

Caribbean Food Cultures: Representations and Performances of Eating, Drinking and Consumption in the Caribbean and Its Diasporas

International Conference, 28th to 29th September 2012, University of Heidelberg, Germany

Keynote Speakers:

Professor Rita de Maeseneer (Antwerp):

“The Aesthetics of Hunger and the Special Period in Cuba”

Professor Fabio Parasecoli (New York):

“Representations of Caribbean Food in US Popular Culture”

Topic:

The Caribbean is associated not only with beaches, palms, exotic food, fruity rum cocktails and reggae-music in Western common knowledge, but also with the inhuman plantation system, slavery, piracy or “banana republics”.

In the Caribbean, food and drinks as products and as acts or performances play a crucial role in various areas of human behavior and interaction: for the self-preservation of the body, as ethnic, religious and national identity markers, in the context of local and global commercial relationships, or regarding the fair allocation of food and relations of production. These biological, social, economic, historical and ethnic dimensions have taken a special turn in the Caribbean – a region that has been heavily influenced by migration. Thus, on the one hand, colonizers, slaves, contract workers, privateers and refugees were components of specific historical relations of production and trade. On the other hand, these different groups of people brought along social, cultural and economic practices related to food, consumer and luxury goods, which were subject to change and (or) hybridization. In the course of decolonization, emigration and tourism these goods and food, in turn, are being re-imported into the former European “motherlands” and North America.

The aim of this conference is to explore the performances or acts related to the production, consumption and the symbolism of food and nutrition in the Caribbean and its diasporas from the perspectives of cultural, social and behavioral sciences. Particular attention will be paid to contemporary and trans-national perspectives. These, for example, can be concerned with the social or religious significance of food, abstinence, rituals of exchange and preparation as well as the exchange of culinary traditions and ingredients on the internet. Of further interest are national and transnational representation practices of eating and drinking in literature, popular culture and new media, such as the advertisement of Caribbean products in the region and the diasporas and the symbolic or metaphorical usage of “ethnic food” and its consumption in narrative literature and song lyrics.

A detailed conference program will be available soon.