

Narratives of Enslavement and Mobility in Central Sudan in the 19th Century

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Central Sudan in the 19th century is characterized by an intense mobility of people through complex networks of circulations. Within this organized space, the rules are not the same for everyone. The ability of Individuals and groups to move depends on the social status of each one. This doesn't mean that the ability to move reflects simply the social hierarchies. In fact, while following the footsteps of European explorers in the region, we are struck by the omnipresence of slaves, men and women, along small paths or in the trans-Saharan caravans, in groups or alone, chained or free to move. This extreme mobility of slaves, call for questioning the individual and collective capacities of enslaved people to move and to exercise control over their movement. To find the experience and practices of slaves, the historian can draw on the corpus of life stories or slave narratives. These testimonials from individuals who were slaves in central Sudan were collected by linguists or amateur scientists in the first half of the 19th century in London, Sierra Leone, Massachusetts, Rio or Bahia. Fifteen stories from one page to ten pages offer a counterpoint endogenous intimate and personal to understand the complexity of mobility experiences in context of enslavement.