

Hidden Economies of Slavery

International Workshop, German Historical Institute London, 10-11 December 2020

Co-organized by Melina Teubner (University of Bern) and Felix Brahm (German Historical Institute London)

In many cases, abolition did not bring about an end to slavery. Local economies often continued to rely on slavery, and new forms of unfree labour were invented that involved new places and peoples. Not seldomly private as well as state actors carried on investing in, or operating ventures based on slavery, though less openly.

This workshop addresses the still under-researched phenomenon of ‘second slavery’ in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It has two main directions of inquiry: Firstly, it explores the reconfiguration of local and regional economies of slavery post formal abolition. How did existing structures and systems of dependency feed into the maintenance of slavery, and how did these also change over time, not least through the agency of enslaved people? Here, the workshop is particularly interested in micro economies – focal points of economic activity in their relation to other places and larger-scale processes. Secondly, the workshop inquires into why and how the phenomenon of ‘second slavery’ was less debated by and became less visible to contemporaries. How did the actors involved conceal their business, what strategies were applied to legitimize new forms of unfree labour and why did public attention fade or turn to certain regions and selected forms of slavery?

The conveners invite researchers at any stage of their career who are working on these topics to apply. A geographical focus will probably be on the Atlantic area, but the workshop aims at a global perspective. Contributions can either focus on one region or locality, carry out a comparative study or explore aspects of an entangled history. Also of interest are

contributions that discuss more theoretical and methodological issues. Papers should address at least one of the following guiding questions:

- How and to what extent did local and regional economies of slavery change after formal abolition?
- How did local economies of slavery function during the ‘second slavery’? What economic activities and policies, local infrastructures, objects and technologies played a role in maintaining and reconfiguring local economies of slavery?
- What new forms of unfree labour were established locally and how was their establishment enabled through global networks?
- What forms of secrecy were adopted in the slavery business and how were new forms of unfree labour legitimized?
- What role was played by individuals, groups and the media in uncovering hidden economies of slavery?
- What do we gain from focussing on the local and regional level, how can translocal and transregional comparisons be carried out, and what is the potential of an entangled or global history of the ‘second slavery’?

The workshop will take place at the German Historical Institute London. We anticipate being able to reimburse standard travel expenses and the cost of accommodation for the duration of the workshop. If travel or other restrictions are still in place due to the coronavirus situation, the conveners will consider postponing the workshop. Abstracts of about 300 words and a short CV should be sent to both Felix Brahm and Melina Teubner (brahm@ghil.ac.uk, melina.teubner@hist.unibe.ch), no later than 30 June 2020.