

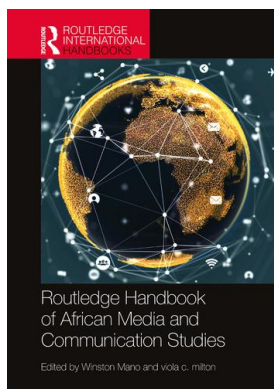
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“Arab Spring” or Arab Winter

Social media and the 21st-century slave trade in Libya

Ashley Lewis, Shamilla Amulega, and Kehbuma Langmia

Introduction/background

The world reacted with shock to the news of West African migrants to Libya having been captured and sold into slavery. American news network Cable News Network (CNN) is being touted as responsible for bringing national attention to the travesty in a November 2017 news-break entitled “People for Sale: Where lives are auctioned off for \$400” (Elbagir et al. 2017). In this report, CNN sought to further investigate a grainy video image that had been circulated, which featured a young adult Black male being auctioned off for farm work in Libya. After traveling to Tripoli to validate the legitimacy of the video, undercover journalists witnessed first-hand about a dozen men being sold off for work. Refugees from conflict-laden countries in West Africa, migrants to Libya are leaving turbulent lives behind in search of better opportunities in Europe but instead are being captured at the Libyan border and thrust into an age-old institution of forced labor accompanied by human degradation, humiliation, and abuse. Scholarly inquiry into the practice of slavery has resurfaced amid recent reports of human trafficking in Libya.

Increasingly, social media access and use now permit everyday citizens to dialogue about social and political issues like the practice of slavery in Libya, independent of the institutions that typically monopolize these discussions. This work employs the use of critical discourse analysis in exploring rhetoric around the capture and unlawful detainment of West and East Africans in route to Europe for the purpose of selling them into slavery. In order to achieve this objective, three research questions have been posed: (1) What is the discourse around slavery in Libya as discussed by anti-slavery Facebook groups? (2) How is Facebook being used as an alternative public sphere for the advocacy of human trafficking victims in Libya? (3) How do Facebook users’ discourse concerning the slave trade in Libya compare to that of early abolitionists in North America? As the Pew Research Center reports that Facebook is one of the most widely used social media platforms (Pew Research Center 2018), we will rely on this medium for data collection and analysis. To provide answers to these three questions, our data was elicited from Facebook groups that were created by everyday citizens spreading awareness about this issue, also advocating on behalf of the enslaved. This research contributes to re-emerging inquiries about modern-day slavery and civic abolitionism by first

historicizing the institution of slavery, and by examining the role of Facebook as an alternative sphere in which everyday citizens commune.

Modern slavery as the new global trade

The silence of advanced nations is complicit with the hegemonic structures that create the conditions for unlawful slavery. Class and race dominance, paternalist thought, religion, and capitalism have historically served as systematic and ideological mechanisms used to restrict populations in the West. Simultaneously, these ideologies and structures benefit others by exalting them and placing them in positions of power. For instance, Wilson (1976) notes that while capitalism made the idea of free labor appealing to White southerners during slavery in the United States, Christianity reinforced the paternalistic values of White slaveholders. Religion was used to solidify in the minds of slaves that as they were being protected and cared for by their masters, they were then obligated under Christian morals and values to obey their enslavers as the Christian bible requires dutiful children to do and provide free labor to their slaveholders as part of a reciprocal relationship (Wilson 1976). In modern-day practices, religion and paternalism continue to be used as devices to ensure obedience and complacency among slaves.

It is difficult to comprehend the value of humans being measured per their physical capabilities, yet this is how slaves were sold in tropical Sahel markets. During the 15th through the 18th centuries slaves were obtained by trading with indigenous kingdoms of the Savannahs and captives captured in local wars were taken to markets where they were bought by Muslim merchants from the north (Alexander 2001, 49). Norris (1982) found that much of the work done at salt extraction sites in the Sahara was done by slaves, providing salt for the extensive trade through the tropical Savannah populations in the 19th century.

Currently, more people are being trafficked across borders now than at any point in the past (Kapstein 2006). It is therefore crucial to bring awareness of the modern slave trade to spark a recognition of the flaws in our contemporary economic and political environment. Irrefutably, modern slavery is comparable to the acrimonious facts of the Atlantic slave trade that led to a reexamination of U.S. history – largely celebratory until the 1960s (Kapstein 2006, 103). Additionally, the United Nations estimate that human traffickers earn around \$10 billion per year and that the average sale price for a slave is around \$12,500. Subsequently, operating costs are approximately \$3,000 for each slave and traffickers can earn over \$10,000 per victim (Kapstein 2006). This system is analogous to ancient slavery practices and profitable structures such as providing cheap domestic labor to European countries.

Slave trade in Libya

Historical analysis of the slave trade in Libya helps illustrate its evolution and illuminates its significance to contemporary human trafficking operations. Picarelli (2008) found that “contemporary trafficking is but the latest form of a trade in human beings practiced for millennia, where comparisons are often drawn between contemporary sex trafficking and the White slave trade of the early 1900s” (Picarelli 2008, 1). The historical significance of the slave trade in Tripoli is pertinent to understanding Libya’s past with slavery as it relates to the current issue of human trafficking.

In his analysis, Picarelli (2008), identified four factors that frame the evolution of the trade in human beings: economic foundations, ideological positions, state responses, and organizational dynamics of the trade in human beings. These four factors mirror the current issues that impact contemporary slave trade operations in Libya and in other African countries. Altaieb (2016)

offers insight into the social and economic relationships of slaves in Libya by evaluating Ali Abdullatif Ahmida’s research on Libya, from the early 19th century to the early 20th century. Ahmida (1994) highlights the role of tribal peasant groups in the social and political transformation of Tripoli, Fezzan and Cyrenaica, arguing that “due to the extension of control over the countryside by the central administration, at first that of the Ottoman, and later that of the colonial powers” (Ahmida 1994, 5). The local response to stop slavery was strongly constrained by the agrarian regions that relied on slaves to work on the farms.

Nineteenth-century agrarian practices took precedence as one of the leading contributors to the Libyan economy due to the decline of the caravan trade. Ahmida (2010) noted that the Fezzan population was established by three main groups: landowners, small peasantry, and sharecroppers. Therefore, the aristocratic tribal clans (represented by a class beneath the land-owning class), owned most of the small farms and employed freed slaves under sharecropping contracts, as slaves were needed to cultivate their farms. Furthermore, Ahmida (2010), noted that the population was divided into two groups: the notables, merchants who owned the land – the Ghadamsiya class versus the peasant class, which consisted mainly of freed slaves or their descendants who worked the land under the control of the Ghadamsiya. Additionally, De Agostini (1974) described Libya’s ex-slaves, commonly referred to as shwashna, as being individuals with low immigration status from tribal backgrounds who were secured for farming by a percentage of the farmland produced.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been selected as this research’s method of analysis given its appropriateness for investigating the prevailing discourses in a society and how these discourses reinforce power and privilege within that society (Wodak and Meyer 2009). Unveiling these dynamics is thought to be necessary because discourse allows certain populations to maintain power through the use of discourse, while all others live in a constant state of subjugation. What’s more is that those who are oppressed by discourse or “language in action” might not be privy to their oppression because the discourse has been normalized and is therefore uneasily uncovered.

Through CDA, the marginalized are given the necessary information about their oppression to become empowered to act on dominant forces within a society. Theoretically, discourse analysis seeks to excavate the existence and maintenance of power by institutions and the elite through language and practice. Moreover, CDA is used to reveal the active injustice and oppression that language and practice allows to function in society. Activists are then charged with the task of striving to make concrete change where a specific injustice is concerned, taking all required measures to ensure this.

Critical discourse analysis was used to examine public and private anti-slavery Facebook groups, identified through a Facebook search using the phrases “slavery in Lybia” and “slave trade in Lybia”, with variations of each phrase containing the same words also included in the search. Among those groups that the search yielded, five groups containing 350 members or more were included in our study’s sample. Each Facebook group’s description, wall posts, and any comments on a post were coded using a method similar to that which appears in Shortell’s (2004) work around abolitionist rhetoric found in anti-slavery newspapers published between 1827 and 1861 (Shortell 2004, 84–88). In his work, Shortell (2004) uses a unique computer application, *SemioCode*, to construct a diagram of semantic relations to reveal a socio-cognitive map that shed light on abolitionist discourse, the ultimate goal of revealing a shared discourse and worldview among actors within the abolitionist movement (Shortell 2004, 85). Shortell

(2004), a social psychologist and spatial semiotician, created *SemioCode*, a statistical application designed to quantitatively study relationships among textual elements. The application uses algorithms to create frequencies and co-occurrences to find probabilistic relations; it uses coding algorithms to operationalize themes in a text as sets of keywords, illuminating semantic links. Shortell (2004) used this software to find common themes and keywords present in abolitionist newspapers published in New York between 1827 and 1860. Shortell's computerized content coding yielded 16 themes. As this study is critical, it is important to note that the idea of an alternative public sphere, a modification of Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which was relative to uncovering abolitionist undertones in citizens' discussions about the Libyan slave trade crisis. Jurgen Habermas' initial conceptualization of a "public sphere", first proposed in 1962, referenced interactions between free citizens in a democratic society, from the bourgeois class, in open arenas where civic engagement is promoted. What should be highlighted about these spaces is the element of critical discourse that takes place within them. In these arenas, the material and ideological contingency of the public sphere is said to vary from society to society and is heavily influenced by the spatiotemporal specificity of a given social reality within a society (Susen 2011).

The global popularity of social media and their propensity to blur the lines between public and private life has changed the material and ideological contingency of Habermas' original conception of a "public sphere" (where public and private were once separate). It is now necessary to consider that both spaces exist simultaneously. Additionally, whereas in Habermas' early conception of the public sphere both public and private spaces were dominated by the White male perspective, the Pew Research Center reports that today's social media users are predominately Black, Hispanic, and female (Pew Research Center 2018), groups that have traditionally been excluded from earlier conceptions of the public sphere.

Shortell (2004) contends that social movement discourse cannot be isolated from hierarchical social relations and the process of domination because though arguments contest particular arrangements, they can simultaneously consent to others (Shortell 2004, 77). This research acknowledges that though users with access to social media platform like Facebook are using it to engage in dialogue about the evils of modern-day slavery in Tripoli, the platform itself is still under the ownership of a larger media entity and is therefore subject to some rules of censorship as set forth by the platform itself.

Data analysis

Sixteen themes were generated through computerized content coding of the abolitionist newspaper *The Working Man's Advocate* (1830–1844) included in the study's sample: JUSTICE, LIBERTY, RIGHTS, UPLIFT, AMERICA, SLAVERY, GOD, BROTHERHOOD, COLORED, PROPERTY, LABOR, CHARACTER, SUFFERING, NATURE, POLITICS, and LAW (Shortell 2004, 86). Overall, *SemioCode* was used to illuminate the construction of abolitionists' arguments, which Shortell contends are designed to describe the social world, explain it, or evaluate it (Shortell 2004, 87). Each unit was coded for the aforementioned themes, a rhetorical mode that was assertive, evaluative, or explanatory; a rhetorical tone that reflected anger, joy, sadness, or irony; and a rhetorical basis of either similarity or difference. Whereas paragraphs were used as coding units in Shortell's (2004) work, each Facebook group description, each Facebook post, and each Facebook comment was coded as a unit of analysis. To better suit the purpose of this research, Shortell's original 16 themes have been adjusted in order to more accurately examine this special case of slavery in Tripoli.

Table 13.1 Anti-slavery Facebook groups

<i>Group</i>	<i>#of Members</i>	<i>Group Type</i>	<i>Languages</i>
Stop Slavery in Libya! Action Now	350	Support, Open	English, Spanish, Portugese, French, Dutch
Slavery in Libya and around the World	676	N/A, Closed	N/A
Stop Slavery in Libya #slaveryinlibya	392	Custom, Open	English, Spanish, Portugese, French, Dutch
A Call to Action: Community Movement Against Slavery and Injustice in Libya	1094	Support, Open	English, Spanish, Portugese, French, Dutch
SAY NO to slavery in Libya	1594	Support, Open	English, Spanish, Portugese, French, Dutch

Themes AMERICA, RIGHTS, COLORED, LIBERTY, COLORED, UPLIFT and BROTHERHOOD, were replaced with themes AFRICA, AFRICAN, LIBYA, TRIPOLI, HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMAN, ATROCITY, and FREEDOM. Advertisements, images, videos, and organized demonstrations notices were not examined, but are noted in our analysis.

Though a total of five Facebook groups were examined for their content, one of the five groups was closed and did not permit non-members to access its content (see Table 13.1). Nevertheless, the group’s description was available to non-members for examination and therefore has been included in our analysis.

Findings

Of the five groups examined, three were led by women. One of the three groups, which was closed, was an entirely female group. Each group had an international membership and was primarily composed of non-White members. As each group was multicultural, some postings were not written in English, the language that is primarily used by the researchers who conducted this analysis. Members in four of the five groups appeared to vary in age (this information was not accessible in the closed group). Every group in the sample had a prepared description of the group in its “about” section, and in each description, expressed a goal of either educating others about the slave trade crisis in Libya or contributing to the end of the slave trade in some way. All groups contained textual posts including posters, images, and videos that in some way connected to the issues of slavery (some covered incidents of slavery in other places besides Libya).

There were also the very assertive modes of expression present in each group’s description post. All five groups examined use the description to state the group’s purpose and their mission. While the tone of group descriptions tended to be assertive, the description of a group entitled STOP SLAVERY IN LIBYA! ACTION NOW seemed explanatory as it discussed the lack of government intervention for slavery, citing this as one of the main reasons why the group had been developed. The other group titled A Call to Action: Community Movement Against Slavery and Injustice in Libya, galvanized around mobilizing people to go out and fight slavery.

The group also provided insight on the possibilities of eradicating slavery by shedding light to the people and countries supporting it. For example, “The countries who fund these detention centers need to be held accountable”. The posts and wall comments that depicted the JOY rhetorical tone basically was in reference to victory over slavery, such as the Nigerian slaves in

Libya being taken back to their country, a container full of clothes and amenities landing in Libya to assist the slaves, and a collection of money that was raised to help the Libyan slaves being released from a European organization, that had earlier branded the Facebook group as a “terrorist funding group” and had seized the total contributions.

Most of the anti-slavery discourse was found in group wall posts, many of which either urged group members to become active in helping to end the suffering of African migrants by ending the slave trade or sought to persuade group members of the evils of slavery. The majority of these posts were created by one of the group’s administrators or moderators. The purpose of many of the posts was to inform others in the group about the dire situation in Libya, as well as assert the importance of concerned citizens intervening on behalf of the captured. While anger and sadness were the tones of many of these posts, most of them expressed unbridled anger at this situation that had previously been hidden, and anger at government failure to put an end to the fiasco. For example, one wall post contained a map that showed that Libya currently has no anti-slavery organizations, reiterating the importance of the involvement of everyday citizens in helping to bring trafficking in Libya to cessation.

The bulk of the comments that were examined not only issued blame to the European Union, intergovernmental organizations, NATO, and the United Nations for the dire state of affairs in Libya that would permit such atrocities to take place, but members also used their comments to indict the U.S. government. These comments accused the U.S. of not only being passive, but also for creating the circumstances in Libya that allowed for such deplorable activities to take place. One member’s comment read:

Libya had the highest human development index in the Islamic world/Middle East as according to a UN report before US-NATO sought destruction and regime change.

Another member with similar sentiments posted the following:

Look what those devil Obama and Killary [Hilary] and that liser [loser] French Sarkoz . . . did to the beautiful progressive Libya.

This user was referring to the former president of the United States, Barack Obama, and the former U.S. First Lady and secretary of state, Hilary Clinton. Both worked closely with Nicolas Sarkozy, former president of France, to drive out the presently deceased Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, former leader of Libya, who had been criticized internationally for running a seemingly ruthless regime and committing various crimes against humanity. He was killed in 2011, an incident that some have referred to as a catalyst for the destabilization of the Libyan government. Yet, other comments made statements that accused the U.S. and the U.K. of supporting the war on Libya, therefore making them responsible for what one commenter called an “inhumane scenario”.

Though most comments issued blame to the Western world, one commenter, who did not appear to be a member of the group (this was determined from a lengthy discussion that the commenter had with the one of the group’s administrators), asserted that there is, in fact, no slavery happening in Libya, only human smuggling, which the commenter alleged is taking place all over Africa. This commenter is referring to the human smuggling that many young men living around the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia) find themselves involved in due to the low availability of job opportunities in their home countries. In another thread of comments, two people went back and forth about whether Arabs were African or European. In one of the most controversial comments examined, a user discussed America’s

recent “border situation”, alleging that the coverage that receives serves to distract the wider populace’s attention away from slavery in Libya. This user is of course referring to immigrant Mexican families who are being detained and separated at the U.S.–Mexico border.

Other common themes that emerged dealt with the atrocities of slavery and the grave injustices and abuse against African migrants. One such comment discussed Britain turning a blind eye on the torture, rape, and abuse that refugees are subject to, and also accusing Britain of supporting the Libyan coast guard. The tone of this post and those like it was either sad or angry. One lone post did contain a more joyous tone, and this post dealt with news of the Republic of Chad’s involvement in helping to liberate enslaved Africans in Libya. The *Washington Post* reports that in November 2017 the Republic of Chad was involved in a multicountry initiative to liberate slave camps in Libya (Bearak 2017).

In order to establish bonds between themselves and those affected by the slave trade, many group members used a basis of similarity to show solidarity between themselves and others. In both wall posts and comments, many group members referred to the enslaved in Lybia as their “brothers” and their “people”. One particular user referred to the enslaved as his/her “fellow Africans”.

Call to action

A few of the groups examined did issue a call to action or urge the wider populace to not only take active stances against slavery in Libya, but to also take substantive action in helping to eradicate the system. One group challenged others to “keep raising our voice to save our people from the hands of animals called ‘Lybia’”. Another group provided practical measures for people to follow in an effort to help prevent slavery. These measures are discussed thoroughly in Research Question 2.

Discussion and conclusion

Research Question 1: *What is the discourse around slavery in Libya as discussed by anti-slavery Facebook groups?*

Most anti-slavery discourse found in group wall posts either urged group members to become active in helping to end the suffering of African migrants by ending the slave trade or sought to persuade group members of the evils of slavery. Many posts like these were created by one of the group’s administrators or moderators. The purpose of many of the posts was to inform others in the group about the dire situation in Libya, as well as to assert the importance of concerned citizens intervening on behalf of the captured. While a tone of sadness pervaded many of these posts, most of them expressed unbridled anger at this situation that had previously been hidden, and anger at the failure of various governments to put an end to it. For example, one wall post contained a map revealing that Libya currently has no anti-slavery organizations, reiterating the importance of everyday citizen involvement in helping to bring trafficking in Libya to an end.

Other comments that were examined not only issued blame to the European Union, intergovernmental organizations, NATO, and the United Nations for the dire state of affairs in Libya that would permit such atrocities to take place, but members also used their comments to indict the U.S. government. These comments accused the U.S. of passivity and for creating the circumstances in Libya that allowed for such deplorable activities to take place. One member’s comment read:

Libya had the highest human development index in the Islamic world/Middle East as according to a UN report before US-NATO sought destruction and regime change.

Another member with similar sentiments posted the following:

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This user was referring to former U.S. president Barack Obama and former First Lady and secretary of state Hillary Clinton, both of whom had worked closely with Nicolas Sarkozy, former president of France, to drive out the presently deceased Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, former leader of Libya, who had been criticized internationally for running a seemingly ruthless regime and committing various crimes against humanity. He was killed in 2011, an incident that some have referred to as a catalyst for the destabilization of the Libyan government. Yet, other comments made statements that accused the U.S. and the U.K. of supporting the war on Libya, therefore making them responsible for what one commenter called an “inhumane scenario”.

Research Question 2: *How is Facebook being used as an alternative public sphere for the advocacy of human trafficking victims in Libya?*

A few of the groups examined did issue a call to action or urge the wider populace to take active stances against slavery in Libya and take substantive action in helping to eradicate the system. One group challenged others to “keep raising our voice to save our people from the hands of animals called “Libya”. Another group provided practical measure for people to follow in an effort to help prevent slavery. This included:

one, “Support your fellow human beings in a peaceful protest. Stop UAE funding of armed groups in Libya which imprison, torture and kill African migrants in addition to selling them as slaves. Two, stand up against human rights abuses, Mobilize, Organize, Speak-up, Speak out. Three, “UN action against Africa (Gaddafi) must stop”.

Four, “Stay informed and keep others informed, raise awareness in your community about the issue, write a letter to your Member of Parliament and demand action”. Five, “Government should protect the working class and fight against poverty that lead to slavery”. “The countries who fund these detention centers need to be held accountable”.

These examples demonstrate the contentious discourse powering Facebook activism. Discourse can also be a mediator and a source of power (Steinberg 1999, 14). Steinberg asserts that discourse mediates power by facilitating the social action of control and exploitation. Further, discourse shapes consciousness and empowers possibilities for action and change that are culturally constituted.

Research Question 3: *How do Facebook users’ discourse concerning the slave trade in Libya compare to that of early abolitionists in North America?*

Very similar to early abolitionist discourse, common themes that emerged in the examined Facebook groups dealt with the atrocities of slavery and the grave injustices and abuse against African migrants. One such comment discussed Britain turning a blind eye to the torture, rape, and abuse that refugees are subject to, and also accusing Britain of supporting the Libya coast

guard. The tone of this post and those like it was either sad or angry. One lone post did contain a more joyous tone, and this post dealt with news that the Republic of Chad had become involved in helping to liberate enslaved Africans in Libya. The *Washington Post* reports that in November 2017 the Republic of Chad was involved in a multicountry initiative to liberate slave camps in Libya (Bearak 2017).

In order to establish bonds between themselves and those affected by the slave trade, many group members used a basis of similarity to show solidarity between themselves and others. In both wall posts and comments, many group members referred to the enslaved in Libya as their “brothers” and their “people”. One user referred to the enslaved as his/her “fellow Africans”

A critical discourse analysis revealed that Facebook groups were not only used to encourage global citizens to take a stand against the inhumane practice of slavery in Libya, but posts were also used to criticize larger institutions, like the United Nations, to which Libya claims membership, who seemed to be compliant with this formidable practice. Facebook users, either consciously or unconsciously, used the language of 19th-century American abolitionists to indict the Libyan government and other key political figures for engaging in and permitting these atrocities, in alignment with critical discourse, which takes a stand against the powerful and elites, namely those who abuse their power. The majority of posts showed anger for the situation in Libya, with commenters being assertive about putting it to an end. Though they did not possess the power or influence of the institutions that they criticized to put a stop to it, many felt empowered by their abilities to be active in what they perceived to be effective ways to address this travesty; through attending a rally, or creating and sharing anti-slavery wall posts to spreading awareness to others. Some users gave donations to anti-slavery organizations that vowed to send clothing and food to African refugees in Libya. Other groups took their activism a step further by searching for anti-slavery organizations in Libya to contact, reiterating the importance of their own advocacy after finding none. Others were empowered by sharing news of Africans who had been rescued from Libya and returned to their homes, although it is not clear if commenters understood that these men were leaving one undesirable condition, only to return to another.

Most of the moderators and administrators for the examined Facebook groups were women. This is significant in relationship to Habermas’ theory of the “public sphere”, which historically excluded women and people of color. The theory of the alternative public sphere fittingly describes how social media has extended communal spaces to those who would have traditionally been denied access. The analysis also revealed that many Facebook users who expressed discontent with Africans being enslaved are citizens of the Western countries that encourage illegal means of immigration by not allowing Africans to come migrate over legally, or making legal immigration impossible because of restrictive policies, tedious processes, and high costs. While everyday citizens may not have the hard power of governments and organizations to put an end to human trafficking in Libya, social media use has made it possible for them to exercise soft power, by urging capable parties to act on behalf of the oppressed.

Though the evils of American slavery are now widely known, during its operation, there were no devices or tools comparable to today’s social media that allowed for dispersed populations and networks to convene together in one space at a given time to share their ideas, displeasure for the practice of slavery, and advocate on a mass scale on behalf of the oppressed. Further, social media and the Internet now allow practices that were once easy to conceal to not only be uncovered, but to be broadcast widely for all to see, critique, and hold accountable parties responsible for their unlawful actions and injustice.

A few comments were particularly significant as they revealed a deeper concern with the relationship between Libyans and other Africans. One comment read, “Why aren’t other Libyans stopping the cruelty”, and another:

From one side you want the polices, from the other side the slavery, which I assure you that there is no slavery in Libya, there is only human traffic [smuggling], which our brothers from Africa are doing it and they fully understood that Libya is a failed state and war zone.

Finally, one last comment implored others to “keep raising our voice to save our people from the hands of the Animals called Libya”. It is also necessary to highlight the back-and-forth conversation between two male users asking each other whether Arabs are African or European. These ironic remarks illuminate the alleged fragile relationship between Libyans and the rest of Africa. For example, Mazrui (1974) posits that Arabs have played two major roles in Africa: first as accomplices in African enslavement, and then in the 20th century as allies in African liberation (as exemplified by Gaddafi, the Libyan revolutionary who dreamed of Africa as a centralized power against the West). However, Wai (1984) believes that President of Malawi Kamuzu Banda’s criticism of Arab involvement in the slave trade in Africa excludes them from being considered Africa’s genuine friends. Hence, President Banda emphasizes that present cases of slavery in Southern Sudan, where Africans have been oppressed, repressed, and subjected to varied human indignities by Arabs, is a case in point. This is analogous to the fate of African men in Libya, where they are treated as sub-human and sold into slavery. This is suggestive of possible Arab superiority to darker-skinned Africans, a dynamic that is worthy of further exploration.

The institution of slavery is an age-old practice that has affected millions. These effects are especially known by African populations. Systems of complacency and compliance allow this diabolic practice to thrive, creating monetary profit for nations looking to benefit from free labor. The abuse, humiliation, and degradation that its victims are subject to has sparked international outrage, with many vocalizing their opposition to slavery. These early protests were spearheaded by abolitionists of the late 19th century. Today’s widespread use of social media platforms have not only revolutionized advocacy and means of resistance but has also granted expanded access in terms of those who are able to become politically involved. Going forward, emancipation of modern slavery needs not just to be examined, but to bring to light the underlying causes that permeate its existence and derive practical solutions, such as enacting policies that can address the problem. Slavery emancipation means little to poor people, and immigrants who are continually trapped in systems that essentially benefit from their disadvantage, which essentially leads to modern slavery. There is a need for developed nations, such as Britain, France, and the U.S. to re-evaluate their restricted labor laws and immigration policies. Increased regulations in broken systems also serve to stipulate illegal migration and thereby increase the level of exploitation of many workers who do not have legal protection in labor markets. Conclusively, social media will continue to remain an open forum for those with oppositional viewpoints who look to challenge the dominant narrative.

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