

### **After Slavery: Comparing the Caribbean and Africa**

**Veranstalter:** Department of History, Leibniz University Hanover, Germany; Interdisciplinary Program Transformation Studies, Leibniz University Hanover, Germany

**Datum, Ort:** 22.11.2013-23.11.2013,

**Bericht von:** Steffen Runkel / Jan Hüsgen, Department of History, Leibniz University Hanover

The Conference „After Slavery: Comparing the Caribbean and Africa,“ which took place in Hanover on 22–23 November 2013, brought together researchers from eleven different universities in Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and North America all working on slavery and post-slavery history. The idea to host this conference arose out of an interdisciplinary research project at Leibniz University Hanover (LUH) which focused on a micro-historical and biographical approach within a global history framework. In the research project, which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), four individual projects researched the question of how African and Caribbean post-emancipation societies experienced the transformation from a slave economy to new forms of economic relations and the changes in family organization and gender relations. The project distinguished itself from other academic endeavours in the field by drawing comparisons and reconstructing connections of different scope, for example intra-regional and trans-Atlantic. The conference adopted this approach on a wider scale.

As an introduction, MICHAEL ZEUSKE (Cologne) provided a preliminary overview of debates on slavery and characterized different historical types of slavery. In general, he argued for a global definition of slavery and a deconstruction of existing discourses, which aroused a debate over whether it would be more sensible to speak of global slaving instead of global slavery. In the second introductory presentation, HELGE WENDT (Berlin) focused on mission societies and their potential role in emancipation processes by giving an overview of different types of mission societies, namely, those based on education,

work, and inter-racial relationships.

The first thematic panel continued with the subject of mission societies. KATJA FÜLLBERG-STOLBERG (Hanover) presented her research on a group of 24 West Indian ex-slaves whom the Basel Mission sent to the Gold Coast in 1843 as role models to advance the abolition of African slavery by presenting Christian values to the African population. She found out that these migrants had themselves become slave-owners, adopting the argument in favour of mild domestic slavery which they contrasted with Caribbean plantation slavery. PAUL JENKINS (Basel) in his paper also dealt with the Basel Mission's influence on slavery on the Gold Coast. Focusing on the correspondences of a native missionary, Theophil Opoku, he demonstrated how missionaries' „messages“ were internalized by their indigenous subordinates and described the references to slavery in Opoku's correspondence after 1874 as „restrained and incidental“. A paper by JAN HÜSGEN (Hanover) also focused on native members of missions, this time National Helpers of the Moravian Mission in the Danish West Indies. He discussed the importance of official helpers in maintaining social surveillance of the mission's congregation and how their office brought them into conflict with both missionaries and congregants. By means of a case study, he examined the ambiguity of their position and demonstrated the extent to which they were involved in organizing and participated in the famous slave rebellion on St. Croix in 1848.

The second panel was devoted to further case studies and comparative research. CHRISTIAN CWIK (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago) presented a history of the last 150 years of emancipation in Dutch Curaçao. He concluded, surprisingly, that emancipation from „mental slavery“ in Curaçao is still in progress. Cwik derived the reason for that from the permanent status of Curaçao as a Dutch colony and the link between colonialism and slavery. In his paper, CLAUS FÜLLBERG-STOLBERG (Hanover) referred to the work of the Moravian Mission in discussing the emancipation of slaves and Khoisan in the Cape Colony. He explained the ways in which both developments significant-

---

ly improved the lives especially for affected mothers and children. Compared with other regions where the Moravian Mission was active, it took place on a smaller scale and did not have the same significance for the economy and society as in regions with plantation economies. Finally, ULRIKE SCHMIEDER (Hanover) presented her recent research comparing emancipation in Martinique and Cuba Grande. She especially emphasized the different circumstances in which emancipation took place on these islands. While Martiniquan slave emancipation took place under stable colonial rule, in Cuba two wars of independence and alliances of whites and blacks provided very different circumstances. These conditions led to a post-emancipation situation in which equality for ex-slaves did not exist.

The second day of the conference started with a panel on micro-historical approaches to gender and marriage in African and Caribbean post-emancipation societies. TREVOR GETZ (San Francisco) talked in his presentation about the close connection between slavery and marriage in the post-emancipation Gold Coast. By means of three legal cases, he explored how slaves and owners made use of the abolition courts to renegotiate their relationships to each other and the conditions of their marriages and how slaves tried thereby to upgrade their social status after emancipation. BRIDGET BRERETON (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago) dealt with the disappearance of women from the labour force on British Caribbean sugar plantations after emancipation. Her paper examined former slaves' motives and „family strategies“ for the „withdrawal“ of women from full-time wage labour. She also discussed the extent to which hegemonic European gender ideologies may have influenced women to seek occupations outside of plantation work. NATASHA LIGHTFOOT's (New York City) paper focused on the gendered inequities of emancipation in Antigua. She used the Moravian Church's exclusion records to show the social disadvantages that black women suffered after slavery. According to Lightfoot, missionaries, native assistants, and emancipated men all tried to gain control of freed women's bodies and sexuality. She argued that black women's bodies

were continually under duress in Antigua and that legal freedom engendered little actual liberation. She concluded that Moravian exclusion conferences offered a limited space for freed women to gain some power in the context of relationships that more often kept them powerless.

The fourth panel examined the slow demise of slavery in the Caribbean and Africa as well as the struggles of emancipated slaves to gain political and social rights. STEFFEN RUNKEL (Hanover) presented the first results of his research project on African initiatives for slavery and abolition on the Gold Coast. He reinterpreted a colonial investigation into the slave trade and slavery practices on the Gold Coast in the late 19th century by focusing on African perspectives on the issue. Runkel revealed the crucial involvement in the investigation of well-known members of the Gold Coast's educated community. Thus his paper stressed the significance of African initiatives to the history of slavery and abolition on the Gold Coast and demonstrated the need to reinterpret Gold Coast emancipation history from non-European perspectives. OILDA HEVIA LANIER (Havana) explored the political struggles of Afro-Cubans against racial discrimination and for access to education between 1868 (at beginning of the Ten Years War) and 1895 (at the start of the war for independence). Her paper explained the inner structure of Afro-Cuban societies and highlighted the role of Afro-Cuban organizations in these struggles. Hevia Lanier focused especially on the foundation of the „Directorio Central de las Sociedades de Color“ in 1886 and the partially successful political campaign of the Assembly of Societies of Colour in 1892 which led to the abolition of discriminatory terms like „moreno/a“ and „pardo/a“ in official documents in 1893. KOFI BAKU (Legon, Ghana) presented a paper dealing with the uncertain legal and social status of freed slaves and their descendants in the Gold Coast/Ghana both before independence in 1957 and after. Using court records, he examined several cases dealing with the legacy of slavery. Baku explained how complex legal issues that arose in the light of the different traditions and customary laws of Gold Coast/Ghanaian societies often had the con-

sequence that descendants of slaves were denied the same rights as „full members of lineages“. He concluded that the legacies of slavery are still evident and, accordingly, that „slavery is not dead at all“ in Ghana. Finally, JAVIER LAVIÑA’s (Barcelona) paper dealt with the black Catholic brotherhoods of Santo Domingo. These religious societies were founded almost simultaneously with those of whites. These black brotherhoods were part of the system of integration into colonial life, but they also resisted colonial rule. They kept some African religious traditions, especially burial rites, alive. From the 19th century onwards, these confraternities supported traditions on the church’s margins, and, though some of them dissolved, their importance has thereby persisted to the present.

The conference ended with an epilogue by JON SENSBAACH (Gainesville, Florida). His paper focused on Camille Pissarro, an artist who grew up on the Danish West Indian Island of St. Thomas and whose works were heavily influenced by the arrival of African-Caribbean freedom. Most of his earliest works focused on West Indian landscapes as well as on free women of colour. By analysing Pissarro’s early works, Sensbach explained their significance for the social history of the post-emancipation Caribbean and how that work influenced his later interest in painting French peasant women.

The conference offered the possibility of adopting the agenda of Hanover’s research project on a wider scale. The presentations offered insights into African and Caribbean post-emancipation societies and the extent to which the transformation from slavery to freedom led to the development of new economic relations and influenced changes in family organization and gender relations. The presentations showed numerous thematic interconnections among the different research areas and also demonstrated the advantages of micro-historical approaches to global history. Through its wide range of presentations from the fields of slavery and post-slavery history, the conference contributed to fruitful exchanges among researchers from different fields and helped to widen the understanding of emancipation processes in Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean. The par-

ticipants agreed that it was thereby possible to identify interesting perspectives and new perceptions beyond the limits of regional research approaches. It is to be hoped that the promising approach of this conference will continue to bear fruit and lead to more research projects on post-slavery which link micro-historical approaches within global and trans-Atlantic history.

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Welcome*

Michaela Hohkamp (Dean of Research, Faculty of Philosophy, Leibniz University Hanover)

Christine Hatzky (Head of History Department, Leibniz University Hanover)

Katja Füllberg-Stolberg (Conference Organization, Leibniz University Hanover)

##### *Introduction: The Big Picture of Slavery and Post-Emancipation*

Michael Zeuske (University of Cologne), Debates about the Heritage of Slavery – Historiography on Post-Emancipation

Helge Wendt (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin), Global Discourses about Societies of Mission during the 19th Century: Education, Work and Inter-Racial Relationships

##### *Panel I: Slavery, Emancipation and Mission*

Chair: Christine Hatzky (Leibniz University Hanover)

Katja Füllberg-Stolberg (Leibniz University Hanover), From Fairfield to Akropong: African American Emigration to Africa in the Post-Emancipation Period

Paul Jenkins (Mission 21, Basel), Traces of Post-Emancipation Slavery in Basel Missionaries’ and Native Pastors’ Reports from Southern Ghana, to 1914

Jan Hüsgen (Leibniz University Hanover), Between Accommodation and Resistance – National Helper in the (Post) Emancipation Moravian Mission

##### *Panel II: Case Studies and Comparisons*

Chair: Wolfgang Gabbert (Leibniz University Hanover)

Christian Cwik (University of the West Indies,

---

St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago), 150 Years  
of Abolition in Dutch Curaçao

Claus Füllberg-Stolberg (Leibniz University  
Hanover), The Emancipation of Khoisan and  
Slaves in the Cape Colony and the Moravian  
Mission

Ulrike Schmieder (Leibniz University Hano-  
ver), Martinique and Cuba Grande: Commo-  
nalities and Differences of Slavery, Abolition  
and Post-Emancipation

*Panel III: Gender, Marriage, Micro-histories*  
Chair: Brigitte Reinwald (Leibniz University  
Hanover)

Trevor Getz (San Francisco State University),  
Reassessing Frames of Reference: 'Slavery',  
'Marriage', and Gender in Abolition Courts

Bridget Brereton (University of the West In-  
dies, St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago), Fa-  
mily Strategies, Gender and the Shift to Wage  
Labour in the Post-Emancipation British Car-  
ibbean

Natasha Lightfoot (Columbia University,  
New York), Moravians, Marriage, Black  
Women's Unfree Bodies and Emancipation's  
Gendered Inequities in Antigua

*Panel IV: 'The Slow Death of Slavery'*  
Chair: Anja Bandau (Leibniz University Ha-  
nover)

Steffen Runkel (Leibniz University Hanover),  
„Slavery as such has completely died out  
(...)“ – African Perspectives on Slavery and  
Abolition on the Gold Coast

Oilda Hevia Lanier (La Universidad de La  
Habana), After Emancipation – the Fight  
of the Afro-Cubans for their Social Rights  
1886–1902

Kofi Baku (University of Ghana, Legon), In-  
complete Emancipation? The Uncertain Legal  
and Social Status of Freed Slaves in the Gold  
Coast, 1874–1950

Javier Laviña (Universidad de Barcelona),  
Brotherhoods of Santo Domingo: Afro-  
Dominican Resistance and Persistence

*Epilogue*

Jon Sensbach (University of Florida, Gaines-  
ville), The Art of Liberation: Camille Pissarro

and Free Women of the Caribbean

Tagungsbericht *After Slavery: Comparing the  
Caribbean and Africa*. 22.11.2013-23.11.2013, ,  
in: H-Soz-u-Kult 03.03.2014.