

2012-2013 Colloquia

April 15, 2013

**Christopher Ebert, Brooklyn College, City University of New York
Salvador da Bahia in the South Atlantic Complex 1650-1750**

The Atlantic World Research Network was proud to host a guest speaker for our final colloquium of the year. Professor Christopher Ebert of the History Department at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, has published several works about early modern economic development and is especially interested in the interactions between imperial powers (expanding from a strictly nationalist perspective). Today, he gave a primer on an important Brazilian city that is often overlooked.

Salvador da Bahia is located in the northeastern part of Brazil, which was a prime sugar and tobacco-farming area, on the mouth of the Bay of All Saints (Baía de Todos os Santos). Founded in 1549, as the capital of the colony due to its significance as a port, Salvador da Bahia was one of the only places where ships in the South-Atlantic could put in for repairs—ships of any friendly empire could use the port, but non-Portuguese ships were guarded and had to pay for repairs and cost of maintenance.

The Portuguese empire, based in Lisbon, tried to maintain a strictly mercantilist trading system that kept its colonial goods in a closed loop from Brazil to Lisbon, and Lisbon would control export to other nations. However, the British had set themselves up as middlemen for exchanges of Portuguese, and Mediterranean goods, and they wanted easier access to Brazilian tobacco and sugar as part of this exchange. Brazilians—and most peoples of the Atlantic World—had high demand for Indian calico cloth produced in the East Indies. Indian calico cloth was in high demand globally, and a very lucrative black market sprung up in Salvador da Bahia. (Professor Ebert commented that Salvador da Bahia was just as much an Indian Ocean port as it was an Atlantic port.) Authorities in Lisbon tried for decades to enforce strict control of their Indian fleets, even passing laws that ships could only be unloaded in Lisbon, but finally legalized the activity that was already happening—allowing ships from India to unload in Brazil. This was quite significant in that the colony set policy, not the European capital, based on what worked. The ever-growing direct trade between Brazil and Africa was another aspect of this phenomenon.

By 1724 the city of Salvador da Bahia contained almost a third of the population of its region; at almost 25,000 residents it was much larger than any North-American city. Slaves made up about half the population of the city; unlike the plantation arrangements, urban slaveowners usually would buy a slave, send him or her out to find work with someone else, and then collect a rent or percentage of the slave's wages. There was a high rate of manumission, as slaves in Salvador da Bahia had more opportunities to save money and eventually purchase their own freedom. There was a great deal of racial mixing (almost always Portuguese men with native or African women, especially acculturated mulattas). The Catholic Church was, of course, strongly present in Salvador da Bahia—although the Inquisition was never as strong in Brazil as it was on the Iberian peninsula—and multiple religious orders from all over Europe came for missionary efforts. After the colonial capital was moved to Rio de Janeiro (a major gold-producing site) in 1763, however, Salvador da Bahia declined relatively to the southern captaincies of Brazil.

Following Professor Ebert's formal presentation, participants discussed the nature of European colonial administration. Professor Ebert pointed out that the administration in Lisbon was quite competent and knowledgeable—they made it a point to promote officials who had actually served in the colonies—but were often unable to enforce their intended policies. Professor Ebert recommended the “epic” study of the transatlantic slave trade out of Emory University, and Stuart Schwartz's study of Brazilian sugar. For primary sources, he said there were some difficulties because the great 1755 Lisbon earthquake destroyed many administrative records and preservation has been slow and difficult in tropical climates. He had access to a few manuscript sources (although more information has survived since 1755) and social history required extrapolation from records of fines and imprisonments. There were also complications because colonial Iberian governments were very wary of printing since it could foment rebellion—there were no printing presses in Brazil—and there were significant bans on allowing the dissemination of information about Brazil after the Dutch invasion in 1624. For anyone who is looking for a pleasant trip, the colonial core of Salvador da Bahia has been very well-preserved, and several of the interior cities in the mining districts have been classified as World Heritage sites. Participants concluded by thanking Professor Ebert for taking the time to travel and meet with us.

March 28, 2013

Jill Bender, History

“Ireland and the British Empire: Networks of Resistance”

Jill Bender, Assistant Professor of History, added to our colloquia with a presentation about Irish responses to the Indian Uprising of 1857 and British reactions to the transmission of rebellious sentiment. The British Empire contained many informal networks such as the press, family connections, and personal correspondence as well as authoritative command structures; authorities feared that the same networks that united far-flung colonists could also be used to inspire independence movements. Professor Bender used many newspapers, personal correspondence, and national archives in the former colonies for her research.

In 1857, Indian soldiers in the British East India Company army—known as sepoys—mutinied against the British authorities; the rebellion quickly became a widespread civilian uprising, as both sides committed brutal atrocities during the fighting. (The use of pork and beef fat in army-supply cartridges is an infamous cause of mutiny; also the sepoys had a long-building resentment of lower pay, Christian missionary efforts, and other forms of mistreatment.) The Irish nationalist press responded favorably to the uprising in India, declaring support for the sepoys and discouraging Irish men from enlisting in the British Army to serve on the front lines. In addition to newspapers, the nationalists posted placards in public areas with more rebellious slogans such as “Three Cheers for Old Ireland! Three more for the Sepoys!” Conservative presses retaliated in a “press war,” emphasizing that the uprising actually gave Ireland a chance to prove itself a loyal subject of the empire. At first, local officials tried to ignore the rhetoric—although they did make some arrests in relation to the more inflammatory placards—but the British officials back in London were worried about a domino effect throughout the colonies.

Prof. Bender took some time briefly to describe reactions to the Uprising in other colonies. Maori-language newspapers in New Zealand were rumored to print rebellious sentiments; colonial officials reported that the press's Indian coverage was presented in a way to inspire similar resistance at home. In response, settlers patrolled the streets of Nelson and evacuated women and children from New Plymouth in 1858. Meanwhile, colonial officials in South Africa reported that the Xhosa also expressed sympathy and racial solidarity with the Indians, as well as discontentment with colonial rule. Settlers joined with local officials to drive the Xhosa away for resettlement. However, London officials were more concerned about Ireland and the dangers of resistance so close to home. Irish nationalists were more likely to gain European sympathy and spread anti-British ideas; European rivals would have an easier time exploiting unrest in Ireland to gain a strategic international advantage.

After Prof. Bender's talk, discussion turned to the plausibility of rebellion in the 1850s. Although Indian and Irish independence obviously didn't happen, the boost especially in Irish nationalism helped establish the necessary mindset for later success. Attendants also discussed the spread of information; there are accounts of ships pulling next to each other so crews could swap newspapers from their home ports, but popular ballads and word of mouth—especially in secret societies—were useful methods to express discontent. Prof. Bender also mentioned the tensions between imperial officials in London, who wished to avoid fighting without a formal declaration of war, and settlers abroad who expected protection for loyal subjects.

February 11, 2013

Mary Ellis Gibson, English

“Export Ware: Robert Browning Crosses the Pond/Byron Goes to India”

Mary Ellis Gibson, Professor in the English Department, continued our lunchtime colloquia with a “probably indefensible sociology of cultural transmission,” emphasizing the global context of the Atlantic World by examining how and why Browning became popular in North America while Byron was more popular in India.

Prof. Gibson discussed the many factors such as language and style (accessibility to another culture), politics and religion (especially in the context of the British Empire) and lastly, how marketing and educational curricula affected an author's canonization.

Robert Browning enjoyed tremendous popularity in America in the late nineteenth century. Membership in Browning Societies and book clubs were often a status symbol, conveying gentility and membership in an elite social network. Browning's poetry filled a sort of “intellectual niche”, grappling with questions of doubt and faith from a “non-conformist” view and entertaining the new historical and scientific criticisms of scripture. For example, “An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician,” explores the title character's confusion upon examining the Biblical Lazarus after his miraculous healing. (Karshish concludes that while Lazarus is physically cured, he must have gone insane; why else would he claim that “God” did it?) Browning's dramatic monologues, which placed the reader right in a character's eccentric mind, and his liberal political views appealed to American individualism. While Browning wrote about power struggles between the genders, and included

sympathetic portrayals of women victimized by domestic violence, Prof. Gibson cautioned that classifying Browning as a proto-feminist would overstate the case.

As an example of George Gordon, Lord Byron's reception in India, Prof. Gibson focused specifically on a young Indian poet who tried to emulate Byron. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) was born of mixed Indian and European heritage and, although raised Baptist, was educated by a Scottish Enlightenment skeptic. Derozio was especially attracted to Byron's combination of political radicalism, combined with skepticism in religion and Oriental tales. His *Poems*, published in Calcutta in 1827, were full of allusions to and imitations of Byron. Indian poets often found it easier to adopt and adapt sentimental styles for their own tastes (much more so than blank verse) although they often had to keep the politics more subtle. One of Derozio's peers, Kasiprasad Ghosh, was a high-caste Hindu who used English verse forms to write about Hindu religious festivals. For these Indians, poetry became a way to beat the Empire at its own game. The poetry—especially Romantic poetry—that survived independence to remain in school curricula is still popular to this day. Prof. Gibson recalled a research trip to India when the police official working on her visa issues got involved in a Kubla Khan quote-off.

After Prof. Gibson's presentation, discussion focused on the controversy of "universalism" and how to avoid projecting relativism while still recognizing that certain topics (death, grief, etc.) resonate in all cultures. We also discussed the role of social status and education in creating literary canons. Derozio and the other Indian poets who were drawn to British Romantics were a small minority, able to read materials from multiple cultures thanks to a very elite education. Even today, although many Indians can converse in English and learn the technical vocabulary required for their work, English language and literature as a course of study are still thought of as strictly for the higher classes.

November 6, 2012

Dr. Claudia Cabello-Hutt, Spanish

"Transatlantic Networks of Women Writers as Spaces of Literary and Economic Independence"

Dr. Cabello-Hutt, Assistant Professor of Spanish in the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures department, was our second featured speaker of the year. She presented on *Transatlantic Networks of Women Writers as Spaces of Literary and Economic Independence from 1920-1940*, focusing on the Chilean poet and intellectual Gabriela Mistral. Mistral (1889-1957) was the first Latin American Nobel Laureate for Literature, and was known for her participation in key political debates of the time. Dr. Cabello-Hutt noted that it was unusual for a woman from a poor, rural part of Chile to rise to international prominence in the early twentieth century, and believes that Mistral's participation in highly effective networks gave her access to such opportunities.

Mistral began corresponding first at the regional level, and then internationally, with prominent writers, teachers, government officials, etc. Some of her work included serving as a consultant for education in Mexico, working with the League of Nations, and representing Chile at various functions in Spain, etc. In addition to securing her own employment, Mistral also acted as a broker to help connect other intellectuals in her network—such as linking a newspaper editor

with a writer who could provide a feature article or editorial. These networks, Dr. Cabello-Hutt argues, provided participants a non-institutional space for freedom of intellectual exchange and mutual financial support. Mistral and many of her peers were constantly short of money and used the network to find new opportunities and sources of income. Given the political turmoil of the era, and the number of people who had to flee their homelands on short notice, networks were also essential for finding safe haven and re-settling in a new country.

Mistral herself was wary of becoming too firmly allied with particular factions and worked to maintain intellectual freedom and credibility. One position that surprises many people today is that she disagreed with feminists regarding the right to vote; Mistral believed that education reform (for creating informed citizens) was a higher priority than immediate suffrage. Mistral wrote for several U.S. publications and often came to America to lecture, but she did not speak English and had to rely on translators and unofficial booking agents, specifically Alice Stone Blackwell. Because Mistral only lectured in Spanish, her speaking venues were limited to places such as universities with strong Spanish programs. Mistral, who had Basque and indigenous Chilean ancestry, frequently complained about Spanish attitudes towards former colonies and the “mainstream” version of Spanish history.

Dr. Cabello-Hutt proposed two questions for discussion:

How can we consider gender differences in networks’ creation, purpose, and effect in this period?

How do these networks (which start with the modernists) play into the historical and political conflicts that define the relationship between Spain and Latin America?

Colloquium participants also discussed the possible contradictions of Mistral spending so much time abroad when she was very concerned with Chilean issues and problems. Dr. Cabello-Hutt acknowledged that many Chileans felt angry at Mistral’s “betrayal” when she left the country, although she believes that Mistral felt stifled in the small, rural area where she grew up, (not just intellectually but personally, possibly related to her sexuality). She also said that Mistral was very concerned about not appearing as a social climber, and constantly emphasized “the people” and her roots.

Researchers who are interested in Mistral and similar figures during this time period might want to look into U.S. government archives; the FBI and similar organizations would certainly have compiled files for activists and possible revolutionaries.

October 23, 2012

Dr. Susanne Rinner & Carola Dwyer, German Studies
“Grimms’ Fairy Tales at 200”

Carola Dwyer opened with an introduction to the Brothers Grimm and their work. Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) originally trained as lawyers before focusing on their efforts as

linguists and compilers. They were especially worried that the growing industrialization and resulting changes in society would lead to the loss of traditional German culture and folklore. The Grimms set out on a “rescue mission” to preserve the ideals of country life and the stories from the past.

The first edition of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Children’s and Household Tales), containing 84 tales, was published in 1812. (It was recently included in the UNESCO “Memory of the World” program for significant cultural heritage.) The Grimms continued to edit, revise, and republish the work for the rest of their lives. Although the Grimms insisted that they were strictly recorders who wrote down tales told by peasant women, evidence shows that they took a good bit of editorial and artistic license. For example, in many of the original folk stories a mother was the villain of the piece; the Grimms’ wanted to preserve the ideal mother figure and created the wicked stepmother figure instead. During their own lifetimes the Grimms were criticized for the stories’ violence, misogyny, racial bias and positivism (“they all lived happily ever after”).

Dr. Susanne Rinner then led the participants through a brief re-reading of “Hansel and Gretel.” First and foremost, the children’s vandalism and theft indicates that they are not good children; most parents would discipline such bad behavior. Gretel saves herself and her brother by killing the witch—that may be self-defense, but society has difficulty dealing with children who commit violent acts when we have no problems punishing adults who do the same thing. Dr. Rinner also pointed out that the witch had been trying to train and teach Gretel, and at the end of the story Gretel demonstrates a magic skill in talking to the duck. Is Gretel now a witch herself? Dr. Rinner concluded her talk by saying that for the last fifty years, fairy tale scholarship has been dominated by psychoanalytic and feminist theory. She believes that the time has come to engage these tales with new readings and analysis.

Discussion began with a question about the violence in the stories. Ms. Dwyer clarified that while the Grimms made sure that stories ended happily ever after, they did not add much original violence to the stories. Participants then noted the differences between reading the tales as scholars and reading the tales in a family setting. Should today’s parents try to deconstruct the stories, and make sure their children learn the “correct” morals? We also discussed the importance of illustrations: many modern fairy tales are presented in picture books for children. A dark woodcut or engraving will set a very different mood than a warm, colorful painting. Participants talked about the recent surge in fairy tale adaptations (TV, movies, etc.) and the new perspectives (such as independent, active women or more concern for motivation).

The discussion also touched on colonialism and imperialism. Are Hansel and Gretel little imperialists who invade, take what they want, and leave the place in ruins? Germany in the early 19th century was almost a colonized nation, and the Grimms demonstrated a sort of native, ethnic pride in holding onto a unique identity in spite of recent foreign occupation. The concern for authenticity is almost post-colonial; do societies always have to construct their own identity by pointing to something “other” and say “we’re not that?”