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Disposition

Motherhood and slavery:

A Global Microhistory of a Swiss-Owned Plantation in

Bahia

(1820-1887)

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***Abstract:** My dissertation focuses on the 'Fazenda Victoria' in Ilhéus, a prominent nineteenth century plantation owned by two Swiss patricians, Gabriel von May (1791-1870) and Ferdinand von Steiger (1825-1887), between 1830 and 1887. Renowned for its coffee and cocoa production, the estate relied on the labour of approximately 200 enslaved individuals. Through the lense of "Fazenda Victoria" this project examines the role of enslaved women, children and men in a larger transimperial economic and political space connecting 19th century Brazil to Europe, including landlocked Switzerland. It draws on multiple sources from archives in Brazil in Europe, namely the account books (1836-1851) of the Victoria plantation, the owners' private correspondence as well as on administrative records in regional and national archives in Brazil. The project thereby reveals deeply ambiguous strategies developed by these Swiss plantation owners to perpetuate slavery in the face of abolition. These strategies included offering financial incentives for births to enslaved mothers, a practice previously undocumented in Brazilian historiography. By studying specific examples of these practices, this research illuminates how enslaved women and children both responded to and resisted such practices. It also reconstructs the lives of enslaved women and their families on the plantation through meticulous analysis of fragmented data scattered across accounting records spanning fifteen years (1836–1851). The periodisation of my thesis covers roughly the arrival of Gabriel von May in Brazil in 1820 until the death of Ferdinand von Steiger in Victoria in 1887. Through micro-historical analysis of the plantation, the project uncovers the central role of enslaved women's productive and reproductive labour on the plantation which ultimately resulted in generating the wealth accumulated by Swiss landowners and merchants in Brazil, while also revealing the underlying tensions in these exploitative relationships. Through examining the Swiss plantation owners far flung economic, political, and family ties in the transatlantic world this research also highlights deep entanglement between the Bahian and Brazilian slave economies and the industrialising, democratising economies of continental Europe, including Switzerland. Combining feminist, decolonial and transimperial approaches with micro- and macro-historical perspectives, this study ultimately allows for a broadening of the scope of transatlantic slavery studies and global racial capitalism: It exposes the often overlooked links between Swiss European economic ventures and Brazilian slavery, while bringing to the fore the historical experiences and the crucial role enslaved mothers and their children played in 19th century transatlantic histories.*

Research questions

At the center of this study are sources located in the State Archives of Bahia and the Archives of the Burgergemeinde Bern¹. Their current location, their origin, the fragments of information about the enslaved population found in their pages, and the new strategies revealed within their pages lead to several important questions: What was it like to be an enslaved woman on the Victoria plantation in the nineteenth century? What do the stories of dozens of enslaved women and their children born in Victoria tell us about transatlantic slavery, capitalism and trans-imperial history? What was the role of the enslaved female body in this system and how did women deal with it? How did the backgrounds of the two Swiss plantation owners influence the strategies they developed to perpetuate slavery in the face of abolition, and how did these strategies affect the lives of enslaved people, especially women? How did the Brazilian experience shape the actions and perspectives of these plantation owners? What role did the Victoria plantation play in the Swiss owners' economic, political and family networks encompassing

¹ Three of the main sources of this theses are the account books from Gabriel von May that covers the years 1836-1851: Mss.h.h.XII.315 Grand-livre (1): 1836 - mars 1847, 1836-1847.03 (Konvolut/Codices/Bände); Mss.h.h.XII.316 Grand-livre (2): avril 1847–1851, 1847.04-1851 (Konvolut/Codices/Bände) In: <https://katalog.burgerbib.ch/detail.aspx?ID=170942> and <https://katalog.burgerbib.ch/detail.aspx?ID=17094>, Visited in August 2022; The letters exchange between Ferdinand von Steiger and his family transcribed in Paiva de Figueiredo, A. (Ed.), *Der Freiherr zu Mato Virgem. Eigenverlag, 2021* and Mss.h.h.XXXVI.129. *Copies de lettres, 1846-1861*. 1846-1861. Sammelschachtel, 1 Schachtel and the Gabriel's von May notebooks located in the Burgergemeinde archives – I include among my main sources the memoirs of the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Habsburg - Maximilian I (1868) Emperor of Mexico. *Mato Virgem in Recollections of My Life*. 3 vols., new ed., with a preface, London, Vol 3:358.

many parts of Europe and the United States of America? In short: what does the history of a globally connected plantation tell us about the trans-imperial history of capitalism and Brazil's role in it ?

The timeframe of this research, from 1820 to 1887, encompasses the main legal milestones on Brazil's long and painful road to abolition. It begins with the arrival of Gabriel von May in Brazil and ends with the death of Ferdinand von Steiger, one year before the abolition of slavery. During this period, three major legal efforts were made by the Brazilian State under national and international pressure to gradually end slavery. The first, in 1831, aimed to abolish the international slave trade, but was short-lived. The second, in 1851, successfully ended the transatlantic slave trade. The third, the Free Womb Act of 1871, challenged the foundations of slavery by addressing *partus sequitur ventrem* - the principle that slave status was inherited matrilineally. With these legal shifts, especially after the abolition of the slave trade, enslavers' attention to enslaved women's reproductive labour and infant care increasingly and shifted from Africa to Brazil, where their role became central.² This change in reproductive responsibility coincided with what historian Dale Tomich³ calls the "second slavery," a period marked by the intensification of slavery in the Americas, despite the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Thus, Victoria plantation can be understood as a portrait of a global, violent society within a system of exploitation in the south of Bahia covering most part of the nineteenth century.

Deeply involved in this system were the subsequent owners of Fazenda Victoria, Gabriel von May and Ferdinand von Steiger, Bernese patricians and former military officers who had served various colonial powers - including Britain, Holland and Prussia. In the Brazilian Empire, both men held prominent positions within Bahia's aristocratic, slave-owning elite in the nineteenth century. They were part of a Swiss Protestant mercantile elite linked through family and economic ties to commercial and banking networks in Lisbon, Paris, Nantes, Le Havre, Amsterdam, New York, London, Florence and other European centres that orchestrated trade with the colonial world. The fact that Victoria - one of the most important plantations in Bahia in the early nineteenth century - was owned by Swiss families was therefore no coincidence. Instead, it reveals a largely unexplored pattern: the ways in which Brazil's nineteenth-century slave economy was continuously and structurally linked to the economies of industrialising and democratising nations across continental Europe, including landlocked Switzerland.

Historiography

Since the 1970s, Swiss historians have thoroughly researched the Swiss presence in Brazil during the nineteenth century, focusing mainly on commercial, financial, scientific and migratory exchanges.⁴

² Paton, Diana « Gender History, Global History, and Atlantic Slavery: On Racial Capitalism and Social Reproduction », *The American Historical Review*, Volume 127, Issue 2, June 2022, P. 727-729

³ Tomich, Dale. *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital and World Economy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004

⁴ Müller, J. (1972). *Die Schweizeriedlung Helvetia im Staat São Paulo, Brasilien*. Juris Druck. ; Müller, J. (1972). *Die Schweizeriedlung Helvetia im Staat São Paulo, Brasilien*. Juris Druck ; Nicoulin, Martin. (1973). *La Genèse de Nova Friburgo : Émigration et Colonisation Suisse Au Brésil 1817-1827* (Études et Recherches d'histoire Contemporaine Série Historique-Éditions universitaires); Ziegler, B. (1985). *Schweizer statt Sklaven : schweizerische Auswanderer in den Kaffee-Plantagen von São Paulo (1852-1866)*. Steiner-Verlag-Wiesbaden. Ziegler, B. (1988). Schweizerische Kaufleute in Brasilien im 19. Jahrhundert. *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas*, 167 ; Veyrassat, B. (1994). *Réseaux d'affaires Internationaux, Émigrations et Exportations En Amérique Latine Au XIXe Siècle : Le Commerce Suisse Aux Amériques = International Business Networks, Emigration and Exports to Latin America in the Nineteenth Century : Swiss Trade with the Americas*. (Publications Du Centre d'histoire Économique Internationale de l'Université de Genève). Librairie Droz; Schneider, L. (1997). *Die Politik des Bundes Gegenüber Projektierten Kolonisationsunternehmen in Argentinien Und Brasilien: Ein Beitrag Zur Organisierten Auswanderung Aus Der Schweiz (1880-1939)* [Geist Und Werk Der Zeiten: Arbeiten Aus Dem Hist. Seminar Der

However, this historiography has been limited in its attempts to understand these topics as part of a global and interconnected history embedded in Brazilian local dynamics. Despite significant contributions, Swiss historiography has often generalised or overlooked specific groups and individuals with whom the Swiss interacted, particularly enslaved men, women and children. Moreover, it has also remained heavily reliant on Swiss sources and archives.

In the last 15 years, research into Switzerland's colonial past has intensified. A new generation of scholars and anti-racism activists has turned to history to challenge the myths of Switzerland's spatial isolation and ideological neutrality.⁵ Important works on Swiss colonial history, colonial heritage and global connections have emphasised the need to examine Swiss history 'from the margins'. However, multivocality, representing the experiences of the colonised or local counterparts, is still often absent, either due to a lack of resources, sources, linguistic and cultural barriers, or a lack of collaboration with scholars from the regions studied. Although Switzerland maintains significant economic, cultural and migratory ties with Brazil to this day, Brazilian Swiss historical relations remain understudied.

Apart from the *Ibicaba Revolt* (1856) and Thomas Davatz's book, *Memoirs of a Swiss Settler in Brazil* (1858),⁶ which are frequently mentioned in general works on Brazilian history and in studies on migration and labour, the national origins of European settlers, including the Swiss, have not been a particularly prominent topic in Brazilian historiography. However, a specific body of literature on Swiss and German migration to Brazil provides insights into the distribution of these colonies across the country.⁷ In the 1990s, an interest in the study of specific plantations and regions associated with Swiss settlers led to the production of dissertations and articles in Brazil.⁸ Most of these publications focused on Swiss settlements, such as Nova Friburgo or Leopoldina in southern Bahia. Although regional historians generally show little interest in the Swiss identity of plantation owners and tend to begin their studies with the establishment of these settlers in the areas under study, they have produced social, economic, and cultural analyses of these properties that are relevant to this research.

Universität Zürich]; Fluck, M. R. (2004). *Basler Missionare in Brasilien: Auswanderung, Erweckung und Kirchenwerdung im 19. Jahrhundert*. (Peter Lang).

⁵ Zangger, A. (2014). *Koloniale Schweiz. Ein Stück Globalgeschichte zwischen Europa und Südostasien (1860-1930)*.

Transcript Verlag; David, T., Etemad, B., & M.Schaufelbuehl, J. (2005). *Schwarze Geschäfte. Die Beteiligung von Schweizern an Sklaverei und Sklavenhandel im 18. Und 19. Jahrhundert*. Limmat Verlag; Purtschert, Patricia; Lüthi, Barbara; Falk, Francesca (2013) *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*, Bielefeld. Transcript Verlag; Purtschert, P., & Fischer-Tiné, H. (2015). *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*; Kupper, Patrick; Schär, Bernhard C. (Hg.) (2015) : *Les Naturalistes. A la découverte de la Suisse et du monde (1800-2015)*. Baden : Hier und Jetzt.

⁶ Davatz, Thomas (1850) *Mémoires de um colono no Brasil*, radução, prefácio e notas de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. Date: 1941

⁷ L Oberacker Jr., Carlos H. (1975). *Jorge Antonio Von Schaeffer, criador da primeira corrente emigratória alemã para o Brasil*. Porto Alegre: Metrópole; Hall, Michael M. (1976). *Reformadores de classe média no Império Brasileiro: A Sociedade Central de Imigração*. Revista de História. São Paulo, ano XXVII, v. LIII; Hall, Michael M. (1980). *The Origins of Mass Immigration in Brazil, 1871-1914*. Columbia University; Lyra, Henrique Jorge Buckingham. (1982). *Colonos e colônias – uma avaliação das experiências de colonização agrícola na Bahia na segunda metade do século XIX*. Dissertação de mestrado em Ciências Sociais, Universidade Federal da Bahia – Salvador; Oberacker Júnior, Carlos H. (1987). *A colônia Leopoldina-Frankental na Bahia meridional; uma colônia europeia de plantadores no Brasil*. In: Revista do IHGB, Rio de Janeiro, v. 148, n. 354-357, p. 118-140, jan.-mar.

⁸ Araujo, J. R. (1992). *Nova Friburgo: O Processo de Urbanização Da 'Suíça Brasileira* [Dissertação de Mestrado]; Sanglard, G. (2003). De Nova Friburgo a Fribourg através das letras : A colonização suíça vista pelos próprios imigrantes. *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos*, 10(1), 173-202. Corrêa, L. S. (2003). *A torturante ausência de uma presença : A imigração alemã na Bahia do século XIX - um estudo de caso*. [Tese (PhD)]. Universidade de São Paulo. Corrêa, L. S. (2005). O resgate de um esquecimento. A colônia de Leopoldina. *GEographia*, 7(13), 87-111. Oliveira, W. F. de. (2007). *A Saga Dos Suíça No Brasil, 1557-1945*. Editora Letradagua. Proença, A. T. de A. (2017). *Vida de Médico No Interior Fluminense: A Trajetória de Carlos Eboli Em Cantagalo e Nova Friburgo (1860-1880)*. Fiocruz. Mata, Iacy Maia et Silva, Ricardo Tadeu Caíres (2021) « Resistência e rebelião. Escravidão e pós-abolição no extremo sul da Bahia (1880-1889)», in Gomes, Flávio dos Santos et Reis, João José, *Revoltas escravas no Brasil*, São Paulo, 2021, p. 539-588; Miki, Yuko (2021) « Política antiescravista na fronteira. São Mateus, Espírito Santo (1884)», in Gomes, Flávio dos Santos et Reis, João José, *Revoltas escravas no Brasil*, São Paulo, 2021, p. 512-538.

For the region of Ilhéus, the Victoria Plantation in the nineteenth century and its Swiss owners, particularly Ferdinand von Steiger, there are rather broad but key studies that have been used in this thesis. In particular, the works of Mary Ann Mahony⁹, André Luiz Rosa Ribeiro¹⁰ and Marcelo Henrique Dias¹¹, which, in addition to the settlement of Europeans in the region, have provided a deeper understanding of local families and genealogies, the demographic profile - including both free and enslaved populations - and the predominant economic formation of the region, which included the main crops, such as sugar, coffee and cocoa.

Between 2015 and 2016, André Paiva Figueiredo, a descendant of Ferdinand von Steiger, began publishing a compilation and transcription of Ferdinand von Steiger's letters to his family in Europe (1855-1887) on a blog,¹² along with a biography of Ferdinand written by his brother, Albert Steiger, in 1891. The original letters and biography are kept in the Burgerbibliothek in Bern. In 2020, André Paiva published these letters in book form, first in the original languages (German and French), and in 2021 in Portuguese, under the title *O Barão de Mato Virgem* (in German, *Der Freiherr zu Mato Virgem*).¹³ Both the publication of the letters on the blog and the physical edition have renewed interest in the study of the Victoria Plantation, Ferdinand von Steiger and his Brazilian family. Since then, two doctoral theses have made direct use of this correspondence.

The first, by Ayalla Oliveira Silva (2020),¹⁴ examines the relationship between Ferdinand von Steiger and the Camacã indigenous nation, focusing on the Sá-Steiger family's economic interests in indigenous lands and the colonisation process in southern Bahia, particularly through the establishment of indigenous military colonies - a project that von Steiger himself experimented with. In 2022, Victor Santos Gonçalves defended his doctoral thesis,¹⁵ which examines the Steiger family's strategies for

⁹ Mahony, M. (1996) *The World Cacao Made: Society, Politics, and History in Southern Bahia, Brazil, 1822-1919*, Dissertation (Ph.D. in Philosophy), New Haven : Graduate School of Yale University; Mahony, M. (1997) « Afro-Brazilians, Land Reform, and the Question of Social Mobility in Southern Bahia, 1880-1920 », *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 34, n° 2, p. 59-79; Mahony, M. (2001) « “Instrumentos necessários”: escravidão e posse de escravos no sul da Bahia no século XIX, 1822-1889 », *Afro-Asia*, n. 25-26, p. 95-139; Mahony, M. (2006) « The Local and the Global : Internal and External Factors in the Development of Bahia's Cacao Sector », in MARICHAL Carlos *et alii* (dir.), *From silver to cocaine : Latin American commodity chains and the building of the world economy, 1500-2000*, Durham : Duke University Press, 2006, p. 174-203; Mahony, M. (2007) « Um passado para justificar o presente: memória coletiva, representação histórica e dominação política na região cacauera da Bahia », *Sociedade Escravista e Pós-Abolição - Cadernos de Ciências Humanas*, vol. 10, n° 18, 2007, p. 717-793; Mahony, M. (2008) « Creativity under Constraint: Enslaved Afro-Brazilian Families in Brazil's Cacao Area, 1870-1890 », *Journal of Social History*, vol. 41, n° 3, p. 633-666, DOI: [10.1353/jsh.2008.0050](https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2008.0050) ; Mahony, M. et Póvoas, Ruy (org.) (2012) « Em busca de Mejiçã e sua família: Um diálogo entre a oralidade e a documentação escrita », in *Mejiçã e o contexto da escravidão*, Ilhéus: EDITUS - Editora da UESC; Mahony, M. (2015) « Um passado para justificar o presente: memória coletiva, representação histórica e dominação política na região cacauera da Bahia », *Especiaria: Cadernos de Ciências Humanas*, vol. 10, n° 18, p. 737-798; Mahony, M. (2019, January 25). Cacao Growing in the State of Bahia: A Socio-Political History. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. Retrieved 10 Nov. 2024, from <https://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-694>.

¹⁰ Rosa Ribeiro, André Luiz (2001) *Família, poder e mito: o município de S. Jorge de Ilhéus (1880- 1912)*, Ilhéus: EDITUS - Editora da UESC, 2001, <http://www.uesc.br/editora/livrosdigitais/familia-poder-mito.pdf>; Rosa Ribeiro, André Luiz (2008) *Urbanização, poder e práticas relativas à morte no sul da Bahia, 1880-1950*, Programa de Pós- Graduação em História da UFBA, Ilhéus : FFCH / UFBA, <https://repositorio.ufba.br/handle/ri/11238>; Rosa Ribeiro, André Luiz (2008) *Urbanização, poder e práticas relativas à morte no sul da Bahia, 1880-1950*, Programa de Pós- Graduação em História da UFBA, Ilhéus: FFCH / UFBA, <https://repositorio.ufba.br/handle/ri/11238>.

¹¹ Dias, Marcelo Henrique (2019) *Economia, sociedade e paisagens da Capitania de Ilhéus*, Ilhéus : EDITUS - Editora da UESC, 2019, 339 p., <https://doi.org/10.7476/9786586213249>.

¹² Paiva de Figueiredo, André, « Ferdinand Karl Rudolf v. Steiger (1825 - 1887) », 2016-2015, <http://ferdinandvsteiger.blogspot.com.br/>.

¹³ In Portuguese: Figueiredo, André Paiva (2021) *O Barão de Mato Virgem*, UICLAP. In German and French: Figueiredo, André Paiva (dir.), *Der Freiherr zu Mato Virgem*, Basel : Eigenverlag, 2021.

¹⁴ Silva Ayalla Oliveira (2020) *Camacãs, Pataxós e Botocudos no Sul da Bahia: Indigenismo, Colonização e Etnopolítica (1850-1879)*, Tese (Doutorado em História) - Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, Programa de Pós-Graduação em História, Seropédica, 318 p. Silva, Ayalla Oliveira (2021) « De inimigos a bons amigos? Os Camacã e o Barão Fernando Steiger no quadro da interiorização da colonização na província da Bahia. », *Revista Brasileira de História*, vol. 41, n° 88, p. 81-105. In 2018, Ayalla O. Silva had already published a work on indigenism and colonisation in southern Bahia. Ferdinand von Steiger's activities and interests had already been researched, but without the support of his correspondence. Silva, Ayalla Oliveira (2018) *Ordem imperial e aldeamento indígena Camacãs, Gueréns e Pataxós do Sul da Bahia*, Ilhéus: EDITUS - Editora da UESC.

¹⁵ Gonçalves, Victor Santos (2022) *"Levar um pouco de água ao fogo em que se incendiara": senhores e escravos às vésperas da abolição, Ilhéus, BA (1874-1893)*, Tese (Doutorado em História) - Instituto de Ciências Humanas e Sociais, Seropédica : Universidade Federal Rural do

gradual emancipation and the ways in which enslaved and freed families on the Victoria plantation negotiated their freedom in the 1870s and 1880s and labour conditions after abolition until 1895. His work approaches the crisis of slavery from a relational perspective, analysing the interactions between the enslaver's family and the enslaved population.

The contributions of both authors, including their recent work and previous studies, are highly relevant to my research. While they address significant aspects of the relationships between Ferdinand von Steiger, his family and those around him, my research aims to deepen our understanding of these individuals in their transimperial context. My study contributes to a Brazilian and Swiss historiography by offering a reading of materials related to Ferdinand von Steiger from a Swiss perspective, grounded in a detailed understanding of the historical context of nineteenth-century protestant-patrician Switzerland, which both received Ferdinand von Steiger's letters and played a role in shaping his worldview.

I also intend to extend this historiography by going further back in time, starting with the first Swiss owner of Victoria Plantation, Gabriel von May. Von Steiger's uncle, von May was an officer and merchant with an international network of contacts, yet he is often overlooked in many of these studies. The accounting records and business correspondence left by von May allow me not only to revisit his role, but also to understand the fundamental practices of managing enslaved people (specially enslaved women) that began on Victoria Plantation already in the end of the 1820s to the beginning of the 1830s. Finally, my research emphasis is on gender. It shifts the focus of Swiss and Brazilian historical narratives towards new historiographical perspectives on Switzerland's colonial and transatlantic past. Rather than re-examining better-documented male figures such as von May and von Steiger, I draw attention to the lives of enslaved women on the plantation, their children, and the complex dynamics between these contrasting groups. By closely analysing the historiography and archival records of Victoria Plantation preserved on both sides of the Atlantic, I aim to write a micro-global history¹⁶ of the plantation with particular attention to the plantation-owning family, the enslaved women and their families, and their intricate relationships.

The provision of financial incentives for childbearing, along with other strategies designed to perpetuate slavery, to increase the productivity and wealth of the two Swiss plantation owners, corresponds to the

Rio de Janeiro, 611 p., <https://rima.ufrj.br/jspui/handle/20.500.14407/17622>. Gonçalves, Victor Santos (2022) A família Steiger : digressões ou reminiscências escravistas no pós-abolição? (Bahia, 1860-1890). Revista Transversos. Dossiê: Escravidão e liberdade no Brasil Independente. Rio de Janeiro, nº. 24, pp. 143-166. Like Ayalla O. Silva, the historian Victor dos Santos Gonçalves also studied the Victoria plantation and the enslaved families on the estate in his 2014 master's thesis: Gonçalves, Victor Santos (2014) *Escravos e senhores na terra do cacau: alforrias e família escrava (São Jorge dos Ilhéus, 1806-1888)*, Dissertação de mestrado, Salvador, BA: Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Universidade Federal da Bahia, 214 p., <https://repositorio.ufba.br/handle/ri/17603> ;

¹⁶ To answer my research questions, I intend to apply what the historian Ricardo Pirola calls Global History seen from below or micro-global history. Pirola understands the concept of global history "as the ability to make an internationally connected history, in which the fact that events in the past are linked to larger networks of trade, exchange of ideas, migrations, cultural contacts, etc. is highlighted." Inspired by Natalie Zemon Davis' proposals to produce global histories, he demonstrates that "global history and the historical narrative based on the trajectory of simple men and women, of enslaved people, of rebels, in short, flesh and blood people, are not separated". Pirola, Ricardo (2020) *História Global "Vista de Baixo"* e Agência: Conceitos, Estratégias de Pesquisa e Desafios. In: *História e Historiografia do Trabalho Escravo no Brasil: Novas Perspectivas*, Ré, Henrique A.; Saes, Laurent A. M.; Vellozo, Gustavo (org), São Paulo: Publicações BBM. pp. 125-156 & Natalie Zemon Davis (2011). *Decentering History: Local stories and cultural crossings in a global world in: History and Theory*, 50(2), 188–202. Further on micro-global history: Ginzburg, C. (2005). *Latitude, slaves, and the Bible: An experiment in microhistory*. *Critical Inquiry*, 31(3), 665–683. <https://doi.org/10.1086/430989>; Andrade, T. (2010). *A Chinese farmer, two African boys, and a warlord: Toward a global microhistory*. *Journal of World History*, 21(4), 573–591; Medick, H. (2016). *Turning global? Microhistory in extension*. *Historische Anthropologie*, 24(2), 241–252. <https://doi.org/10.7788/ha-2016-0206>; Bohorquez, J. (2018). *Microglobal history: Agencia, sociedad y pobreza de la historia cultural postestructural*. *Historia Crítica*, 69 (Julio-septiembre), 79–89; Ghobrial, J.-P. A. (2019). *Introduction: Seeing the world like a microhistorian*. *Past & Present*, 242(Supplement 14), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz046>; Mathieu, J. (2021). *A case for global microhistory*. *Histories*, 1(1), 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/histories1010001>

theoretical frameworks proposed by scholars such as Diane Paton¹⁷ and Maria Helena Pereira Toledo Machado¹⁸, who argue for a re-evaluation of global capitalism through the lens of the exploitation of enslaved African women's maternity, care, productive and reproductive labour. It is precisely alongside a historiography that focuses on enslaved families, motherhood, gender and slavery¹⁹, and the relationships between slave owners and enslaved individuals²⁰, applied to the experience of nineteenth-century Victoria, that I find the tools to analyse the archival sources.

Methods and Archives

My primary research draws extensively from Gabriel von May's account book located in the archive of the city of Bern's patrician families (the Burgerbibliothek) which has detailed records of enslaved persons from 1836 to 1887. The accounts are organised by year and by subject, with categories such as 'ouvriers' (worker), 'ménage' (household), 'plantation', 'entretien des esclaves' (slave maintenance), or names such as 'Yetzer & Co', 'Gabriel von May' and 'F. von Steiger'. The right-hand side is called Avoir (credit) and the left-hand side Doit (debit), where receipts and payments are recorded. I was particularly interested in the sections relating to the expenses of the plantation's enslaved people. In these sections I find all sorts of information relating to both groups and the individuals. This systematic collection of data allows me to reconstruct key events in their lives, trace family genealogies and identify patterns, inconsistencies or unusual occurrences.

In addition, I supplement this data with references to individuals found in archival documents written in French, German, and Portuguese, primarily housed in the State Archive of Bahia in Brazil and the Burgergemeinde Archive in Bern, Switzerland. These sources include criminal records such as police files or criminal investigations, commercial and personal letters, inventories, and official records. Such materials broaden my analysis both temporally and geographically, enabling me to trace nearly three

¹⁷ Paton, Diana (2022) « Gender History, Global History, and Atlantic Slavery: On Racial Capitalism and Social Reproduction », *The American Historical Review*, Volume 127, Issue 2, June 2022, Pages 726–754

¹⁸ Machado, Maria Helena Pereira Toledo (2023) *Marília Bueno de Araújo Ariza, Reclamando a liberdade: mulheres em busca de emancipação em sociedades escravistas nas Américas (séculos XVIII e XIX)*. Tempo; 29 (1): 229–34. 1

¹⁹ Barbara Bush-Slimani (1993) «Hard Labour: Women, Childbirth and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies », *History Workshop*, n° 36, Oxford University Press, p. 83-99; Beth Herzfeld, (2002) « Slavery and Gender: Women's Double Exploitation », *Gender and Development*, vol. 10, n° 1, [Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Oxfam GB], p. 50-55; Stephanie M. H. Camp, (2002) « The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861 », *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 68, n° 3, Southern Historical Association, p. 533-572; Ballantyne Tony et Burton Antoinette (dir.) (2005) *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, Duke University Press; Bahadur Gaiutra (2014) *Coolie woman: the odyssey of indenture*, Chicago : The University of Chicago Press; Brenda E. Stevenson (2013) « Introduction: Women, Slavery, and the Atlantic World », *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 98, n° 1, Association for the Study of African American Life and History. P. 1-6; Fuentes Marisa J., *Dispossessed Lives*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016; Turner Sasha (2017) *Contested Bodies*, University of Pennsylvania Press; Cowling, C. (Org.); Machado, M. H. P. T. (Org.); West, E. (Org.); Paton, D. (Org.) (2017). *Mothering slaves: comparative perspectives on motherhood, childlessness, and the care of children in Atlantic slave societies*. 1o. ed. Nova York: Routledge; Machado, Maria Helena Pereira Toledo; Paton, D. (Org.); Cowling, C. (Org.); Telles, Lorena Féres da Silva (2018) *Teresa Benguela e Felipa Crioula estavam grávidas: maternidade e escravidão no Rio de Janeiro (século XIX)*, Tese (Doutorado), Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de São Paulo. Departamento de História. Área de concentração: História Social, São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo; West, E. (Org.) (2020) *Motherhood, Childlessness and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies*. 1. ed. Londres: Routledge Studies in Slave and Post-Slave Societies and Cultures, v. 1; Brito, L. C., Viana, I. da S., & Gomes, F. dos S. (2021). *Ventres livres? gênero, maternidade e legislação*. São Paulo: Unesp; Collins Jane-Marie (2023) *Emancipatory Narratives & Enslaved Motherhood: Bahia, Brazil, 1830-1888*, Liverpool University Press; Roth, C. (2024). *In the family way: Incest, fertility control, and the power of the patriarchal family in Brazil*. In *Intimate Politics* (1st ed., p. 19). Routledge.

²⁰ Machado, M. H. P. T. (2014) *Crime e Escravidão*. Edição revista e ampliada. 2o. ed. São Paulo: EDUSP; Cooper Owens, D. (2017). *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press; Fischer, B., & Grinberg, K. (Eds.). (2022). *The Boundaries of Freedom: Slavery, Abolition, and the Making of Modern Brazil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Roth, C., & Paton, D. (Eds.). (2024). *Intimate Politics: Fertility Control in Global Historical Perspective* (1st ed.). Routledge.

generations of enslaved individuals living in Victoria, including people who have been acquired in 1823, to the abolition of slavery in 1888.

By integrating this data with existing literature on Brazilian and Swiss trans-imperial connections, gender, and slavery, I am able to reconstruct the political, legal, cultural, social, and environmental contexts in which these individuals lived. I analyze these documents alongside existing historiography, guided by the research questions I have developed. Even in isolation, the systematic organization of socio-demographic data and the events they document reveals significant aspects of enslaved individuals' lives.

Contributions to the field

Among the groundbreaking contributions of this dissertation is its re-examination of Swiss patrician history from an overlooked transimperial perspective, analysing it alongside those who are often omitted from current narratives but who, against their will, contributed significantly to the wealth of Swiss elites - enslaved women.

By cross-referencing distant sources on Fazenda Victoria, new information has come to light. One notable example is the financial incentives for the birth of enslaved children on the plantation, first documented in the memoirs of Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Habsburg²¹, who described his visit to Ilhéus in 1860. Historians specialising in the Ilhéus region, such as Mary-Ann Mahony²² and André Luiz Rosa Ribeiro²³, have attributed the introduction of this practice to Ferdinand von Steiger. However, my analysis of the accounts left by Gabriel von May in the Bernese archives shows that this practice originated in 1837, during von May's ownership and administration of Fazenda Victoria. My thesis argues that both von May and von Steiger were fully aware that their wealth depended directly on the productive and reproductive labour of enslaved women and actively sought to increase it. By analysing such strategies this dissertation sheds light on the broader social dynamics, individual personalities and transnational influences involved in this exploitation.

Furthermore, my thesis proposes a qualitative reading of sources such as accounting records and commercial correspondence, which are traditionally used in purely quantitative analyses. The aim is to examine accounting entries by focusing more on the qualitative analyses of numerical data, which captures the essence of every 'entry' or 'exit'. This brief information was often written with the intention of summarising data in a way that could be understood by different people (maybe in Bahia or Bern) and in different time frames. I am also interested in the pencil scribbles and occasional remarks and observations made directly in the table, over data or in the margins. This method offers a new insight into understanding the lives of enslaved people, free workers, indigenous people, in short, those whose lives often remain outside the main narrative and are rarely documented.

²¹ Maximilian I (1868) Emperor of Mexico. *Mato Virgem in Recollections of My Life*. 3 vols., new ed., with a preface, London, Vol 3:358.

²² Mahony, M. A. (1996). *The World Cacao Made: Society, Politics, and History in Southern Bahia, Brazil, 1822-1919* [Dissertation (Ph.D. in Philosophy)]. Graduate School of Yale University. New Haven. P. 329.

²³ Ribeiro, A. L. R. (2017) *In memoriam: urbanismo, literatura e morte*, EDITUS - Editora da UESC, pp. 48-49

By analysing the network of Gabriel von May and Ferdinand von Steiger, this research also employs a transimperial global framework to trace the connections between empires and their subjects, highlighting the flows of capital, labour and culture. This integrated perspective reveals how power structures shaped by gender, race and social status were manifested on the plantation, offering deeper insights into the complexities of colonial power dynamics.

By weaving together these diverse sources and theoretical frameworks, my research illuminates the intertwined narratives of gender, race, and global history. This multifaceted approach deepens our understanding of the legacies of slavery and the complex interplay of power, identity, and resistance in the transimperial context of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, my work contributes to transatlantic historiography of slavery by exploring the nuanced relationships between gender, agency, power, and global capitalism.

Chapter outline and short description

Introduction

Victoria: A Swiss-owned plantation in Ilhéus

The Swiss presence in Bahia

Genesis of Victoria

Slavery and motherhood

The legal framework of slavery in nineteenth century Bahia

Literature Review

Research Methodology

Chapter Description

Relevance & Contributions

Chapter One: The lives of enslaved women on Victoria Plantation

What was it like to be an enslaved woman in Ilhéus and on Victoria Plantation in the nineteenth century? How did their lives unfold at different stages? How did they experience motherhood, childbirth and child rearing?

This chapter is divided into two parts. First, I will give an overview of the general conditions of enslaved women in Victoria, covering topics such as: generations, food, family, health (including geophagy), generational particularities, daily life, violence and care.

In the second part, I will delve into specific case studies and personal experiences. These cases will be divided into sub-sections and will serve to illustrate the relationships between enslavers and enslaved women, the agency of these women, and the living conditions they faced during different periods of the nineteenth century.

1.1 Maria, her son and the escape

1.2 Marcus, Rosa's son

1.3 The legal case of Vicenzo - Mother Delfina and Father Anastasio (1887) / Insights into slave family dynamics and abolitionist efforts

1.4 Steiger vs. Camara - Co-option of the enslaved women and children of Egydio Camara, his father-in-law

Chapter Two: Management strategies and paternalism

How did the backgrounds of the two Swiss plantation owners influence their management practices and the lives of enslaved people, especially women? Can we find traces of their military experience in their management practices? How did their Brazilian experiences shape their actions and perspectives as plantation owners?

I will begin the second chapter with an overview of the plantation system in Brazil and Ilhéus, and how Victoria fit into this system. Particular attention will be paid to the management practices imposed by Gabriel von May, Ferdinand von Steiger and their families. I aim to trace their knowledge back to continental Europe, Switzerland, Brazil or other colonial experiences. I will explore different management practices, forms of control, punishment and reward. Where possible, I will describe the reactions of enslaved individuals to these practices.

2.1 'Prime a Rosa', 'Prime a Theresa' - rewards and incentives in the dynamics of the plantation

2.2 The management of rituals (birth, marriage and death rituals) - how they were appropriated, manifested and used by different actors on the plantation.

2.4 "Vous devez donner l'exemple, agir ponctuellement et énergiquement !" Punishment, control and paternalism in Victoria

2.5 'My personal army' - Von Steiger and the indigenous people in and around Victoria

Chapter Three: Patricians in Bern, Officers in Europe and Slavers in Ilhéus

What do Victoria and its inhabitants tell us about the trans-imperial globality of capitalism and transatlantic slavery? What was the role of Swiss patricians and Brazilian aristocracy in this context? How far did the experiences of enslaved people and enslavers travel from Victoria?

I will begin this chapter by presenting the biographies of the two owners of Victoria and examining their different intentions for the plantation. I will then describe their family ties, their local and transimperial connections, and the extent of their influence. I will trace the various institutions that encountered Victoria and its inhabitants, from museums, imperial houses and embassies to slave traders and smugglers.

3.1 European Swiss Plantation Owners in Bahia - Von May's Business Project / Von Steiger's Life Project - Fazenda Vitoria

3.1.1 Von May - Meuron & Cia / De Pury / Jetzler and Co / Ilhéus

3.1.2 Von Steiger - Sá Camara Family

3.2 Global Connections - Lisbon's Foreign Trade Elite / Turntable and Gateway to the Atlantic - London, New York and Continental Europe

3.3 Bern in the early nineteenth century - patricians, officers, Protestants, conservatives and... old-fashioned traditions

Conclusion