawlay Ismail. Within the framework of race and slavery, the book selects a meaningful example from North African society and presents the practices of slavery and concubinage in this period without detaching them from their connections in the historical process. The role of enslaved blacks in the background of power is revealed through soldiers, concubines, eunuchs and palace guards. It analyzes the role of the enslaved in the construction of future Moroccan society and politics. This approach makes the book notable for its contribution to other disciplines besides history, such as sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, and ethnographic research.

El Hamel contributes to African studies without reducing the criticisms of colonialism in different studies to anti-Westernism. Focusing on the fact that blacks were racially segregated in pre-colonial Moroccan society, he analyzes the foundations on which the colonial structures established in Africa were built. Tracing the relations of authority and exploitation in Africa, the author reveals how Westerners developed the slave trade that they found ready-made when they arrived in Africa in the fifteenth century and how they carried it across the Atlantic.

The book's examination of the claim that colonialism and the power and domination structures that developed accordingly actually have a structural context through the examples of Morocco and the West makes an important contribution to the studies in this field. The study can also be seen as important in terms of expanding the boundaries of historical knowledge on Africa. Based on the racist attitudes towards enslaved black men who were enslaved for the army during the reign of Mawlay Isma'il, as well as enslaved black women who were tasked with unlimited service to their male masters, the networks of tradition, power and masculine domination in Africa are revealed. Thus, a new perspective in understanding and narrating Africa is presented.

The practice of slavery in Morocco's history, which the author analyzes in the relationship between memory and space, is a very shocking example in terms of reflecting the paradox between the interests of Islamic society and its faith. By reconsidering African history, El Hamel opens the door for Africa to confront its own past and pushes the possibilities of a new historiography of sub-Saharan Africa. This quest leads El Hamel along the path opened by subaltern studies with the mission of healing the wounds of the past, revealing the truth, justice and sharing suffering. El Hamel's "Black Morocco", in which the courage to confront the past is revealed through Morocco, is reminiscent of Fanon's "Les Damnés de la Terre", in which he examines the exploited subalterns through France's past.

According to El Hamel, Islamic law, which consists of "male-dominated" and "male-approved" interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith, has created a patriarchal legal discourse. El Hamel's approach to the issue is reminiscent of feminist historiography, which aims to expose the power relations between men and women, and the neglect of women in an exploitative system, which are among the basic assumptions of patriarchal thought.

The work contributes to African historiography by providing a basis for Africans to tell their own stories and connect with their own history. The book's re-problematization of the faith-based legal norms that feed the power structures and policies that are influential in the formation of African history and the previous studies in this field may bring a new perspective to the debates in this field.

Finally, the author analyzes how historical memory is embedded in the memory of subsequent generations and how it affects their lives. He shows how peoples whose rights to life have been curtailed and whose social identities have been fragmented have uncovered the cultural codes of their memory in order to rebuild themselves. Comparing the mystical music of the Gnawa people with the slave songs of America, El Hamel's book stands out among other works in this field by shedding light on the cultural legacy of slavery from a broad perspective, born out of shared suffering through the universal language of music.