

SWISS SLAVERY CONNECTION

Two new books show Switzerland was actively involved in the Slave Trade

Guest author, Simon Inou, reviews two new books on the participation of Swiss traders, trading companies and financial institutions in the Slave Trade. "The courage of the authors to embrace great risks while researching should serve as a good example to researchers in other European countries, such as in Austria, in their attempts to debunk the myth that 'we-did-not-have-any-slaves-and-colonies'", Vienna-based journalist and scholar Inou writes

Two books dealing with "Switzerland and the Slave Trade" have been published in Switzerland. The first one, "Schwarze Geschäfte" by Thomas David, Bouda Etemad and Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, investigates the involvement of Swiss traders, trading companies and financial institutions in the Slave Trade, and then deals with the relationships between Switzerland and the system of slave plantations in America. It finally talks about the movements and organisations in Switzerland which were active in the fight for the abolition of the Slave Trade.

A second book written by Hans Faessler, "Reise in Schwarz-Weiss. Schweizer Ortstermine in Sachen Sklaverei", focuses in detail on the role Swiss families and cities played during the slave trading period. According to Faessler, slave trading in Switzerland can be traced to people with precise addresses and postal codes. He investigated nineteen cities between Lake Constance and Lake Geneva closely and could supply interesting results.

When it comes to the topic of participation, Faessler avoids making any differences between those who participated directly or indirectly, and offers three reasons for that. As far as he is concerned, all those who con-

tributed in any way to the Slave Trade were active participants.

Commenting on Faessler's book, Jean Ziegler, a sharp-tongued globalisation critic and UN Special Commissioner for the Right to Food, remarked during a literary programme on Swiss TV, "Switzerland will tomorrow discover that it was very much implicated in the Slave Trade. The book is well-written, easy to read, cleverly crafted, precise and very useful."

The two books focus on a dark chapter of Swiss history. The courage of the authors to embrace great risks while researching should serve as a good example to researchers in other European countries, such as in Austria, in their attempts to debunk the myth that "we-did-not-have-any-slaves-and-colonies". It is simply wrong to assume that Austria alone stood aloof and looked on as all other European monarchs of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were deeply engulfed in the Slave Trade.

The two books published in Switzerland help us to better understand the role landlocked countries played during the slave trading era. What is certain is that the number of countries which profited from the Slave Trade has been underestimated till today. Sooner or later, all these countries will have to own up to their history and pay compen-

sation to the affected. Contrary to what many of these European countries are saying today, development aid is no substitute for reparation payments.

Simon Inou is the Chief Editor of the online news magazine *Afrikanet.info*

Ordering Information

Schwarze Geschäfte Die Beteiligung von Schweizern an Sklaverei und Sklavenhandel im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert
Thomas David, Bouda Etemad, Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl
Limmat Verlag
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