

Dr. Claudia Rauhut, Freie Universität Berlin, rauhut@zedat.fu-berlin.de

“Slavery Reparations in the Caribbean: Transregional Perspectives on Actors, Debates, and the Politics of History”

Reparations for the crimes and long-term consequences of the transatlantic slave trade have been claimed since the 17th century by numerous parties – first and foremost, by the enslaved Africans and their descendants, but also by missionaries, philosophers, and writers. Since the middle of the 20th century, human rights activists, academics, politicians, and representatives of national and international organizations have spoken out in favor of reparations. When the member states of Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) addressed European governments for the first time in 2014, the call for a dialogue on the historical injustices achieved greater global political prominence. The need to confront the legacy of slavery by reparatory justice has thus become a global matter with a new symbolic dimension. In my research project, I investigate historical-political activism and debates on reparations for slavery in the Caribbean by focusing in particular on Jamaica and its transregional entanglements. I pursue a multi-methodological, interdisciplinary approach to such entanglements and, on the basis of an empirical anthropological investigation, trace the actors, their networks, and personal agency within the local and national setting, and beyond. I want to highlight the inner Caribbean and transatlantic interrelations with civil society and state activists from the English-, French and Spanish-speaking Caribbean who also repeatedly call for reparations. My research project centers on Jamaica in order to demonstrate the configuration of a global movement at a local level, as well as to analyze the impact of trans-local actors within global debates. The aim of my work is to underline the relevance of slavery reparations – not only for the Caribbean region but also for an overdue examination of the colonial past and slavery in Europe – and to encourage academic and public debate. The current agenda for reparations forcefully challenges European countries to come to terms with their own history relating to the history of their colonies and the persistent legacy of slavery – not as an exclusive concern of Caribbean societies, but instead as an integral part of Europe’s own developmental paths, historical narratives, and responsibility for its interwoven histories.