

Slaves Movements in Benin and West Africa

Eric K. Hahonou¹

¹Roskilde University, Department for Society and Globalisation, Roskilde, Denmark

komlavi@ruc.dk

Whereas slavery is generally well documented and studied in a historical perspective, the author suggests that slavery still shapes everyday politics in most African societies. The marginalization of people of slave descent in Africa did neither end up with colonialism nor with postcolonial policies. However a sudden shift occurred since the twin processes of democratisation and decentralisation in sub-Saharan Africa gave rise to various social movements claiming a more egalitarian society. Here and there people of slave origins organized themselves in various social movements in order to get access to their rights as full citizens, to recover their dignity, and ethnic identity challenging both a political domination and a political culture. Surprisingly, the political emergence of people of slave descent, the building of their collective identity within social movements and other kinds of organizations, their ideologies and the forms of political mobilization they adopted remain an understudied field of research in African studies. This article analyses the current relationships between slavery and politics in Benin. First, the author state that slavery is a more important dimension of nowadays politics in Africa than the literature suggests. It is not only a crucial aspect of everyday politics at the local level (e.g. in villages, tribes, municipalities) but also in national politics where the stigmata of slavery still shape political landscapes, political cultures and practices. In a comparative perspective the author explores the dynamics of West African social movements related to the struggle against the legacie