
Slavery, Resistance and Democracy

Exploring Swiss-Brazilian
connections in the 19th century
Atlantic world

5–7 November 2025
University of Lausanne (UNIL)
Amphimax 414

Convenors: Bernhard C. Schär and
Izabel Barros (UNIL)



The conference will mainly be
conducted in English

Supported by the IEP (Institute of
Political Studies of the University of
Lausanne) and Atelier des Histoires

At first glance, Brazil and Switzerland may seem worlds apart—one a vast, tropical nation in South America, the other a small, landlocked country in the heart of Europe. While Brazil grew into the largest economy based on slavery in the 19th century, neutral Switzerland established itself as one of the first democracies in 1848. Yet, beneath the surface, since the early modern period, both countries have been embedded in a vast web of transatlantic connections that have profoundly shaped both nations. By exploring the underlying webs of economic, political, and cultural networks and exchanges between Brazil and Switzerland, this conference seeks firstly to historicize the apparent contradiction between slavery and democracy in the 19th century and secondly explore its ongoing legacies. It brings together scholars from Brazil, Europe, and the United States who study the history of exchanges in the southern transatlantic world. The conference is part of the SNSF Eccellenza research project on “Moral and Economic Entrepreneurship: A collaborative History of Global Switzerland” directed by Bernhard C. Schär at the University of Lausanne’s Institute for Political Studies.

17.00—19.00

SALON HISTORIQUE – HOW HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF SLAVERY, TRADE AND MIGRATION EVOLVED IN SWITZERLAND AND BRAZIL SINCE THE 1980S

Béatrice Ziegler, Professor emeritus, FHNW & University of Zurich

Rafael de Bivar Marquese, University of São Paulo

Mary Ann Mahony, Central Connecticut State University

Maria Helena P. T. Machado, University of São Paulo

Moderators:
Bernhard C. Schär and Izabel Barros, University of Lausanne

Welcome apéritif

Thursday 6 November 2025

9.00—10.30

**SLAVERY, GENDER, INDIGENOUS
HISTORY AND AGENCY**

Chair: Rahel Kunz

Izabel Barros, University of Lausanne:

Beyond the Ledger: Enslaved Women's
Lives on a Swiss-Owned Plantation in
19th century Ilhéus, Bahia

Ayalla Oliveira Silva, Federal University
of Pernambuco

The Camacã indigenous nation and the
plantation owner Fernando Steiger:
agricultural frontier, labor relations,
and indigenous resistance in Ilhéus,
Brazil, in the 19th Century

Mary Ann Mahony, Central Connecticut
State University:

Incorporating Newcomers: Slave
owning and the Extended Sá Family

11.00—12.30

**INDUSTRY, SLAVERY AND
EUROPEAN MIGRATION**

Chair: Pierre Eichenberger

Hans Fässler, Independent researcher:

“The Curse of Dishonoured Humanity”
MP Wilhelm Joos and the Swiss
Parliamentary Debate of 1863/1864 on
Swiss Slaveholders in Brazil

André Nicacio, Independent
researcher:

Powered by steam, driven by slave
labor: the Porchat factories and São
Paulo's first industrialization
(1839–1888)

Fabio Rossinelli, University of
Lausanne:

The role of the state behind Swiss
expansion in Brazil in the long 19th
century

Lunch

14.00–15.30

SCIENCE, SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACIES

Chair: Stéphanie Ginalski

Tomás Bartoletti, ETH Zurich:

Pests and Profits in Brazil, c. 1900–1930: Agricultural Modernities and Swiss Science from a Transimperial Perspective

Monique Ligtenberg, ETH Zurich:

Commodifying the Amazon: A German Painter, a Swiss Industrialist, and the Transimperial Butterfly Trade (1890–1920)

Nelson Sanjad, Goeldi Museum:

Tropics as a Career Choice: German-speaking Swiss Scientists in the Amazon (1890–1920)

Break

16.00–17.30

TRADE AND FINANCE

Chair: Sandra Bott

Andreas Zangger, Independent researcher:

Swiss Threads in Brazil's Slave Economy, 1830–1852

Ricardo Bormann, University of Neuchâtel:

The International Neuchâteloise: Family Businesses, Fortunes, and Colonialism

Alain Naef, ESSEC Paris:

Banking on Empire: David de Purry, London Financiers, and the Portuguese Atlantic

18.–19.00

KEYNOTE

Maria Helena P. T. Machado, University of São Paulo:

Louis Agassiz Revisited

Friday 7th November

9.00–10.30

HELVÉCIA

Chair : Thomas David

Aretuza da Cruz Silva, Federal
University of Espírito Santo:

The ecclesiastical records of baptisms
of free and enslaved people in Villa
Viçosa and Colônia Leopoldina
(1829–1847)

Yuko Miki, Fordham University:

On the Frontiers and Margins: Race,
Nation, and Colonization in Southern
Bahia and Brazilian Amazonia

Gilsineth Santos, Helvécia Quilombo
community:

Helvécia: Memory of a Living Tradition
and its *Pretagogia* (Black Pedagogy)

Denise Bertschi, Collegium
Helveticum Zurich:

Agence Consulaire Suisse
Léopoldine' – The stamp of the Swiss
federal government on the land of
Colônia Leopoldina in Southern Bahia

11.00—12.30

**AFTER ABOLITION – LEGACIES OF
SLAVERY AND NEW CHALLENGES IN
THE 20TH CENTURY**

Chair: Álvaro Tomás Gonçalves Sousa

Michael Schmitz, University of
Lausanne:

Between continuities and change:
Cacao trade and production in the
South of Bahia on the example of the
Swiss-Brazilian company Wildberger
& Cia., first half of the 20th century

Kátia Vinhatico Pontes, State
University of Santa Cruz:

Cocoa and labour in the post-abolition
South of Bahia (20th century).

Béatrice Ziegler, Prof. em. PH FHNW:

Brasileian import substitution
industrialisation and Swiss emigration
control: Silk ribbon weavers from
Basel for silk spinning mills in Brazil,
1912–13

Lunch

14.00–15.30

**LEGACIES OF SLAVERY AND
MEMORY CULTURES 20TH CENTURY**

Chair: Aline Martello

Gabriella Lima, University of
Lausanne:

Swiss Interests and Influence in
Brazil under military rule : From the
“Economic Miracle” to the Debt Crisis
(1969–1983)

Larissa Tiki Mbassi, University of
Fribourg:

Walking Through Colonial Archives:
Brazil in the Public Memory of
Neuchâtel.

16.00—17.00

**TAKE AWAYS AND NEW WAYS
FORWARD: REFLECTIONS AND OPEN
DISCUSSION**

Moderator: Bernhard C. Schär,
University of Lausanne

Reflections by

- Rafael de Bivar Marquese,
University of São Paulo
 - Maria Helena P.T. Machado,
University of São Paulo
 - Izabel Barros, University of
Lausanne
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Biographical Notes

ALAIN NAEF is an Assistant Professor at ESSEC Business School (Paris). He obtained his PhD at the University of Cambridge after studying in Switzerland. He is an economist and economic historian specializing on questions of exchange rate history and banking. His current historical research particularly explores European financial and commercial networks involved in the triangular trade and the economic and social impacts of these exchanges. He also works on questions of green finance and international macroeconomics.

ANDRÉ NICACIO LIMA is a historian and anti-colonial activist from São Paulo. His PhD dissertation is a study on anti-Portuguese riots in post-Independence Brazil. Since 2019, he has been researching Swiss trans-imperial colonialism in Brazilian archives in collaboration with colleagues, as well as developing an investigation on Swiss entrepreneurs with slave businesses in southeastern Brazil. The research covers topics such as the clandestine slave trade, the connections between European immigration projects and slavery in Brazil, and the exploitation of slave labor in the industrialization of São Paulo. Results of this work have been published in articles and book chapters. In addition, he writes educational materials and develops projects on public history and the decolonization of Brazilian history.

ANDREAS ZANGGER is a freelance historian based in Amsterdam and an Associated Researcher at the Universities of Bern and Basel. His work explores Switzerland's entanglements with colonialism, and he has published widely on the subject, including books, articles, and curated exhibitions in Zürich and Heiden. His forthcoming book, *Ginghams, Batik und Kangas: Eine Globalgeschichte von Textilien aus der Ostschweiz, 1750–1880*, will be published in autumn this year.

ARETUZA DA CRUZ SILVA, Federal University of Espírito Santo – Aretuza Cruz is a PhD candidate in History at the Federal University of Espírito Santo – UFES. Her thesis project “Johann Martin Flach: Immigration, colonization and slavery in the trajectory of a Swiss in Brazil (1781–1855)” investigates Flach’s actions in Brazil and how this trajectory can shed light on the participation of Switzerland and the Swiss in colonization projects in Brazil and the use of slavery of Africans and Afro-Brazilians on coffee plantations, especially the Leopoldina Colony in Bahia. I’ve had professional experience as a teacher, teaching high school students for over 16 years. As far as research is concerned, she has worked in various areas of history, such as indigenous history, slavery and ritual kinship formation. She has worked on cataloguing, identifying and organizing the archives of the Diocesan Curia of Teixeira de Freitas/Caravelas.

AYALLA OLIVEIRA SILVA, PhD in History from the Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ). Associate Professor in the History Department of the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE). Member of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in History of the Associação Nacional de História (ANPUH) and of the Laboratório de Pesquisa Povos Indígenas na História (LAPESPIH-UFRPE). Author of *Ordem Imperial e Aldeamento Indígena: camacãs, guerens e pataxós no Sul da Bahia* (2018). My research focuses on indigenous peoples, with an emphasis on the following themes: land, frontier, indigenism, resistance and indigenous labour. Currently, I am part of the research project “Sempre obrigados ao trabalho: novas perspectivas sobre a exploração da mão de obra indígena e suas resistências, 1750–1900”, funded by the CNPq Universal Grant (CNPq – National Council for Scientific and Technological Development).

BÉATRICE ZIEGLER, em. Prof. Dr. Universität Zürich und PH FHNW, historian. Thesis (1985) *Schweizer statt Sklaven. Schweizerische Auswanderer in den Kaffeeplantagen von São Paulo (1852–1866)*. Research fields: migration history, gender history, Swiss history 19th/20th century. In her function as one of the directors of the Center for Democracy

Aarau she was active in history and citizenship education. Retired since 2017, living in Berne.

BERNHARD C. SCHÄR has been serving as an SNSF Eccellenza Professor at the University of Lausanne since 2022, where he heads an international research group on the global history of 19th century Switzerland. He has published extensively on science and empire in the Dutch East Indies and Europe, imperial masculinities and Colonial Armies, ethnic minorities in Europe, and the transatlantic protestant missionary movement. He has also written about Switzerland's role in European expansion. His research has been featured in theatre productions, museum exhibitions, interviews, and podcasts. In 2026, he will take up new position as Professor of Modern History at the Swiss Open University (UniDistance).

DENISE BERTSCHI holds a doctorate from the Arts of Sciences Laboratory at the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne and is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Collegium Helveticum, the Institute for Advanced Study at ETH Zurich. Her research is located at the intersection of visual culture, urban studies, and history of coloniality. She critically investigates not only archives, but landscapes or the built environment on the *longue-durée* of Swiss extractives and coloniality. Her work also takes the form of video-installations or films. She published the monographs *State Fiction. The Gaze of the Swiss Neutral Mission in the Korean Demilitarized Zone* (2021), *Strata. Mining Silence* (2020) and the co-edited volume *Unearthing Traces. Dismantling the imperialist entanglements of archives, landscapes and the built environment* (2023). Bertschi was awarded the "Manor Art Prize" in the Aargauer Kunsthaus in 2020, and twice the "Most Beautiful Swiss Books" (2019/2022) for her monographs. Her research is widely exhibited, for example in; Centre Culturel Suisse Paris, Swiss National Museum Zürich, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Artsonje Seoul, Nieuwe Institute Rotterdam, Artivist Johannesburg or LACA Los Angeles. She was previously a Getty Research Summer Fellow (Los Angeles) and artist in residence with Pro Helvetia, La Becque and CAN Centre d'Art de Neuchâtel.

FABIO ROSSINELLI is a doctor in Contemporary History (PhD). His doctoral thesis on Switzerland's involvement in colonial imperialism during the nineteenth century received the Whitehouse Prize, a Swiss academic award, in 2021. He worked for twelve years at the University of Lausanne and three years at the University of Lugano, until 2025. He now continues his activities at the Universities of Geneva and Fribourg. In his research and publications, he studied various Swiss colonial actors, such as geographical societies, missions, globetrotters, businessmen and statesmen.

GABRIELLA LIMA is a PhD student in contemporary history in the SNF project "The Apostles of the Market Economy: Swiss Protagonists and Networks of Global Neoliberalism (1969–1995)." Her research aims to analyze Switzerland's relations with international financial institutions during the global debt crises of the 1980s. This doctoral thesis focuses on the role of Swiss actors in promoting neoliberal reforms in heavily indebted peripheral countries through the structural adjustment programs implemented by the IMF and the World Bank, with a particular focus on the Turkish and Brazilian cases. Her book *Don't Miss the Bus!* analyzes Swiss-Brazilian economic and political relations during the military dictatorship, demonstrating how Swiss neutrality facilitated economic expansion in Brazil amidst widespread human rights violations.

GILSINETH JOAQUIM SANTOS SILVA is an early childhood teacher at the Crèche Emília Sulz Municipal and Pedagogical Coordinator at the João Martins Peixoto Municipal School, both in Helvécia, Brazil. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Education and History from the State University of Bahia (UNEB) and a Master's degree in Teaching Ethnic-Racial Relations from the Federal University of Southern Bahia (UFSB). She is also an active member of the Educational Training Group within the Department of Education of the Municipality of Nova Viçosa, Bahia. In addition to her educational work, she is a community organiser in the quilombo community of Helvécia. She is currently enrolled in the Advanced Studies Programme in Quilombo School Education in the Extreme South of Bahia (2024–2025), a course offered

by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC), the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI) and the Federal University of Southern Bahia (UFSB).

HANS FÄSSLER (born 1954) is a Swiss decolonial activist and an independent researcher into Switzerland's involvement in Transatlantic Slavery and the European colonial project. He holds a master's degree in English and History from Zurich University. His 2005 book *Reise in Schwarz-Weiss. Schweizer Ortstermine in Sachen Sklaverei* (Travels in Black and White. Swiss Local Appointments in Matters of Slavery) was one of the trailblazing publications for the debate on Switzerland's colonial past. His website (<https://louverture.ch>) contains a database of Swiss links with slavery and colonialism (<https://louverture.ch/ccca>), including a section on Brazil (<https://louverture.ch/beyond-the-caribbean>). In 2019, Fässler founded the Swiss Committee on Reparations for Slavery (SCORES).

KÁTIA PONTES, Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz: Kátia Vinhático Pontes is an Assistant Professor at the State University of Santa Cruz (UESC-BA) and a Permanent Professor in the Postgraduate Program (Academic Master's) in Atlantic History and the African Diaspora (PPGH/UESC). She holds a Master's degree in History (2000) from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA-BA) and a PhD in History (2018) from the Fluminense Federal University (UFF-RJ). She develops research in the fields of social and economic history, with an emphasis on the production, circulation and consumption of cocoa; regional development; transportation infrastructure, port-railroad; trajectories of capitalists and companies; history and the city; ethnic-racial relations and anti-racism. She is a member of the research groups Atlantic Studies and the African Diaspora (UESC-BA) and Ports and Cities in the Atlantic World (UFF-RJ).

IZABEL BARROS is a doctoral researcher at the University of Lausanne. Her dissertation, entitled "Motherhood and Slavery: A Global Microhistory of a Swiss-Owned Plantation in Bahia (1820–1888)", investigates the intersections of gender, slavery, and transimperial history. With a professional background in feminist peacebuilding and advocacy with quilombo and Indigenous communities in Brazil, she is also active in public history and community activism in Switzerland. She is one of the initiators and co-authors of the interactive mapping project "Bern Kolonial" (2020). Her work connects academic research with transdisciplinary outreach, focusing on global histories, decolonial and postcolonial studies, and intersectionality.

LARISSA TIKI MBASSI is an exhibition curator based in Zurich and a doctoral researcher affiliated with the Departments of History and Art History at the Universities of Fribourg and Vienna. Her dissertation, titled "Black Public Space? Historical Approaches to Monuments and Colonial Symbols in Neuchâtel," examines the connections between historical amnesia, colonial monuments, and Afro-diasporic activism in Neuchâtel (CH). As part of the research project "Neuchâtel face à la colonisation: circulations, intrications et mémoire," Larissa aims to understand what memorial conditions amnesia creates and how these conditions shape demands for decolonizing public spaces. Her work bridges historical analysis and curatorial approaches, contributing to discussions on decolonial studies and memory politics in Switzerland. She is particularly interested in critical race theory and representations of Blackness in art institutions.

MARIA HELENA P. T. MACHADO is Full Professor in the History Department of University of São Paulo, researcher at the Brazilian National Research Council, and Leverhulme Trust Visiting Professor at Reading University (UK) in 2022. She is the author of several books and articles on slavery, abolition, and post-emancipation in Brazil. She published catalogs and curated various exhibitions, individually and with the partnership, on Louis Agassiz Brazilian Photographic Collection and other slavery Brazilian photographic collec-

tions. She currently carries out research on the interrelations between slavery, abolition, and gender. Her publications include the book co-authored by with Antonio Alexandre Cardoso) *Geminiana e seus filhos. Escravidão, maternidade e morte no Brasil do século XIX*. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2024 (Geminiana and her sons: Slavery, maternity, and death in 19th Century Brazil).

MARY ANN MAHONY is Professor of History and Director of the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Center at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, CT. She holds an A.B. from the College of the Holy Cross, an M.A. from Tufts University and Ph.D. from Yale University. Her dissertation, *The World Cacao Made: Society, Politics and History in Southern Bahia, Brazil, 1822–1919*, and the subsequent article in *Afro-Asia*, “‘Instrumentos necessários:’ Escravidão e posse de escravos no sul da Bahia no século dezenove” were the first scholarly studies to definitively document the presence of African enslavement in the formation of in Bahia’s cacao growing region. She is the author of numerous articles about the history of the cacao region. She won the 2016 Best Article Prize of the Brazil Section of the Latin American Studies Association for her article, “A Vida e os Tempos de João Gomes: Escravidão, negociação e resistência no Atlântico Negro” (The Life and Times of João Gomes: Slavery, Negotiation and Resistance in the Black Atlantic), published in the Special Issue on the Atlantic World of the *Revista Crítica Histórica*. Her translation of Walter Fraga’s *Encruzilhadas da Liberdade* won Honorable Mention in the New England Council of Latin American Studies Best Translation Prize competition of 2017. Her article on using genealogy in the history classroom is the featured article in the forthcoming *American Historical Association’s Perspectives on History* magazine in May 2025. She has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Fulbright.

MICHAEL SCHMITZ is a doctoral researcher at the University of Lausanne. In his PhD project supervised by Prof. Bernhard C. Schär, he investigates the role of the Brazilian state of Bahia in the global system of cacao production and trade in the first half of the 20th century through the lens of one of its main actors, the Swiss-Brazilian company Wildberger & Cia. In 2008, he completed a master’s degree in general history at the University of Zurich. Before returning to academia in 2024, he worked as a history and German teacher and was involved in the anti-racist projects Autonome Schule Zürich and Papierlose Zeitung. Through his long-standing involvement in capoeira, he co-organises events aimed at preserving and disseminating Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

MONIQUE LIGTENBERG is a postdoctoral researcher at ETH Zurich, where she studies the provenance of natural history collections in Switzerland in light of their colonial entanglements. Her research interests include global history, the history of knowledge and science, and the modern history of Southeast Asia. In addition to her academic work, she is a founding member of the public history project Zürich Kolonial, a tour through Zurich’s colonial past.

NELSON SANJAD is Senior Researcher at the Goeldi Museum, a research unit of the Brazilian Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (since 2002). He is dedicated to the social history of sciences in the Amazon region. His current research project addresses the construction of scientific knowledge about the Amazon from a transnational perspective. He is interested in the circulation of naturalists/scientists, ideas and collections gathered at the Amazon, as well as the process of appropriation, translation and elision of native knowledge. His recent publications include the relationship of Indigenous people and museums, circulation of plants, history of zoo and botanical gardens, intertextuality in scientific works and travel reports. He also works on the biography of European scientists and explorers who lived in the Amazon, born in France, Germany and Switzerland. Doctor in History of Sciences and Health from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Brazil (2005), with

Postdoctoral studies at the Naturhistorisches Museum der Burgergemeinde Bern, Switzerland (2013–2014). Professeur Invité at the Centre Alexandre Koyré, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France (2023).

RAFAEL DE BIVAR MARQUESE (1972) is professor at the Department of History, University of São Paulo, Brazil. He is the author of *Administração e Escravidão. Ideias sobre a administração da agricultura escravista brasileira* (Hucitec, 1999), *Feitores do Corpo, Missionários da Mente. Senhores, letrados e o controle dos escravos nas Américas, 1660–1860* (Companhia das Letras, 2004), *Slavery and Politics. Brazil and Cuba, 1790–1850* (University of New Mexico Press, 2016), *Os Tempos Plurais da Escravidão no Brasil. Ensaio de História e Historiografia* (Intermeios, 2020) and *Reconstructing the Landscapes of Slavery. A Visual History of the Plantation in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2021). He is currently writing a global history of coffee and slavery.

RICARDO BORRMANN is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Neuchâtel, working on the SNF project “Neuchâtel face à la colonisation”, which explores the historical intertwinings between Neuchâtel and the Black Atlantic. In 2024, he conducted archival research in New York City for his second book as a Postdoctoral Fellow of the German Historical Institute Washington D.C. From October 2024 to March 2025, he served as interim professor at the Chair of Latin American History at the University of Bremen. He holds a PhD in cultural history from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His book was published in 2019 by Franz Steiner Verlag under the title *Tobias Barreto, Sílvia Romero und die Deutschen*.

TOMÁS BARTOLETTI is Senior Lecturer and SNSF-Ambizione Research Group Leader at the Chair for History of the Modern World of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zürich. He earned his PhD from the University of Buenos Aires and has held research positions as a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute (2021–2023) and as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the ETH Zürich (2019–2021). His current project, “Insect Pests and Economic Entomology in Plantations, c. 1870–1930s: A Multispecies History of Global Capitalism,” examines the development of pest control research in the tropical world between c. 1880 and 1950. An exhibition resulting from his research, titled “Naming Natures,” is scheduled to take place in December 2024 at the Natural History Museum of Neuchatel. www.naming-natures.ch

YUKO MIKI, an award-winning historian of slavery in Brazil and the Atlantic World, is an associate professor of history and Latin American and Latinx Studies at Fordham University. Her book, *Frontiers of Citizenship: A Black and Indigenous History of Postcolonial Brazil* (Cambridge) has received awards and honors across multiple fields, including the Wesley-Logan Prize for African Diaspora History from the American Historical Association and the Warren Dean Memorial Prize for Brazilian History from the Conference on Latin American History. The Portuguese-language edition is now available from Brazil's Companhia das Letras. She is currently completing her new book, *Kalunga: The Story of the Last Slave Ship to Brazil* (working title), under contract with One Signal / Simon & Schuster. She has also authored works in English and Portuguese that have appeared in edited volumes and journals including the *Americas; Slavery & Abolition*; and *Social Text*. Her work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, Yale University's Gilder Lehrman Center; and the American Philosophical Society, among others. She received her B.A. from Brown University and a M.A. and Ph.D. from New York University. She lives in Brooklyn.