Constructing Public History of Slavery and Dealing with Colonial Monuments within the Reparations Movement in Jamaica

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ABSTRACTS

Die öffentlichen Aktionen in Großbritannien und weltweit zum Sturz von Denkmälern, die Sklavenhändler und Kolonialherren ehren, fanden auch in Jamaica Resonanz. Wenngleich kein neues Phänomen, spiegelten sich die Diskurse über den Umgang mit diesen Denkmälern im öffentlichen Raum verstärkt in den Medien wider. Für jamaikanische Aktivist:innen für Reparationsforderungen für die Sklaverei ist diese Thematik seit Jahren relevant. Sie nutzen öffentliche Bildung und Geschichte als einen zentralen Schwerpunkt ihrer umfassenden Agenda für Wiedergutmachung, für die sie sich sowohl auf nationaler als auch auf transnationaler Ebene im Rahmen der CARICOM Reparations Commission einsetzen. Diese Kommission, vor allem aus Wissenschaftler:innen, Menschenrechtsaktivist:innen, Journalist:innen und Kulturschaffenden aus den anglophonen Ländern der Karibik bestehend, fordert die europäischen Regierungen auf, Reparationsmaßnahmen für die langfristigen Folgen des transatlantischen Versklavungshandels und der karibischen Plantagensklavereien zu leisten. Die Agenda umfasst wirtschaftliche und politische Aspekte ebenso wie Dimensionen von Bildung, Gesundheit, Kultur und öffentliches Erinnern. Der Beitrag gibt zunächst einen Überblick über die Debatten und Aktivitäten, die vom jamaikanischen Nationalen Komitee zur Zweihundertjahrfeier der Abschaffung des Sklavenhandels im Jahr 2007 und von der im Jahr 2009 gegründeten National Commission for Reparations (später umbenannt in National Council on Reparation) initiiert wurden. Er fokussiert, basierend auf meiner eigenen empirischen Forschung, das Engagement von Reparationsaktivist:innen im Bereich der öffentlichen Bildung zur Geschichte und zum Erbe der Sklaverei. Der zweite Teil geht auf die Bedeutung von deren Arbeit für die aktuelle Debatte über den Umgang mit Kolonialdenkmälern in Jamaika ein. Er endet mit einer Reflektion darüber, wie

Comparativ | Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung 31 (2021) Heft 3 / 4, S. 394–410.
DOI: 10.26014/j.comp.2021.03-04.06

nach ihrer Ansicht eine dekolonisierte öffentliche Geschichte und Erinnerung an die Sklaverei aussehen könnte.

The public actions of toppling and removing monuments of enslavers and colonizers by protesters in several cities of Great Britain as well as worldwide have also resonated in Jamaica. Discussions on removing statues of colonial-era icons from public spaces, although not a new phenomenon, have increased in the media and in the public discourse. In particular, for Jamaican activists in favour of slavery reparations, it has been a relevant topic for years. Public education and public history are central aspects of their broader agenda for the reparatory justice they are campaigning for at the national as well as transnational level within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Reparations Commission. Mainly composed of scholars, human rights activists, journalists, and cultural professionals from anglophone Caribbean countries, this commission urges European governments to engage in measures of reparations in order to come to terms with the legacies of transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and of plantation slavery – legacies still shaping Caribbean societies. It embraces economic and political aspects as well as dimensions of education, health, culture, and public memory. Focusing on the example of Jamaica, the article first gives an overview of the debates and outreach activities initiated by the Jamaican National Bicentenary Committee before and after the Bicentenary of Abolition of the Slave Trade, in 2007, and by the National Commission for Reparations, founded later in 2009 (renamed the National Council on Reparation). Focusing on Jamaican scholars and activists in favour of reparations, the article emphasizes, based on my own empirical research, their commitment to public education on the history of slavery and its legacies. The second part of the article briefly discusses the relation between reparations and the current public debate on dealing with colonial monuments in Jamaica. Finally, it reflects on the activists' visions of how a decolonized public history and memory of slavery could look like.

1. Introduction

Claims for slavery reparations have a long history in the Americas. Jamaica has always been at the forefront of this struggle, and reparations have increasingly become part of a national debate – currently, it is a timely topic resonating widely. The Bicentenary of Abolition of the Slave Trade, in 2007, was instrumental for placing the reparations agenda at the forefront. I argue that, despite the many controversies raised around this event, the outreach activities and debates initiated have intensified the call for reparations and resulted since then in a growing support by the government as well as in a stronger addressing of Great Britain to apologize and invest in measures of reparations. These Jamaican developments are closely linked to a global conjuncture of reparations. Crucial herein is the agenda of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Reparations Commission, composed of delegates from basically anglophone Caribbean states. Since starting in 2013 to urge European governments to engage in measures, this commission has made the issue of reparations for slavery a global concern with a new symbolic, geographic, and political scope. The global toppling of colonial monuments and statues and

the rapidly growing Black Lives Matter movement might represent another element for this global push, which also resonated in Jamaica.

In this article, I briefly reflect on how the reparations agenda is linked to the toppling of colonial statues – a subject on which I have not conducted systematic research, however. My research analyses the arguments of the Jamaican scholars and campaigners for reparations and how they trace back the legacies of slavery in order to mobilize a political agenda on behalf of reparations. The focus of my research is the raising up of an agenda, not its possible (or impossible) implementation in practice. In this sense, the reflection on public history here is limited to tracing the arguments and strategies to generate public knowledge and does not discuss the potential effects.

The article outlines some of the developments that contributed to the increasing awareness and support for the reparations cause. In that respect, the foundation of the National Commission for Reparations in 2009 (renamed the National Council on Reparations in 2016, hereinafter NCR) was fundamental. In this article, I rely on the reports and official documents of the NCR, on press statements, on popular and academic publications of their members, and on interviews I conducted with them during research in Kingston in 2014 and 2017. I centre on historian and professor Verene Shepherd, who chaired the NCR from 2012 to 2017 and co-chairs it since. I first met her in 2014 and then again in 2017, shortly before she became the director of the newly established Centre for Reparation Research at the headquarters of the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI), where she invited me in 2020 to be a guest researcher. She and the other 15–20 members of the NCR have for years worked on the issue of slavery reparations, anti-colonial struggles, and Afro-Caribbean traditions and, as scholars, human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, or artists, are long committed to the issue of reparations. Shepherd is renowned for her outstanding commitment to the cause beyond Jamaica. It is particularly due to her exceptional work as a historian, activist, and public voice in local, national, and transnational arenas that the case for reparations has gained such a strong impetus and momentum in Jamaica and globally. She closely collaborates with the Barbadian historian and professor Hilary Beckles – the globally acknowledged spokesperson, chair and co-founder of the CARICOM Reparations Commission since 2013, and current vice chancellor of the UWI – at the level of the CARICOM Reparations Commission as well as in other international organizations. As a former chair (from 2009 to 2012) and member of the United Nations (UN) Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (until 2015), Shepherd has placed reparations on the agenda of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent, under the theme "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development".[1]

The way I see and analyse reparations is highly influenced by the many interviews and exchanges I have had with Shepherd. I sincerely thank Shepherd for her trust, time,

1 United Nations, Program of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2014), http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/pdf/A.RES.69.16_IDPAD.pdf (accessed 3 May 2016).

contacts, and perspectives she opened up and made possible for me. That being said, I am aware that, at least in this article, which centres on her efforts in linking public history and education to reparations and reflecting on her impact as public personality, the perspective might be biased. In other publications, I am more engaged, providing stronger based insights on empirical grounds according to the views and perspectives of other activists of the NCR while balancing their arguments alongside Shepherd's.
Lastly, the controversies and ambiguities in constructing public history and the extent to which it can be conceived as a form of reparation for the multiple harm slavery has caused require more systematic elaboration. I have briefly commented in my reflection on the current redress of the compensation of slave owners that my Jamaican interview partners are quite clear in arguing that it is impossible to quantify the psychological harm and even more impossible to repair it with money. They regard some other dimensions, like the material damage in terms of structural gaps in development, to be potentially quantifiable. Here, they argue explicitly that Great Britain could at least finance infrastructural investments in education and health, roads, houses, school reforms, and the building of museums and research centres, as all of these require material resources, which Caribbean states often lack.[2] The article will briefly touch upon this aspect as well.

2. Brief History of the Jamaican Reparations Movement

There is a clear consensus among the current members of the NCR to praise the Jamaican Rastafarians for championing the reparations cause by pointing out the need to confront the legacies of slavery and colonial domination. Except for several significant individual initiatives since the 1950s, such as petitioning the queen of England and later the British government to facilitate repatriation to Africa as a form of reparations, the issue hardly reached the public outside of Rastafarian contexts or academia, nor was it a subject of official political negotiation. Rastafarian leaders started to work on a broader and more organized reparations agenda that went beyond the issue of repatriation, pushing the case forward in Jamaica as well as in two world conferences on reparations in Nigeria in 1990 and 1993.[3] Reparations finally became *the* top issue at the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. Caribbean delegates, in particular Beckles, ensured that the topic of reparations was intensely debated and included in the final declaration,

2 C. Rauhut, Reassessing the Compensation Payments to British Slave Owners in Current Caribbean Claims to Reparations, Sociologus. Journal for Social Anthropology (forthcoming).

3 J. Niaah, The Rastafari Presence in Ethiopia. A Contemporary Perspective, in: M. Barnett (ed.) Rastafari in the New Millennium. A Rastafari Reader, New York 2012, pp.66-88; The Abuja Proclamation, A declaration of the first Abuja Pan-African Conference on Reparations For African Enslavement, Colonisation And Neo-Colonisation, http://www.shaka.mistral.co.uk/abujaProclamation.htm. I deal more with the Rastafarians contribution in: C. Rauhut, Mobilizing Transnational Agency for Slavery Reparations: The Case of Jamaica, in: Journal of African American History: Special Issue on National and International Perspectives on Movements for Reparations 103 (2018), pp. 1-2, https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/jaah/2018/103/1-2.

even if not in the substantive way they would have desired. The resolution condemned slavery as a crime against humanity and called on the former European colonizing countries for an official acknowledgement and an apology. After all, for the first time in an international arena it was recognized that slavery had caused structural marginalization and racial discrimination that still persist to this day and directly affect the lives of Africans and people of African descent. As far as specific demands and potential resolution for reparations are concerned, the declaration remains clearly vague and was not followed up with concrete measures.

The CARICOM Reparations Commission has therefore taken up the cause by reviving and amplifying the Durban agenda, strengthening the reparations aspect of it and encouraging Caribbean states to address European governments for reparations. The Durban conference as well as the Pan-African conferences of the 1990s are widely perceived as a milestone for the Caribbean and global reparations struggle, involving, next to civil activism, several politicians and representatives of national governments and international organizations such as the UN and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Rastafarian Barbara Makeda Blake-Hannah, upon her return from Durban to Jamaica, founded the Jamaican Reparations Movement, which paved the path for the establishment of the Jamaica National Bicentenary Committee (JNBC) in 2005 and finally the NCR in 2009. The NCR, in its reports, interprets this launch by the government as "a recognition of the justification of the work on reparation done over decades by Rastafari, NGOs, Civil Society Groups, Barbara Blake-Hanna and [long-standing politician in favour of reparations] Mike Henry". The NCR and its members constantly praise the pioneering role of Rastafarians, who are represented by official members of the council as well as by many associates, articulating their different perspectives.[4] Also, at the level of the transregional CARICOM Reparations Commission, the Rastafarians' contribution is in a way recognized, as evidenced by the inclusion of repatriation (for those who desire it) as the second point in their Ten-Point Action Plan.[5]

3. Jamaican Debates around the Bicentenary of Abolition of the Slave Trade in 2007

The commemoration of the Bicentenary of Abolition of the Slave Trade was instrumental for the proper handling of the past slavery in Jamaica. Even more for those scholars and activists committed to the reparations cause, it became a key moment for advancing the case nationally and internationally and, moreover, for urging the British govern-

4 National Commission on Reparation, Report of the Work of the National Commission on Reparation, May 2009 - October 2013: Presented to Hon. Lisa Hanna. Minister of Youth and Culture, Novemeber 2013, unpublished work 2013.

5 CARICOM Reparations Commission, 10-Point Reparation Plan, http://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricoms-10-point-reparation-plan (accessed 10 May 2018).

ment and society to apologize and engage in reparations. These supporters, as well as many journalists of local and international media, have articulated strong expectations that the case will be dealt with and result in an official apology by the representatives of the UK government within the national ceremonial acts in Jamaica. Respective debates were centred not only on commemorative practices but also on the construction of monuments and other heritage and memory sites – they were directly connected to the demands for reparations. The JNBC was founded in 2005, officially supported and mandated by the government to

> *find meaningful and sustainable ways to mark the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British Transatlantic Trade in Africans to Jamaica; to find appropriate ways to honour the ancestors* […] *abolitionists in the struggle to end the trade; to conduct research to facilitate the production of information for schools and the general public and to advance the cause of reparation*.[6]

Since then, the JNBC has raised considerable public awareness through public meetings, lectures, and debates and by reporting in local media and publishing in academic and popular journals, which dedicated special issues on the bicentenary, slavery, and reparations.[7] It made strong efforts to present a Caribbean perspective on the commemoration that differs from the official version of Great Britain, celebrating itself as the pioneer country that abolished the slave trade and slavery.

The JNBC deliberately compiled a counter-design based on two aspects to the UK's unidimensional British abolition narrative. Firstly, they have criticized this narrative as a selective way of remembering that highlights Britain's efforts in ending the trade and is silent about the centuries of slave trading, slave owning, and profiting that predated it, causing the damage that Caribbean societies still have to confront. Not surprisingly, the former prime minister Tony Blair's statement of "deep sorrow" that slavery ever happened was absolutely contrary to what many people in the Caribbean expected long ago: an official recognition of the crime and consequently a formal and full apology by the British government, considered to be the successor state. Reparations activists and scholars as well as local and international media across the Caribbean and Europe have largely countered this denial. Secondly, contrary to the British abolition narrative, which centres on white personalities like the British parliamentarian and abolitionist William Wilberforce, the JNBC has explicitly pointed out the active role of the enslaved people themselves in resisting and fighting slavery in the Americas. Consequently, the enslaved and anti-colonial heroes were placed at the centre of commemorative ceremonies.

6 V. A. Shepherd et al., Jamaica and the Debate over Reparation for Slavery: A Discussion Paper Prepared by the Jamaica National Bicentenary Committee, Kingston 2012, p. v.

7 V. A. Shepherd, Slavery, Shame and Pride: Debates over the Marking of the Bicentennial of the Abolition of the British Trans-Atlantic Trade in Africans in 2007, in: Caribbean Quarterly 56 (2010) 1&2, pp. 1–21; V. A. Jamaica and the Debate over Reparations for Slavery: pp. 24–30; R. M. Nettleford, The Psychic Inheritance. The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery, in: Jamaica Journal 11 (2008), pp. 6–11.

The two monuments that were the official contributions of the Jamaican government to the bicentenary were considered milestones. The one was the Freedom Monument at Sam Sharpe Square in Montego Bay, St James, honouring the "heroes and heroines of the final emancipation war in Jamaica (1831–32)".[8] The other was dedicated to the victims of the Zong Massacre, located in Black River, St Elizabeth. In this tragedy of the slave ship *Zong*, 132 enslaved Africans from Liverpool were thrown overboard off the Jamaican coasts in 1781, and the owner later got compensation based on insurance and property rights for the human beings. The JNBC and later the NCR, as well as leading reparations activists Beckles, have underscored its emblematic meaning: "Aside from the brutality of the transatlantic trade, the story of the *Zong* also introduces perhaps the most important aspect of the trade itself: its profitability and financial importance to European countries and citizens who engaged in it."[9] Both Jamaican monuments were dedicated to the enslaved ancestors and included in their commemorations the dimension of not only suffering and brutality but also resistance and resilience. The shifting of monuments and memorials to the resistance of the enslaved and anti-colonial rebels – instead of honouring white abolitionists – has been observed as a more regional or even global tendency since the 1980s in the anglophone Caribbean, for instance in the French oversea departments as well as in Cuba and, to a lesser extent, in Europe.[10]

In Jamaica, the bicentenary went along with intense controversy: whether it should be marked or not, whether slavery should be remembered, and what would be the appropriate terminology and respective memory practices. Shepherd, chair of the JBNC, summarizes critical views on commemorating slavery in Jamaica and the Caribbean, especially when associated with anniversaries of colonial conquest, abolition of slavery, and emancipation. Already the terminology in relation to annual events is contested and navigates between celebrating, commemorating, observing, and marking – it is the latter one that Shepherd prefers. She traces back the long history of a narrative of forgetting slavery and looking forward – which was established right after slavery ended in contemporary newspaper coverage and by several generations of politicians and which, to a certain extent, was perpetuated by post-independent ideologies after 1962. Elsa Goveia, the first female head of the UWI history department stated in 1959 that slavery was associated with shame and that this "shame about the past too often fills the place that should held by knowledge".[11] Shepherd's concern here is, 50 years later, "why do people still feel such shame over the question of slavery and what can we do about it in the 21th century?" Being aware of the speculative terrain in answering this question, she relates this to the

8 National Commission on Reparation, Report.

9 H. M. Beckles, Britain's black debt, p.45; See also J. Walvin, The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery, New Haven 2011.

10 U. Schmieder, Sites of Memory of Atlantic Slavery in European Towns with an Excursus on the Caribbean, in: Cuadernos Intercambio sobre Centroamérica y el Caribe 15 (2018) 1, pp. 29–75. https://revistas.ucr.ac.cr/index.php/intercambio/article/view/32959 (accessed 4 January 2020).

11 Shepherd, Slavery, Shame and Pride: Debates, p. 5.

literature on the psychological harm and trauma caused by slavery and the slave trade, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame and a negative self-image among Jamaicans.[12] Those feelings of shame and taboo, as she states, must be explained and deconstructed as part of the dominant knowledge system keeping slavery and the slave trade as a sort of shameful family secret associated with victimhood – something that has been observed across Jamaica in the broader African diaspora and Atlantic, resulting in silence, whisper, and repressed memory production about the trade in enslaved Africans for a long time.[13] Shepherd finally argues that the feelings of shame can only be addressed by the construction of an "empowering knowledge about the past, show-casing pride in the achievements of one's ancestors […] and iconographic decolonization – removing the iconic stamp of the colonizer from the landscape and substituting local icons; insisting on Reparation". Her self-asserted aim to raise awareness of the history and legacies of slavery "from text to public space"[14] is elaborated as the subject of this article.

For now, I want to firstly emphasize that the attempt to remove colonial monuments and to substitute it with local black icons, representing the enslaved Africans, had been long known in the Caribbean before it became such a lively topic in Europe in 2020. Secondly, in Jamaica, such attempts were closely linked to reparations claims – which became evident during the bicentenary debates – and have grown since. Obviously, the extent to which such measures of public history and commemoration – highlighting black agency and achievements, can potentially repair the psychological harm of slavery or even be used and perceived as a form of reparation – requires more systematic empirical research as already mentioned.

The controversy around the bicentenary commemorations is reflected in scholars' criticism analysing the dynamics both in the Caribbean and in Great Britain. It relates to a broader research field across and beyond the anglophone context about commemorative practices, memory, and politics of history that cannot be addressed here in detail.[15]

For the UK context, it is argued that, on the one hand, hundreds of heritage projects and initiatives in public history have empowered many black Britons, most of them of Caribbean descent, and reframed the debate and knowledge about slavery and the slave trade in general, which until 2007 was not a public issue within the dominant British abolition narrative. On the other hand, for some, public history initiatives will only ever be regarded as a "safe" option that allows Britain and other European states implicated in the slave trade to evade issues like apologies and reparations.[16] In relation to the bi-

12 Ibid., pp. 11. See also Nettleford, The Psychic Inheritance. The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery.

13 A. C. Bailey, African voices of the Atlantic slave trade: Beyond the silence and the shame, Boston 2005.

14 Shepherd, Slavery, Shame and Pride: Debates, pp. 11, 16.

15 G. Oostindie, Public Memories of the Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery in Contemporary Europe, in: European Review 17 (2009) 3–4 (accessed 2 April 2017); J. R. Oldfield, Repairing Historical Wrongs, in: Social & Legal Studies 21 (2012) 2 (accessed 2 April 2017); C. Kaplan/J. R. Oldfield (eds.), Imagining transatlantic slavery, Basingstoke England, New York 2010; Schmieder, Sites of Memory of Atlantic Slavery; U. Schmieder/M. Zeuske (eds.), Erinnerungen an Sklaverei, Leipzig 2012; U. Schmieder/M. Zeuske, Erinnerungskulturen und Geschichtspolitik im Hinblick auf transatlantischen Sklavenhandel und Sklaverei, in: Schmieder/Zeuske, Erinnerungen an Sklaverei, pp. 7–32.

16 Oldfield, Repairing Historical Wrongs, p. 253; Oostindie, Public Memories of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

centenary in Jamaica, Wayne Modest is rather critical toward the official activities of the Jamaican government, considering them to be too much linked with symbolic politics or even used by several politicians involved as a strategy to gain voters and power. Moreover, those politics were not accompanied by measurable changes in policy or attitudes in order to face problems of social exclusion, racism, and so on. He concludes, however, that a "generalised condemnation of symbolic politics in distinction to real politics is too simplistic and therefore inappropriate",[17] and I would add that this distinction does not fully address the complexity of politics (symbolic or not) in its intentions, results, and implications for issues of memory and, as this article demonstrates, in its incentive effects for the reparations case. The general scepticism towards the government's role in 2007 might be raised as well in relation to the current reparations agenda of the NCR, which I deal with later.

For now, being aware of the controversy raised around the bicentenary, I argue that, for the Jamaican context, the commemoration activities were important and efficient in the sense that they helped to bring the topic of reparations to the forefront. This was maybe not yet predictable at the time the reflections on the 2007 events were published. In the meantime, the political context for reparations has significantly changed in Jamaica and globally. The topic of reparations is energized even more as the 2013 agenda of the CARICOM Reparations Commission has been echoed globally in academic and public debates, and the topic might even be more vitalized by the growing Black Lives Matter activism and the toppling of colonial statues. The activities and debates initiated by the JNBC have intensified the call for reparations, becoming more and more a national debate since then. This finally culminated in the establishment of a NCR in 2009, officially funded by the Jamaican government as a body under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. It was first chaired by sociologist and anthropologist Barry Chevannes, author of various books about Rastafari culture in the Caribbean, and from 2012 to 2017 by Shepherd – who is still the co-chair and, in addition, is the director of the Centre for Reparations Research, inaugurated in 2017.

Regarding these developments, the initial work of the JNBC was instrumental and went beyond its mandate to mark the bicentenary. It has significantly intensified the public debates on reparations and political pressure not only nationally but also internationally by urging Great Britain to apologize and engage in measures. Since 2007, the commemorations marked each year at both monuments are constantly renewed and linked to multiple outreach events organized by the NCR. Activists ensure that such activities are framed within the broader reparations approach. This, in Jamaica, definitely envisions much more than issues of memory and symbolic politics. Reparations not only are designed to address the structural damage slavery has caused at a social, economic, and political level but also involve dimensions of recognition, development, and national and

17 W. Modest, Slavery and the (Symbolic) Politics of Memory in Jamaica, in: L. Smith/G. Cubitt/W. Ross/K. Fouseki (eds.), Representing enslavement and abolition in museums: Ambiguous engagements, New York, NY 2011 pp. 75–94, p. 91. I thank Ulrike Schmieder for facilitating access to this publication.

international politics. In this sense, public history and memory are by no means seen as a substitute for reparations (as it has been observed in case of the UK), but rather framed as just one aspect among many others.

4. Public Education and Public History: The National Council on Reparations' Outreach

The members of the NCR consider public education as a main priority of their work. Rupert Lewis, professor emeritus of political science and one of the first reparations activists since the 1980s, underlines the need to inform and teach the population about the history of slavery and the potential meaning of reparations. Although many people are aware of the injustices committed by slavery, he believes that productive knowledge and discussion on slavery and the long-term legacies were systematically unattended in education and public discourse. He attributes this to a social colonial order, followed to a certain extent by the independent governments after 1962, which were reproducing an education system based on a Eurocentric model of British master narrative that either silences or glorifies the colonial past.[18] This relates to what earlier has been described as the ideology of forgetting slavery and looking forward as well as associating slavery with shame and guilt.[19] Others shared their owns observations that for a long time the history of slavery has barely been touched upon at schools, and the subject of history was not even compulsory, and still, it is only at secondary school. Even if pupils choose history, it is often very superficial: they cram dates, places, and names of people for their exams without dealing with their ideas and contents.

Therefore, Shepherd and many other historians have worked for decades in advisory commissions for the revision of various curricula of schools, colleges, and high schools – to a certain extent with success as relevant changes were adopted in the last years, and still, the curriculum is constantly being reworked. The intention of the NCR is not only to make history compulsory but also to include a module on reparations and reparatory justice in the Caribbean and globally.[20] These efforts have their antecedents, such as in the Jamaican Reparations Movement of the 2000s, championed by Blake-Hannah, who presented in 2003 a "Jamaica Reparation Document" (unpublished) to some ministers of the Jamaican government, calling for "a Jamaican education curriculum related to the interconnections of the effects of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, slavery and colonialism, the resulting negative social and economic manifestations on all aspects of life in Jamaica and the need for Reparations nationally, regionally and internationally to correct these negative manifestations".[21]

18 Interview with Rupert Lewis, 10 March 2014.
19 Shepherd, Slavery, Shame and Pride.
20 Interview with Verene Shepherd, 7 March 2017.
21 Shepherd et al., Jamaica and the Debate, p. 68.

Next to their constant effort to reform the school curricula, the members of the NCR offer workshops in schools and colleges as well as in work centres, churches, hospitals, unions, and many other places with public access. The NCR has further produced a radio jingle, convened various youth forums on reparations in cooperation with the African Caribbean Heritage Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank, and organized several public lectures in the Emancipation Park in Kingston. Various members are regularly interviewed by national and international media, above all Shepherd. She, in addition, has ran for ten years her own weekly Saturday radio history education programme *Talking History*, where she informs listeners about current developments in the "reparations corner".[22]

Also, the literature on reparations has visibly expanded and today is sold at the bookshops of the UWI campus, cultural institutions, as well as downtown. By campaigning all over the country, the NCR clearly intends to reach people and to transfer comprehensible academic knowledge on slavery and reparations to the public. The purpose is to raise greater awareness not only about the history of slavery but also, more importantly, about the long-term legacies and connections to today and, even more, about how this might legitimize the call for reparations. Many people would not understand what their current situation could have to do with history; it is seen detached from the past, which, again, lies in a deeply rooted discourse of regarding slavery as a closed chapter of the past as they argue.

Recently, however, activists have been able to use a powerful example to highlight the complex effects of slavery shaping the present: the compensation British slave owners claimed and got for the "loss of their (human) property" at the end of slavery in the 1830s. Archival evidence about enormous amounts of cash and ongoing profits was publicly made accessible in 2013 by the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership at the University College London.[23] Since then and even long before, Jamaican scholars and activists have explored this source, even more when they uncovered in the year 2018 that the huge bank loan taken out by the British parliament at the time in order to enable those compensations was not repaid until 2015.

I have analysed elsewhere how activists explored the outrage felt by many people in Jamaica when learning that one of the slave owners profiting from this compensation was former British prime minister David Cameron's ancestor. They have explicitly unmasked Cameron's denial of recognition when he visited Jamaica in 2015 and proposed to Jamaicans to "move on from painful legacy of slavery" instead of apologizing and answering the reparations call. Using the media and their own outreach activities, the activists turned this into a public political scandal that helped to strengthen their reparations claims and finally to increase diplomatic pressure towards the UK government.

22 V. Shepherd, Talking History, in: nationwide radio, https://nationwideradiojm.com/personalities/talking-history/ (accessed 16 April 2021).

23 Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership, Legacies of British Slave-ownership, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/ (accessed 5 April 2018).

Lastly, they not only have connected the need for reparations to political or moral dimensions, including apology, but also have insisted on the need to confront the tremendous gap in wealth and development slavery and compensation that caused and is still shaping Caribbean societies. This example, in a way, confirms the investment of the NCR in public education as a successful strategy, as it demonstrates that the more historical understanding people have about slavery and post-slavery dynamics and about the links to current global inequalities and politics , the more support could be gained for reparations. In this sense, the spread of public knowledge about the history and slavery, compensation, and the long-term legacies is seen as a sort of precondition for advancing the case for reparations.[24]

As mentioned earlier, Shepherd, as a key player, has for years been pushing the reparations cause in Jamaica as well as regionally and globally. As the chair of various relevant commission (the JBNC, the NCR, and since 2017 the Centre for Reparation Research), she has mobilized governmental support in terms of budget, logistics, and infrastructure. In its early years, during the 2000s, the working conditions both for the JNBC and the NCR were constantly influenced by the lack of funds, depending on the fluctuating expenditures of the government and its terms in office.[25] Since then, as she commented in our interview in 2017, the conditions have improved, and the work of the NCR has become quite consolidated, but still no permanent funding is guaranteed, which depends on many external factors, including electoral conjunctures.[26] Despite official support, the scope of public work and outreach constantly faces the context of scare and unstable resources. This observation might not be interpreted as a particular Jamaican phenomenon.

Efforts in public history and commemorating slavery – as always and everywhere – depend on official funding, political agenda, and state interest. And the building of museums, research centres, monuments, memorials, and heritage sides require solid and sustainable financial, technological, and logistical funding. What might be a particular condition of the former British colonies in the Caribbean is that their governments are very often restricted by the lack of resources due to restraints of emergent economies and foreign debt, among many other aspects. Consequently, the idea here is to primarily address Great Britain, more than the government of Jamaica, to finance such infrastructural investments within a framework of reparations. This is similarly included as point four, "Cultural institutions", in the agenda of the CARICOM Reparations Commission.[27]

24 C. Rauhut, The Link of a Former British Prime Minister's Ancestor to Caribbean Slavery Economy in the Current Call for Reparations in Jamaica, in: O. Kaltmeier, M. Petersen, W. Raussert, J. Roth (eds.) Cherishing the Past, Envisioning the Future. Entangled Practises of Heritage and Utopia in the Americas, New Orleans 2021, pp. 77–99; Rauhut, Reassessing the Compensation Payments.

25 V. A. Shepherd, Jamaica and the debate over reparation for slavery: an overview, in: C. Hall/N. Draper/K. McClelland (eds.), Emancipation and the Remaking of the British Imperial World, Manchester 2014, pp. 223–250, here p. 243.

26 Interview with Verene Shepherd, 7 March 2017.

27 CARICOM Reparations Commission, 10-Point Reparation Plan, http://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricoms-10-point-reparation-plan/ (accessed 10 May 2018).

Again, to invest in public history and the memory of slavery is an important strategy but only one among many others, for instance the addressing issues of responsibility in international politics. In this arena, Shepherd and her colleagues, in particular the legal experts, are committed to urge the Jamaican government to pursue reparations as an internal and foreign policy goal. Indeed, former Jamaican prime minister Portia Simpson Miller (and this was unprecedented) placed the reparations agenda in the diplomatic talks with former British prime minister Cameron when he visited Jamaica in 2015. Since then, Jamaican politicians have taken up the cause more forcefully as an international political agenda.[28] This shift of reparations becoming more and more a governmental matter is ambivalent and requires a much more differentiated examination elsewhere.
For now, and for the argument of the article, I consider the increasing backing of the government and the positive effects such backing has for the cause. Shepherd and many other activists make use of this support in their aim of securing reparations, to which they had been committed whether as researchers, lawyers, or volunteers long before the government came on board. The official funding of the NCR finally helped to implement outreach activities, which in turn spread the reparations spirit widely in Jamaican society. This resulted in a growing resonance, as far as I have observed between 2014 and 2020. I argue that the backing of the government is a significant aspect, at least in creating public awareness. It might further be interpreted in its interrelation with other national and global conjunctures of the reparations topic in general.

5. On Dealing with Colonial Monuments in Jamaica

One of these global conjunctures and effects relates to the toppling of colonial statues. As demonstrated here, the controversy about monuments and memorial sites and to whom is memorialized (or not) has been going on for years and came to a head during the bicentenary. Recently, in reacting to the global Black Lives Matter protests after the killing of George Floyd in summer 2020, the Jamaica government, through its minister of culture Olivia Grange, has also initiated a political debate on how to deal with colonial statues and memory sites. This move reflected the news about monument destruction in the UK and the government's and politician's responses to them, such as the establishment of a commission in London to review statues, monuments, and street and place names to reflect greater cultural diversity and sensitivity. Also for Jamaica, Grange announced a necessary discussion and course of action for a treatment of colonial monuments in Jamaica, and, most importantly, she situates this current process in a broader need "to fully confront the inequities and injustices of the past that are impacting modern life".[29]

28 Rauhut, The Link of a Former British Prime Minister's Ancestor to Caribbean Slavery; Rauhut, Reassessing the Compensation Payments.

29 D. Hyman/D. Rodney, Update: Statue rage – Government opens debate on removing monuments to colonial-era icons, in: The Gleaner, 11 June 2020, http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20200611/update-statue-rage-government-opens-debate-removing-monuments-colonial (accessed 3 April 2021).

Clearly, the inherent reparations argument is hardly to be overlooked and expresses Grange's familiarity with the reparations cause, which she has officially supported as the minister of culture by convening the establishment of the NCR in 2009.

Other public scholars and activists from the UWI welcome this state initiative and express more radically that the icons of colonization and oppression by white slavers in many public spaces – that is to say, statues venerating Christopher Columbus in St Ann, British admiral George Rodney in St Catherine, and Queen Victoria in Parade in Kingston – must be removed. "We ought to put aside people like Christopher Columbus in some basement museum and have things that more represent and reflect the 95 per cent African population that Jamaica is comprised of", states Professor Palmer Adisa. Professor Amina Blackwood-Meeks underlines the crucial role of the Jamaica Black Lives Matter movement within this ongoing project of decolonization.[30] To what extent the Black Lives Matter activists in Jamaica could also become multipliers of the reparations call would be interesting to explore further. At least, they have taken explicit public actions, including for instance the Youth Rally prior to the summer 2020 of global Black Lives Matter activism – a rally that received global attention.[31] What concerns the removal of colonial statues, Professor Emerita Carolyn Cooper warns, is that although necessary, those acts carry the risk of being limited to a superficial "empty gesture if the systems of oppression in the present are not also transformed".[32]

Shepherd has commented in the media on at least two occasions that the removal of statues is a mostly welcomed initiative, but just a part of a much more complex and radical project. This initially aims to transform the way history is thought and dealt with in schools and in the public sphere. She first calls attention to the fact that the project of iconographic or symbolic decolonization has a long history not only in Jamaica but also in the broader Caribbean, involving the erection of monuments and statues to freedom fighters or supporters of Caribbean decolonization represented as "our own icons".[33] More explicitly, in a radio interview for the programme "Nationwide", she argues that colonial statues must be kept as evidence and placed in a museum instead: "As a historian, I would prefer to not destroy them, I would prefer to place them in a museum […] where you can have a proper storyboard and explain their role in history."[34] Shepherd herself has lobbied for years to reform school curricula in order to make history a compulsory subject at secondary school. In that respect, she mobilizes a discourse of missing adequate knowledge and reflection about history as and old and ongoing observation:

30 Ibid.

31 https://jis.gov.jm/jamaican-leg-caricom-reparations-youth-baton-relays-launched/; #jamaicayouthrunforreparations#.

32 D. Hyman and D. Rodney, Update: Statue rage.

33 V. A. Shepherd, Letter of the Day. Time to decolonise the Caribbean, in: The Gleaner, 12 June 2020, http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/letters/20200612/letter-day-time-decolonise-caribbean (accessed 3 April 2021).

34 T. Thomas, Remove Statues of Colonial Oppressors & Place In Museums – Professor Shepherd (11.06.2020), https://nationwideradiojm.com/remove-statues-of-colonial-oppressors-place-in-museums-professor-shepherd/ (accessed 3 April 2021). Audio transcription by the author.

> *There is a disconnect. So it is not only about monuments, it's deeper. We have to address that and we have to do history revisionist. Not just any history education. We have to lead our children with the correct books. Listen, since the university department of history was created historians are being trained to go back to the archives and to look at history from our perspectives. We are not reading those books! When I go to school I see the same old books that are allowing us to participate in an old oppression.*[35]

Obviously, the claims "history from our perspectives" and how it should look like, whom it should represent, and on which source it relies all require a much more differentiated analyses. This applies just as much to the inherent programmatic question she raises about the role of the historian, to which she explicitly delivers a potential answer:

> *Is it our role to lead the reparation movement or to ignite interest in it?* […] *At the very least, we should become engaged in public history education – at least until Caribbean and African history become compulsory subjects in the schools. In other words, historians need to provide people with the educational tools that they need to make an informed decision on the merits and demerits of reparation.*[36]

As this article has demonstrated, Shepherd has been committed to connecting her profession as a historian to public education and advocacy for reparations for a very long time. Her proposal to turn to revisionist texts dealing with Caribbean and African agency, knowledge, and resistance in a broader historical frame, including pre-colonial periods, pre-fifteenth-century conquest, slave trade, and colonization appeals to the notion of achievement and of black pride and resilience. In this regard, in chairing the JNBC and the NCR, she has, together with her team, initiated many efforts to award and honour those black heroes who fought slavery and colonization.

This impetus fits into a global conjuncture (which is not new) of generating Afrocentric ideas and practices to oppose Eurocentric historiography. Rastafarian activist and attorney Ras Miguel Lorne argues in a similar manner, pointing out the need to raise awareness not only about the history of slavery but also about a revitalization and revaluation of African and Afro-Caribbean traditions, which have been marginalized, and their adherents criminalized for centuries by colonial orders and prejudices in nearly all parts of the Americas. He describes reparations "as a fight to restore the dignity of black people, to re-connect us with Africa, to eliminate racism".[37]

I see here a certain parallel to what I have analysed in my PhD on the Cuban Santería religion as projects of "Africanization" – a relevant agenda existing in nearly all other Afro-Atlantic religions as well. In Cuba, several religious practitioners are enacting visions of a transatlantic restoration of a more African (Yoruba) religion between Africa and Cuba, inspired by the vision that something that has been forcibly broken by the

35 Thomas, Remove Statues of Colonial Oppressors.

36 V. A. Shepherd, Jamaica and the debate over reparation for slavery: an overview, in: C. Hall/N. Draper/K. McClelland (eds.), Emancipation and the Remaking of the British Imperial World, Manchester 2014, pp. 223–250.

37 Interview with Ras Miguel Lorne, 3 March 2014.

slave trade can be "completed" and restored in the present. This can be interpreted as an act of empowering and contribute to decolonized knowledge by including reconstructed sources of African origins.[38] In a similar manner, the sources that inspire the Jamaican reparations approach rely on historical research, archives, oral history and tradition, and African-based religious and cultural, in particular Rastafarian practices and thoughts. Here, public history and education, as put into practice by the activists, might contribute to generating a decolonized knowledge about slavery and its legacies and, in this sense, to a rewriting of history.

Last but not least, the proposal of building "bridges of belonging" between the Americas and Africa is included as point seven in the Ten-Point Action Plan of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, urging European countries to facilitate money for an African knowledge programme. It reads:

> *the forced separation of Africans from their homeland has resulted in cultural and social alienation from identity and existential belonging. Denied the right in law to life, and divorced by space from the source of historic self, Africans have craved the right to return and knowledge of the route to roots. A program of action is required to build "bridges of belonging"* […] *in order to neutralize the void created by slave voyages. Such actions will serve to build knowledge networks that are necessary for community rehabilitation.*[39]

6. Conclusion

Constructing a public history of slavery is a fundamental field of action in favour of reparations. Exemplified here by the approach of the Jamaican National Council on Reparation and, in particular, of its current co-chair Verene Shepherd, I have demonstrated that activists are engaged in generating public knowledge about slavery and reparations in order to make it available for a larger social context beyond academia and finally to advance a political case they consider as relevant. They deliberately link their efforts in public history and education to their reparations demands. Public history is therefore not substituting, but rather fostering reparations as a political agenda. In this context, the removal of colonial monuments is important for public impact to raise awareness, but it is only a tiny part of what reparations really mean.

Activists ensure that their public history outreach is consequently framed within the broader reparations framework. This, in Jamaica as well as at the level of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, is designed to address the structural damage slavery has caused at a social, economic, cultural, and epistemological level. It involves material and non-

38 C. Rauhut, A Transatlantic Restoration of Religion: On the Re-construction of Yoruba and Lúkúmí in Cuban Santería, in: I. Kummels/C. Rauhut/S. Rinke/B. Timm (eds.), Transatlantic Caribbean. Dialogues of People, Practices, Ideas, Bielefeld 2014, pp. 181–200.

39 CARICOM Reparations Commission, 10-Point Reparation Plan, http://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricoms-10-point-reparation-plan/ (accessed 10 May 2018).

material dimensions, such as development and recognition, and a clear national and international political agenda that counters global inequalities and political hierarchies, which still deny recognition of the crimes of slavery and respective responsibility. Thus, the commitment to invest in public history and education is by no means seen as a substitute, but rather as just one strategy among many others in the broader reparations framework. It is conducted by the purpose to link the current situation to its historical bases, rooted in slavery and colonialism.

Thus, the activists' vision for a public history first insists on making visible the multiple dimensions of damage and long-lasting legacies of the slave trade and slavery still shaping Caribbean societies. On the other hand, they reconstruct a public history that focuses on black icons who fought slavery and colonization; on the narratives and achievements of enslaved Africans and their descendants, relying on sources from historical research and archives; and on oral history and tradition. In this sense, public history and education generate decolonized knowledge about slavery and the legacies. However, the activists do not limit the discourse to issues of public memory and history. They also call for a financial transfer from Europe to Caribbean states as equally important and frame this within an international agenda for historical and political responsibility to address today's global inequalities regarded as long-term consequences of slavery. This article promotes reflecting more on the connections between public history, memory, and reparations in Jamaica and its contribution to a rewriting of a global entangled history that seriously considers the multiple dimensions of long-lasting impact of slavery.