Historiography and Research Problems of Slavery and the Slave Trade in a Global-Historical Perspective*

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SUMMARY: This article takes a global-historical perspective on all slaveries and slave trades (and contraband trading of human bodies) in relation to today’s state of capitalist accumulation. It follows the different “national” schools of slavery research in different imperial traditions, as well as the sections of historical thinking stimulated through slavery research. Although legal ownership over humans does not exist any more, more women and men are in conditions of slavery today than in any other period of history since 1200. Against this background, the article criticizes the concentration in historiography on “hegemonic” slaveries (antique, Islamic, and American plantation slaveries) and proposes a focus on smaller “slaveries” all over the world (first of all of women and children), and on the agency of slaves and slave women, rather than on “great” slavery in a tradition of “Roman Law”.

Slavery research has been dominated since c. 1970 by two cultures of historiography and memory: those of the USA and Brazil – though completely unbalanced from a European perspective, with some 80 per cent of publications and research originating in the USA against 10 per cent in Brazil, despite a very important research institute in Canada (The Harriet Tubman Institute).¹ Brazilian global-historical research dominates the history of the South Atlantic and naturally enough that of the Brazilian internal market. In Brazil itself, besides slavery research on the Anglo-American space (centred on the USA), there exists the best, quantitatively most comprehensive and detailed research in the world into slavery, the slave trade, and the slave condition, as well as national post-emancipation research that includes local-historical studies. This too is only natural,

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given that Brazil was the largest slave society in the world in its time. So, in a consequent global perspective, Brazil was the most important slave and slave trade society, and it is today the country with the most important historiography. With reference to the above mentioned distortion, John W. Sweet in a recent article claims that there are myths in the history of the slave trade in a macro-historical perspective: the myth of the primordial importance of North America and the myth of the nineteenth century as a “century of abolition” since 1808 (in reality North America was, until 1850, a periphery of the Spanish Caribbean).

The remaining historiography of slavery is divided diffusely between other national historiographies: the British (often combined with the US into the Anglo-American historiography of slavery), followed particularly by the Dutch, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, the Baltic states (Denmark, Brandenburg, Sweden), Hamburg, Bremen, and Switzerland. The historiography of different internal slaveries in Africa confronts particular difficulties, while the Atlantic slave trade from Africa 1650–1800 is relatively well known.

Difficulties with the subject in Europe and Latin America also arise time and again in Spain, which from 1493 to 1898 possessed the largest colonial empire in the Americas (still including Cuba and Puerto Rico after 1825), with the longest history of slavery. Spain as a colonial power had no areas for obtaining slaves in Africa until the end of the eighteenth century. The particular view of Spanish Catholicism was (and remains) marked by the “mildness” and “gentleness” (suavidad) of Catholic

Spanish-American forms of slavery (slaves being brothers in Christ with their masters). But because many investments (such as urban modernization in Barcelona, Seville, and Madrid, and large firms in the transport and banking sectors), as well as private wealth were drawn from the smuggling of slaves and from slavery to and in Cuba and Puerto Rico in the nineteenth century, the subject remains even today extremely thorny, being in fact scarcely known outside specialized historiographies.6

The hegemony of Anglo-American historiographies threatens a canonization, which is further promoted by a theorizing history of historiography in central Europe, fixed on the USA, which basically rejects empirical research. The greater part of recent encyclopaedias, textbooks, and atlases of slavery and the slave trade express this hegemony.7 New empirical material is kept at bay with the dual argument that empirical research is quite impossible to conduct in such global-historical macroconnections as global history, plantation slavery, and the Atlantic slave trade (Atlantization).8 Along with the second argument, implicitly drawn from “media science”, of an almost exclusively “perception history”, this leads to a habitus of postmodern epistemology that is hard to attack, a habitus of impossible access to historical reality (and of the ever stronger self-reflexivity of present-day societies). It is from the fund of this slavery that the official memorial culture of slavery draws its material; its scenarios and scripts almost necessarily produce a new historicism.9

6. Manuel Lucena Salmoral, La esclavitud en la América española (Warsaw, 2002); idem, Regulación de la esclavitud negra en las colonias de América Española (1503–1886): Documentos para su estudio (Madrid [etc.], 2005); José Andrés-Gallego, La esclavitud en la América española (Madrid, 2005).


EARLIER HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF SLAVERY

The starting points of the modern historiography of slavery are the earlier historiographies of religious orders and missions (including those of Sandoval, Labat, and Oldendorp), Cuban historiography (Saco, Ortiz, and Moreno Fraginals), British West Indian radical thinkers (C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, and Walter Rodney), and Brazilian cultural sociology (Gilberto Freyre). These studies developed against a broad background, particularly in the historiography of the Caribbean: Dominicans and Jesuits, but also the Bohemian Herrenhuters (Moravians), works by Caribbean planters and slaveholders such as Ligon, Long, Edwards, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and Arango, and a strongly metropolitan and often political-economy-oriented nineteenth-century historiography such as Merivale, Peytraud, and Niebohr. Jesuit historiography, especially Tomás de Mercado and Alonso de Sandoval, had aimed at enquiring into the rightness of Catholic proselytism and the conditions for it. The Jesuit universal mission thought and acted globally. It is interesting that John Kelly Thornton, in the context of a newly Africa-centred world historiography, has drawn massively on Alonso de Sandoval, and more recently also on Oldendorp (Protestant mission).

Starting in the nineteenth century, Cuban historiography was the first of the three major Atlantic-American traditions of slavery research, both chronologically and in a certain sense also in terms of its early quality. The slave culture of what was in the early nineteenth century the most efficient and compact plantation economy also led to research into slavery, and an ethnology and anthropology of slaves: Francisco de Arango y Parreño (1765–1837), the Adam Smith of the plantation economy, as well as one of the founding fathers of the theory of American
mass slavery and functional racism, influenced Alexander von Humboldt’s essay on Cuba.\textsuperscript{14}

But there was more. The owner of the “Surinam” ingenio and Professor of Latin at Havana, Anselmo Suárez y Romero (1818–1878),\textsuperscript{15} conducted a literary slave ethnology; José Antonio Saco (1797–1879), from the township of Bayamo in the east of Cuba, a functional racist like Arango, published one of the first comprehensive world histories of slavery (from the beginnings to around 1850).\textsuperscript{16} Cuba, in particular the Cuba grande of the technologized plantation economy in the west of the island, was the most “modern” slavery of the nineteenth century, which is why the first visualization of a slave economy in terms of global history, according to the rules of modernity, appeared in the words of an actor of slavery (Cantero/Laplante, Los Ingenios, a work from which almost all “authentic” illustrations in books about slavery are still drawn today, Mialhe, and Landaluze).\textsuperscript{17}

The other strong visual culture of slavery was – not surprisingly – from Brazil (Rugendas, Debret, Thomas Ewbank, Maximilian Prinz zu Wied-Neuwied, Johann B. Spix, Carl F. Ph. Martius, Thomas Ender, Richard Bate, Carl Wilhelm von Theremin, and Eduard Hildebrandt).

The first cultural history of slaves, arising from highly dubious beginnings in criminal ethnology at the start of the twentieth century


\textsuperscript{15} Anselmo Suárez y Romero, Francisco. El ingenio o las delicias del campo (Las escenas pasan antes de 1838), prologue by Eduardo Castañeda (Havana, 1974); Martin Lienhard, “Afrokubanische Orality und ihre Darstellung in ethnologischen und literarischen Texten”, in Ottmar Ette and Martin Franzbach (eds), Kuba heute. Politik Wirtschaft Kultur (Frankfurt, 2001), pp. 393–410.

\textsuperscript{16} José Antonio Saco, Historia de la esclavitud desde los tiempos más remotos hasta nuestros días, 3 vols, I and II (Paris, 1875), III (Barcelona, 1877/1878).

(Cesare Lombroso), and the first “post-colonial” history of a society that owed its world-historical rise to slaves, the slave trade, and slavery, yet insults ex-slaves as all being “witches”, more or less, stems from the pen of Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969), the creator of the concept of transculturación that has become so important today in cultural history, post-colonialism, and subaltern studies. ¹⁸

He was followed in the line of concealed transculturation by the essayist Miguel Barnet in 1966, with his prototype of testimonial literature that enjoyed worldwide success under the title Biografía de un Cimarrón – a white literature that speaks for blacks (a cultural technique of the actual-historical “transculturation” that existed also in the nineteenth century). ¹⁹ Barnet’s “authentic” history was written against the broad background of the works of José Luciano Franco, Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, and Juan Pérez de la Riva, ²⁰ as well as of the most important structural and social history of a concrete slavery society (El Ingenio, which basically only covered developments until around 1860). ²¹ The first volume was published in 1964 by Manuel Moreno Fraginals (1920–2001). Moreno Fraginals belonged to one of the schools of Cuban slavery research that, in contrast to Fernando Ortiz, was based on structures and demography (linked above all with the names of Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, who also introduced the British-Caribbean and French-Caribbean concept of the “sugar revolution”, and Raúl Cepero Bonilla). ²² In contrast to this, Barnet’s testimonial

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¹⁸. Fernando Ortiz, Los negros brujos (apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal). Carta prólogo del Dr C. Lombroso (Madrid, 1906); idem, Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros esclavos. Estudio sociológico y de derecho public (Havana, 1916), new edn publ. as Los negros esclavos (Havana, 1976); idem, Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar (advertencia de sus contrastes agrarios, económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografía y su transculturación), introduction by Bronislaw Malinowski (Havana, 1940); idem, “El fenómeno social de la transculturación y su importancia en Cuba”, Revista Bimestre Cubana, 66 (July–December 1940), pp. 273–278.

¹⁹. Miguel Barnet, Biografía de un cimarrón (Havana, 1966).

²⁰. José Luciano Franco, Historia de la Revolución de Haití (Havana, 1966); idem, Los Palenques de los esclavos Cimarrones (Havana, 1973); idem, “Piratas, corsarios, filibusteros y contrabandistas, siglo XVIII y XIX”, in idem, Ensayos históricos (Havana, 1974), pp. 45–92; idem, Las Minas de Santiago del Prado y la rebelión de los Cobreros (Havana, 1975); idem, Las conspiraciones de 1810 y 1812 (Havana, 1977); idem, La diáspora africana en el Nuevo Mundo (Havana, 1978); idem, Comercio clandestino de esclavos (Havana, 1996), bibliography on pp. 283–285; idem, La presencia negra en el Nuevo Mundo (Havana, 1981); Pedro Chapeaux Deschamps, El negro en la economía habanera del siglo XIX (Havana, 1971); idem and Juan Pérez de la Riva, Contribución a la historia de gentes sin historia (Havana, 1974).


construction of the biography of a former slave and cimarrón, still readable today, gives the blacks a place in the national cycle of revolution, appreciating also their role in revolutionary leadership. On the whole, however, Cuban national history is still predominantly a “white” history, overlaid today by the one-sided dominance of the US and Brazilian historiographies of slavery.24

Not surprisingly, United States research into slavery society outside North America begins with Cuba, in the positivist book on the slave trade by Hubert H.S. Aimes (1907).25 Aimes also began, at a very early date, to do comparative work on slavery in the Americas.26 Other equally early works are those of Irene Aloha Wright,27 who, however, dealt with early colonial history. The works of Frederick Douglass28 and W.E.B. Du Bois also appeared in the USA, as well as the oldest journal of “black history” (The Journal of Negro History, founded 1916). The 1940s, with the work of Fernando Ortiz and Melville J. Herskovits, saw the start of analysis of

28. Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself [1845], David W. Blight (ed.) (Boston, MA, 1993).
the African background of slavery and the “black family”, the “forgotten memories” of slaves as well as the “myth of the negro past”, somewhat later, Pierre Vergier began to study the connections of Bahia to Benin and the Gold Coast. But predominantly, even in the universities, the view of history remained marked by the racist works of Ulrich B. Phillips. This bore mainly on slavery in the US, absolutizing this as the “peculiar institution”. Only with the extremely influential works of Frank Tannenbaum and Stanley Elkins did a new phase comparing the American and the global history of slavery set in (with the influential works of the Genoveses and Anglo-American historians), and with the myth of the “mildness of Ibero-American slavery” (compared with its pathological severity in the USA) partly persisting through to today.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SLAVERY

Somewhat outside the mainstream, beginning also in the 1950s, were anthropological studies in the Caribbean, their main protagonists being


30. Nina S. Rodrigues, O Animismo Fetichista dos Negros Bahianos (Rio de Janeiro, 1932); Pierre Verger, Bahia and the West African Trade, 1549–1851 (Lagos, 1964); idem, Flux et reflux de la traite des negres entre le golfe de Benin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du XVIIe au XIXe siecle (Paris, 1963); idem, Fluxo e refluxo do trafico de escravos entre o golfo do Benin e a Bahia de Todos os Santos dos seculos XVII a XIX (Sao Paulo, 1987); idem, Os Libertos: sete caminhos na liberdade de escravos da Bahia no seculo XIX, Salvador (Bahia, 1992).


Sidney W. Mintz and Eric Wolf, and researchers of slave resistance (like Richard Price and João Reis). Both of these conducted empirical research in the field. They studied problems of rural populations (initially in Puerto Rico) that lived in former slavery societies. The publications of Sidney Mintz, above all, produced a plethora of stimuli, methodological concepts, and theoretical reflections, which in a certain sense founded an anthropological history of slavery “from below”, from the perspective of slaves and former slaves as actors in a transnational history of the Caribbean, against the background of a pronounced historical translocality (without using this concept). Mintz’s work continues to play an important role today, in debates over slave agency, creolity, and centralisms, particularly between Americanists and Africanists (Mintz and Price versus Thornton und Lovejoy etc.).

Since then, empirically and anthropologically oriented research has taken a mediating standpoint, opening on the one hand on to slave voices and the archaeology of the lives of slaves, the slave trade from an under-deck perspective, and the African diaspora along the line Africa–Atlantic–America, as well as the archaeology of the slave trade in West Africa, and on the other hand to a stronger visualization: (www.slaveryimages.org; Jerome S. Handler; Jane G. Landers; Christopher DeCorse etc.). There have also

been studies of historiography and the history of ideas of slavery, starting, above all, with the works of Elsa W. Govea and David Brion Davis.40

Under these conditions, research, historical sciences, and historical social sciences in the USA responded to the challenges of Caribbean “postcolonialism before postcolonialism” (especially made by Fernando Ortiz and Eric Williams).41 As a background, the works of economic history and quantitative studies also need to be mentioned, these likewise having their origins in the late 1950s,42 and later culminating in *Time on the Cross*,43 in which it was shown from a standpoint of neoclassical economics that slaves in the USA worked more efficiently than free workers, and were relatively well provided for in terms of diet and medical care, without which it would be impossible to explain the growth of the slave population from around 400,000 in 1808 to something like 4 million in 1865, in the absence of the Atlantic slave trade (even though, in this timeframe, we do not really know how many slaves were smuggled into the USA from the Caribbean, and first of all from Cuba after 1820).44

The line of quantitative research, without Fogel’s neoclassical series of assumptions, continues in what is today the most important social-historical data base on the Atlantic slave trade, under the direction of David Eltis, Herbert Klein, and David Richardson: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database; www.slavevoyages.org.45

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The intensive “slavery debate”, particularly in the USA, which was initially comparative and then also quantifying and social-historical, has seen in the last forty years the introduction of computerized methods into the historical and social sciences. Together with the new approaches of Mintz and others, research into slaves and slavery has seen a blossoming of comparative research and new approaches from the side of culturalist-oriented world and global historiography, as well as a series of new research orientations, such as “racism and slavery”, “transculturation, diaspora/migration history”, including trans-Atlantic construction of identities, ethnicities, and Atlantic creoles, “comparative history of slavery”, “history from below”, not only of slavery as an institution but
first of all based on slave voices, life histories, and experiences, including “abolition and post-emancipation”,51 “social history of law and slavery”,52 “social history of medicine” (and sciences in general),53 as well as international history, microhistory, in particular Atlantic history, history of the seas and migrations,54 history of slaveries and creolizations in different spaces of the Indian Ocean,55 or “translocal/transnational” cultural history,56 with the variants of “new” imperial history, histories of diaspors, and translocal south–south history.58

More recently, the themes “religion and slavery” (if the slavers were only interested in the bodies of the enslaved, slaves in their agency transcended the individualities of the dead and the ubiquity of death),59 “women, children, and slavery”,60 and “gender and slavery”61 have also

begun to play major roles, the high point of research so far (resulting in new criteria of analysis for a genuinely global history of slavery from today’s perspective) being the two volumes of *Women and Slavery* and *Children in Slavery*. The appearance of Joseph Miller’s article of synthesis on this subject is also not accidental. A relatively new theme, in part influenced (but not solely) by the distortions of the perception history complained of above, is that of “slavery and memory”. In the USA and the Anglo-American language zone including Canada, ever more works are appearing that open to Atlantic and other historiographies, conducting *histoire croisée*, the history of workers (pirates, sailors, slaves), the transcultural roots of North America, and the importance of the Haitian revolution (1791–1803) for the world history of slaves, thematizing freedom and the Atlantic. This has led in turn to new assessments of slaveries and the slave trade, as well as of transitional forms in Africa and in world or global history (coolies mostly from China and India) also of


the eastern hemisphere (especially the Indian Ocean and India, as well as the Arab-Islamic zone). New impulses for world and global history come especially from Africanists and Brazilianists, including the Atlantic dimension and different cosmologies; from the new historiography of workers (Boutang, Linebaugh, Rediker, Van der Linden, Lucassen, and Brass); while especially from Indian Marxist historians there has been a new assessment of global labour relationships including forms of slavery existing through to today. Histories of slavery have been supplemented by a body of economic, political, and sociological studies of “labour compelled by force” (= slavery), or “free and unfree labour under conditions...
of globalization”, that arose in parallel with the new cultural paradigm of the “black Atlantic” (Paul Gilroy).70

In general, slaves were and are classed by their contemporaries in the lowest and most dishonourable rank of society, expressed above all in violence against bodies and control over the bodies of the enslaved. Even when they have assumed quite high positions as domestic slaves, soldiers, or luxury slaves, their position has always been extremely precarious, “radically uncertain”, as Brent D. Shaw formulated it.71 This is basically also what the American sociologist Orlando Patterson meant by “ultimative slave” and “social death”.72 Patterson’s cultural-sociological concept of “social death” is particularly interesting in this connection, and particularly contested.73 It holds that slaves were not only torn away from their community of origin, but also as members of the same group as their master or mistress they were non-persons in the enslaving society. They had no “honour” and were not “persons”, as defined by the community in which they were forced to live. They had no “freedoms”, in the sense of the European medieval discourse, or at least only very few, and even these were in general not formally defined. They were thus excluded from normal life, and formed almost a kind of social zombie condition, the undead dead.74 Their position was bound up with shame, dishonour, insecurity, lack of “freedoms” and loss of status, fatherlessness, as well as such degrading characteristics as slave names.

Anthropologists, historians and social scientists have developed other models of slavery (e.g. Herman Jeremias Nieboer, Moses I. Finley, Claude Meillassoux, Paul E. Lovejoy, Albert Wirz, S. Fenoaltea, Martin A. Klein, Joseph E. Inikori, David Eltis, and John K. Thornton),75 or else used no
explicit models (Georges Scelle,\textsuperscript{76} and Charles Verlinden\textsuperscript{77}). Werner Scheidel has repeatedly indicated the characteristics of “slave economies” as distinct from Finley’s concept of “slave society”, and discussed various models of relationship between societies and slaveries.\textsuperscript{78} In some cases, models of slavery start from a large number of enslaved individuals and their fundamental importance for the economy, social structures, and social processes, in part also for the mentality and social psychology of most societies in world history. In the most important new global-historical approach, Joseph C. Miller has attempted to combine all the aspects of slavery (the capture, trade and transport of slaves, as well as the different sectors of slavery) under the concept of “slaving”, also in order to dynamize the extreme structuralizing of the concepts of “slavery systems” or Finley’s “slave societies” and “societies with slaves”.\textsuperscript{79} Miller presents tables on epochs of slaving, stretching from prehistory into the future, and appends to these three global-historical tables on “novelties in the Atlantic”, designed to emphasize what was specific about Atlantic slavery.\textsuperscript{80}

Of particular weight for a world and global history of slavery is Moses I. Finley’s attempt, which as I said, I greatly respect, to elaborate the


\textsuperscript{76} Georges Scelle, \textit{La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille: Contrats et traités d’assiento}, 2 vols (Paris, 1903–1906).


\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 100–102.
absoluteness of antique slavery vis-à-vis other forms of forced and involuntary labour.\textsuperscript{81} Many of Finley’s arguments still deserve consideration today, as Brent D. Shaw also stresses in his introduction to Finley’s works. One thing, however, is missing: it is always historians of classical antiquity who emphasize the idea of the exceptionality of their object of investigation. Two of Finley’s most important arguments are that of the “individuality” of enslavement and that of the inadequate reproduction of slave groups. The reality of the individuality of enslavement as a common basis of all conceivable types of slavery and unfree labour still requires further discussion and analysis – particularly in terms of world history. My own position is rather that of an actual similarity of basic characteristics of coerced and unfree labour as defined on the basis of slaveries (and of their historic individualities in particular contexts), above all because only this concept makes it possible for us to conceptualize in an integrative way the types and forms of slaveries in world and global history – from the perspective of the twenty-first century.

The “individuality” of antique slavery, in view of the mass enslavement of women, children, and prisoners of war in kin-slaveries and worldwide with the rise of other slaveries “without the name of slavery”, and in cultures with different norms, is rather a product on the one hand of the process of the sharper characterization of antique slave status in Roman law, and on the other hand of the reconstruction of Roman law in the thirteenth century against the background of the Italian slave trade (Genoa and Venice), above all along the line “from the Mongols to the Mamelukes”, but also of the global spread of Roman law with the European expansion and the “new” Atlantic slavery from c.1300–1650. One position seems to be clearer and clearer with ongoing research: the “new” Atlantic slavery raids in Africa, the peripheral Iberians, and later other Europeans, used the forces of transculturation/creolization and a technological complex around their ocean-going ships to overtake and control the Middle Passage.\textsuperscript{82}

The African and Atlantic slave trade, however, as well as Atlantic slaveries in modern times, are at the same time far more. In the rise of the “creole space” (the Atlantic, ocean shores and coastal zones, but also used for places around the Indian Ocean), as well as of trans-local and trans-imperial spaces of slavery, “before the nation”, as it were, and also in the fate of those affected, we see the founding violence, zones of influence, the spirit of the time, underlying structures, languages, and the beginnings of globalizations; slaveries, and especially the “new” Atlantic slavery and globalization, also show the “meaning” of early colonial expansions. It is

\textsuperscript{81} M.I. Finley, “The Emergence of a Slave Society”, in \textit{idem}, \textit{Ancient Slavery}, pp. 135–160, 137–145.

\textsuperscript{82} Tobias Green, \textit{The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589} (Cambridge [etc.], 2011).
with the slave trade and slaveries that the diasporas of African people in the Atlantic world (and beyond) arose. The “creole space” of Atlantization and early capital formation was marked by the most varied creole languages, displaying a common feature of “African” basic structures and European vocabulary.

The most important Atlantic bearers of the culture of the trade in humans and the Atlantization of Africa, Europe, and the Americas were Atlantic creoles even “beyond the Atlantic” (by and large, in the first generation, descendants of European fathers and indigenous mothers, whose families were generally in charge). In the early period of Atlantization (1300–1580), Atlantic creoles (tangomão˜s and lançados) played a leading role in trade in humans, particularly including the early transport of slaves to America after 1493. They had to deal very soon with the counter-reactions of monopolization and company formation, as well as marginalization and attempts at exclusion on the part of all other profiteers in the slave and human trade, including Europe-, Africa- and America-based sovereigns, monopolists, and wholesale banker-merchants (shipowners and armadores). For this reason, they often found themselves alongside former slaves, pirates, corsairs, and other anti-monopolists, or in general enemies of state regulations (cimarronaje as Caribbean-Atlantic culture). In the wake of the formation of the Anglo-Atlantic and a deliberate policy of Christianization and Europeanization (generally also with national exclusiveness), Atlantic creoles were often, though not always, pressed into service functions in relation to the European-Christian and “white”-dominated slave trade. Despite this, they remained, even en masse, bearers of a still scarcely researched Atlantic culture, and bearers of networks between America and Africa.

As opposed to the enslaved, who undoubtedly also included a number of Atlantic creoles (Ira Berlin), slave traders or their employees habitually moved between continents on the sea (or on rivers into the continental mass), i.e. back and forward, not just as slaves from Africa to America. The spread of maize, manioc (yucca and cassava), European cattle, horses, herd and guard animals (in particular, cattle, mules, horses, and dogs), groundnuts and tobacco, as well as Atlantic epidemics, formed an irregular biological background to these diasporas. The spread of yucca/manioc and of preservable tapioca flour characterized the early slave empire of Brazil-Congo-Angola. Alcohol and tobacco were a particular consumption vice of

83. Angela Bartens, Der kreolische Raum: Geschichte und Gegenwart (Helsinki, 1996).
the slave trade and the enslaved, but also goods for exchange in the slave and human trade. The extent to which opium and cocaine also played a role alongside alcohol and tobacco remains to be studied.

The capture of slaves, the slave trade, and slaveries were part of an early human capitalism, which from the start of the modern age in the narrower sense (c.1870) drew Africa into active capitalist development, but a development that in the Christian Atlantic states was deliberately marginalized (racist arguments about civilization and Christianity), and only by the fixing of capital value in money, along with European manufactured goods, became the instrument of early European trading capitalism in Europe and in the European colonies, summarized in the term *rescate* and broadly traceable in the history of the word *razzia* (trade/theft/enslavement).86

The trading routes of early mercantile capitalism were often mainly the routes of slave ships and slave caravans; the real rise in value took place on the marginalized Atlantic lines of the Middle Passage between Africa and the Americas. And both Atlantic slavery and the slaveries on the shores of the Indian Ocean and in the maritime lands of South-East Asia offer the most important and largest historical foundation for all forms of unfree labour in modern times.

**THE DOMINANCE OF “GREAT SLAVERIES”**

A basic problem of the structure of slavery and slave-trade research with a global-history orientation is its fixation on “great” slaveries. The reason for this is evidently that these “great” slaveries, meaning from a European perspective above all Roman slavery, produced a great corpus in terms of texts, legal discourses, essays, and historiographies, and still continue to produce these – studies of antiquity are among the strongest legitimation of European and neo-European superiority. With the other “great” hegemonic slavery: i.e. the Islamic-Persian-Egyptian-Indian, which produced a similar wealth of texts and historiographies, the European or North American perspective already has a harder time as well as with the “great slaveries” in Africa.87

Studies on the long-run history of the most varied local “small” slaveries “without the name of slavery” (but with a large number of specific names

and legal conceptualizations), or of slaveries based on kinship, raiding or sacrifice, can be found in the realm of ethnology and non-European anthropology; also in the local historiographies of many colonial areas and expansion processes (including Europe, for example, Carolingian and Viking expansion), pre-colonial regions and zones of contact between Europeans, their successors, and non-Europeans. 88

If there are beginnings of research into “prehistoric” forms of slavery or slaveries outside antique Greece and Rome (Gronenborn, Peschel, Heinen, Sommer, and Taylor), 89 most of these are overlaid by hegemonic slaveries, and have been conceptualized as “special forms” (like the slavery of the helots, a kind of slavery Sonderweg), quite markedly in the case of Finley’s “individuality” of antique Mediterranean slavery; “overwritten”, as media theory would put it. In this way, the history of slavery is repeatedly canonized in a kind of formation theory after the model “ancient–East–antiquity– (more recently) Islam–American-plantation-slavery–abolition–end”. The problem of a global perspective on slaveries and human trafficking in the twenty-first century is that today visible “great” slaveries in the tradition of “hegemonic” slaveries or legal ownership over human bodies no longer exist. The most interesting cases of different forms of slaveries (colonate, Leibeigenschaft, Viking and other Scandi-
navian slaveries, slaveries of the Mongols, Russians, or Chinese, or the


slavery of gypsies in Romania) and slave trades are debated today in medieval Eurasian history, far from this formation theory and in a comparative perspective with African forms of slavery.90

All the “prehistoric”, “small” slaveries belong to the major genus of kin- and age-group slaveries. Without the types of kin-slavery and transitional forms to larger slaveries (as with the Phoenicians and Etruscans),91 it is impossible to understand slavery outside the realm in which the concept of slavery in the “Roman” tradition applies; neither pre-colonial slaveries and the slave trades in Africa92 and in the Americas “without Europeans” nor elsewhere on the globe, including the dynamics of early slave exchange between Africans and Europeans, or Europeans and indigenous peoples, in the Americas. The sources of the Atlantic slave trade and the “great” slaveries formed on this basis lie in the “small” slaveries and the dynamic raiding slaveries of Africa, and, despite royal prohibition, also in the “small” slaveries on the peripheries of the European colonial empires in the Americas.93

Kin slaveries also existed within the “great” plantation slaveries, as Gilberto Freyre has impressively shown from the example of Brazil (this despite his conceptual errors). In other plantation societies, too, slave-owners and their employees had children with slave women. And in terms of perspective, it is particularly important to point out that present-day forms of slavery can no longer be grasped in terms of the concepts of “great” slaveries, but only those concepts of “small” slavery and concealed debt slaveries. Today, in 2012, far more slaves (and human trafficking in different kinds) exist than at any time in the past (estimates reaching from 27 million to as much as 270 million). The problem of the literature dealing with today’s forms of slavery and trade in humans is, that, with few exceptions (for example Kevin Bales),94 it is too much focused on


prostitution, transnational crime, or illegal migration, and separated from history in the very long run (longue durée), particularly that of these “small” forms of slavery and pawn-slaveriess.

**GERMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY ON SLAVERY**

Research on Atlantic slavery and other types of slavery in Germany can be described as an alternation between brilliance and silence. The brilliance was in the past, the silence is today.95 There is scarcely anything theoretical any more. Some of the earliest works of synthesis on the slave trade came from the pens of German historians (especially Römer, Sell, Sprengel, Hüne, and Häbler).96 The most important liberal manifesto against slavery in the nineteenth century was Alexander von Humboldt’s *Essay über die Insel Cuba*.97 Karl Marx had at least certain theoretical ideas about slavery (his misunderstanding of slavery as


an anomaly in capitalism’), and on the connection between “primitive” accumulation, English industrial capitalism, the slave trade, and slavery. It is clear today that accumulation is (up to now) eternal and that slavery is indeed capitalism. It is also increasingly clear that the Islamic territories and Africa also had a centrality because of their dynamic slaving, and it was peripheral spaces in the economic system (seen from north-western Europe), as in modern times the Americas (especially the USA, but also Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia and many other places) whose world-historical importance profited from the slave trade, slavery, forced migration, implanted resources, natural conditions and racism.

In the German language there is today no modern scientific synthesis on Atlantic slavery, and little genuine research. Important works stem from the Africa historians Heinrich Loth, Albert Wirz, Helmut Bley, and Jan-Georg Deutsch, as well as from world-history oriented historians such as Wolfgang Reinhard und Jürgen Osterhammel; historians of Latin America have dealt with the slave trade and slavery more in essays.


Loth published an analysis of the slave trade. Albert Wirz’s book is a survey in the style of Wallerstein, focused on the British and Anglo-American realm. A preferable source work is that of Peter Martin on Africans in the history and consciousness of Germans. Wolfgang Binder and Rüdiger Zoller have published the proceedings of congresses on slavery in the Americas. The synthesis *History of African Americans*, published in 1999 by Norbert Finzsch and fellow authors, places US slavery above all in the context of the “race and racism debate”.

CONCLUSION

The view represented by the author, however (on the basis of field and archival work), that the history of “slavery” today should be not so much a history of the institution of slavery, but rather and especially a transcultural history of actors, in the first place of slaves of both sexes (because there is least research on these), as well as of individual slave-owners, slave traders, and their ancillaries between the micro and macro history of different spaces (above all seas, oceans, islands and coasts), has not prevailed. In global history, analysis of slavery should be replaced by the history of slaveries, or of actors in these slaveries, in the tradition of “small” and kin slaveries, which extend up to the present. The syntheses published around 2008 for the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade by Britain and America were rather hasty anniversary-oriented essays, without any basis in research (with the exception of the Atlantic sections in *Schwarzes Amerika*), a fact that may be due not

least to a mistaken publication policy (and ignorance) on the part of publishers, particularly clearly expressed in a so-called Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei (Munich, 2009), which is more like a Christian-globalist pamphlet directed against what the author terms “Islamic slavery”.

The history of slaves is, still more than the history of the economic macro-structure of the “Atlantic slave trade”, or of the violent institution of “slavery” or the great ideology “racism”, a transcultural subject, but one partialized nationally or regionally by scientific traditions, perspectives, and the professionalization of historiographies; paradigmatically, this partialization is expressed in the context of a “nation” in Colombia or in still quasi-colonially structured spaces, such as the Caribbean, or in the slavery historiography of Venezuela, which is marked very strongly by Hubert Aimes (1907), Cuban historiography (Fernando Ortiz), as well as the Venezuelan “nationalization of Marxism” (Miguel Acosta Saignes).  

At the same time, the rise of a new historical problem consciousness for the history of slaves and slavery can be studied from the rise of these historiographies.

Translation: David Fernbach