

### III) Konferenzberichte | Conference Reports

#### 1. Socare Early Career Symposium 2024 in Bonn

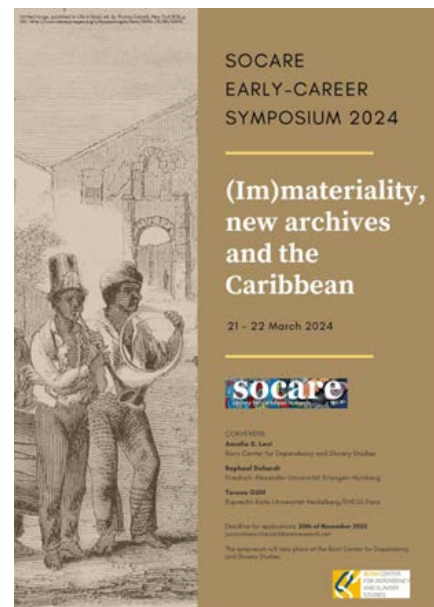
*Socare Early Career Symposium: “(Im)materiality, new archives and the Caribbean”, 21-22/03/2024, Bonn Center for Slavery and Dependency Studies*

On March 21–22, 2024, the SOCARE Early-Career Symposium, organized by Amalia S. Levi (BCDSS), Raphael Dohardt (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg), and Teresa Götl (Heidelberg University), brought together emerging and established scholars at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS). The symposium explored the theme “(Im)materiality, New Archives, and the Caribbean” and examined how archives, as both ‘sources’ and ‘subjects’, shape our understanding of the Caribbean’s complex past and present.

The engaging contributions addressed critical questions, including: What qualifies as a historical source, and how do archives shape societal and political discourses? How can we capture the immateriality of cultural expressions, such as music or oral traditions, that transcend institutionalised records? And how can material artefacts illuminate lived experiences that ‘written’ archives frequently overlook? These questions were addressed through interdisciplinary approaches spanning literary and film, linguistics, geography, history, economics, and museum studies.

After a welcome by the organizers and SOCARE chair Sinah Kloß (BCDSS), Philipp Kandler from the *Fachinformationsdienst Lateinamerika, Karibik und Latino Studies* provided insights into how his organisation assists in locating information on the Caribbean in archives and libraries across Germany. This section emphasised that the symposium focused not only on discussing recent research topics but also on the exchange of research strategies. For this reason, each panel was framed by a commentary from senior scholars, such as Pia Wiegink (BCDSS), Miriam Lay-Brander (Katholische Universität Eichstätt) and Sinah Kloss (BCDSS). Through their expertise and experience in Caribbean Studies, they highlighted key themes and offered valuable insights that enriched the discussions and provided context for the diverse approaches presented.

The first day started out with Julia Richard (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv) presenting her work on photographic sources of the *Black Atlantic*. She raised key questions about the visualities of colonialism, the processes of imperial displacement, and how these were translated into photographic form, highlighting the complex relationship between image, memory, and power.



Alexandra P. Gelbard (Independent Researcher) built on this point by introducing the concept of ‘community wisdom’ as a counterpoint to historical silences, reimagining Santiago de Cuba’s African diasporic history through music and performance, and emphasising the importance of local knowledge in challenging dominant historical narratives.

Vincent Laarman (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) brought the former Dutch colony of Curaçao to the forefront and discussed often overlooked sources in the reconstruction of the lives of enslaved people: the financial records of the Dutch Reformed Church in the 18th century. Reading these records both along and against the grain to uncover hidden stories and gain a deeper understanding of the lives of enslaved people reveals the complex relationship between economic structures and social realities.

In the afternoon of the first day, Julia Kieslinger (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg) and Laura Meltke (TU Chemnitz) presented their research on *Dominican Bateys* and Caribbean migration films. Kieslinger focused on how artefacts and the built environment become carriers of memories and constitute archives of people’s lived experience throughout the years, while Meltke foregrounded how films contain and preserve (im)material aspects of diasporic lives.



The keynote lecture by Prof. Steeve O. Buckridge (Grand Valley State University) provided a fitting conclusion to the first day. His presentation, *Beyond the Classical Archives: Dress as Embodied Histories, Memory, and Orality in and from the Caribbean*, reframed garments as dynamic archives that carry narratives of resilience, identity, and cultural memory.

The second day of the symposium began with an important and highly discussed topic: the restitution of colonial archives from the Netherlands to Suriname. Leah Niederhausen (NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies) used the concept of ‘transformative justice’ to highlight the often-underexplored role of archives in this process.

Raphael Dohardt (FAU) analyzed a Haitian Vodou sanctuary located in a Dominican *batey*, discussing how the picture-texts displayed there relate to the immaterial aspects of religious practice. Furthermore, he showed how different layers of indexicalities intersect in the sanctuary and influence social meaning-making in this diaspora context. This was followed by Morgane Honoré (EHESS & CIRESC Paris), who addressed the challenges traditional archives face in uncovering urban sociabilities. Addressing violence, oppression, and the active resistance of the enslaved, she explored how to approach and represent these complex and sensitive issues. Margaret Brehony (Moore Institute, NUI Galway & Concordia University Montreal) presented online and introduced her project on the *Cuba Ireland Digital Archive*.

The event concluded with a vibrant final discussion that synthesized the diverse perspectives shared over two days. Participants reflected on how archives, both material and immaterial, serve as bridges between the past, present, and future, contributing to the ongoing negotiation of Caribbean identities locally and globally. A publication featuring selected contributions is planned, ensuring that the impact of these discussions continues beyond the symposium.

The SOCARE Early-Career Symposium 2024 not only highlighted innovative research but also encouraged collaboration and dialog among scholars from various disciplines. The support from both BCDSS and SOCARE was

essential to the event's success. The organisers want to thank the Socare chair Sinah Kloss and its Board members, Mario Laarmann, Myriam Lay Brander, Corinna Di Stefano and Silke Jansen, as well as all who contributed to the success of the event.



Text and images by Amalia S. Levi,  
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