

Excursion report Edinburgh 10th – 15th of June 2019



The Fachschaft Afrikanistik was delighted to have received funding from QVM sources and the SpRat of the University of Cologne for ten students (Emmanuella Bih, Celina Horev, Jan Knipping, Aisha Makorni, Elizabeth Namwanje, Latifat Odugbemi, Janna Perbix, Claudine Rakotomanana, Tatjana Schnellinger, Janine Traber) to visit the ECAS (European Conference on African Studies) in Edinburgh this June.



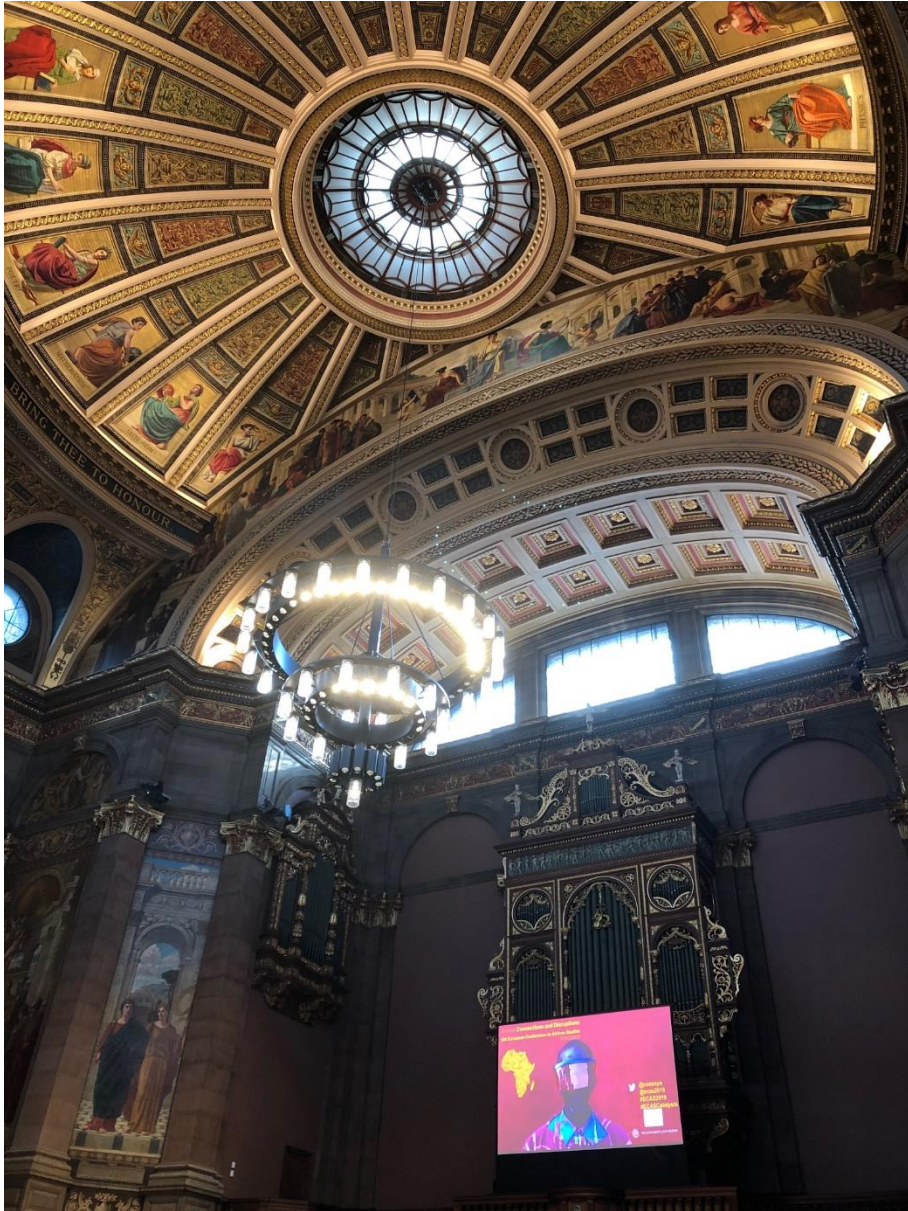
After having selected the students and sorting out the visa issues we were happy to find everyone on time at the boarding gate. Although some of us had excess luggage, we managed to distribute all clothes to the bags of the group, so no conference outfit had to be left behind. In Scotland we were relieved to see that everyone was finally permitted to enter the blessed kingdom (in contrast to many scholars from African countries who were denied visa) and had lunch together to celebrate the arrival. To be able to discuss the results and experiences of every day over shared meals, we spent the week in two adjoining apartments.

As we registered for the conference, we received the wonderfully designed conference bags in African prints. This was presumably one more reason for the very expensive conference fees. The included printed program was massive and overwhelming. One whole book full of panels, keynotes and a broad cultural program. It was impossible to attend all of the very interesting panels but the wide range of topics assured that everyone would benefit. So, it was no wonder that all students without exception left the house early every day to take the ten minutes' walk to the university. No one was stressed by a fixed schedule but could pick the most interesting panels for themselves. In the breaks we used the time to discuss with some of the presenters or met the group for lunch.



On one of the evenings we organized to take part in a Black History Walking Tour. Although the weather was typically Scottish, the guide gave us most interesting insights into the history of slavery and Black Scottish-Caribbean entanglements.

While theories about decolonizing and racism were discussed in the panels, we were unfortunately able to experience the latter live in the city, where tasting local products was only allowed for people who looked like they had a European passport. In this respect, the content of the conference seemed even more significant.



The panels included presentations on politics, arts, ecology, economy, tourism, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, religion, gender, museum studies, history and probably even more. This broad offer provided a holistic and diverse engagement with the field of African Studies that we enjoyed very much. Most of the panels we visited tried to encounter current key topics like feminism and decolonization of the academia from a range of perspectives. However, some experiences showed that there is still a long way to go, as it seems astonishing that some panels on African women were held without even a single African woman present. Additionally, discussions appeared to stagnate when most scholars came from only one academic circle (universities of the same country).



The conference was generally well-organized although there were more than 1500 delegates. It was an important opportunity for us to gain insights into ongoing research and discussions, which we can benefit from in our studies, theses and further careers. Nonetheless, the most stimulating discussions took place in the evenings at home amongst ourselves, where we engaged in heated debates about migration, politics, racism, neo-colonialism, etc. Although many of us did not know each other before, learned much about and from each other and spent a great time together. Our final dinner in an Indian restaurant was an appropriate closing event of this successful and educative excursion.



My personal highlight of our trip to Edinburgh was our time together with the other students. On the opening evening we stormed the dance floor together and celebrated with DJ Plantainchips, on another evening we sat together on the bed in pyjamas with tea cups and chatted about all kinds of topics. One evening was particularly intense, in which we all sat down together and laughed a lot but also discussed a lot. It was about current social and political topics, personal opinions and lived experiences. Also the often discussed concept of decolonization was a topic as well as the current conflict in Cameroon. It was loud and sometimes very quiet, sometimes very funny and sometimes very serious. A really great and valuable time together, which I like to think back to. When we discussed in the group which panel of the conference we liked most, we agreed that it was our joint discussion evening. It was really great to be able to attend the big panels during the day and to have the chance to talk privately in the evening. The program was very full, but due to the great location of the accommodation and the university, we could still see something of the city. I used one of the free mornings to go for a little hike with a friend, so I even had a small highland feeling. It was a great opportunity to be part of that excursion.

Janna

Joining the group to Edinburgh for the ECAS 2019 conference was one of the best decisions so far, first it was a collaborative team and made things easier. The conference was worth attending as I had a lot to benefit. Many interesting topics were programmed such that on many occasions, I suffered from the problem of choice. We also had a walking tour on black history in Edinburgh which was very interesting considering how much I learned. Again, the conference as a whole was worth it and I will definitely want to attend it again if given the chance.

Emmanuella

The conference was very informative and it gave a deep insight on both positive and negative issues Africa is facing as a continent. The conference brought together people from all walks of life to discuss and contribute their research knowledge to Africa. It was a great experience for me to listen to different presentations and arguments on different topics concerning the African continent. There was a lot to be learnt as well as contributed. A big thank you goes to the Fachschaft for organizing and making this possible and also the funding institution who made the trip a reality. The ECAS is indeed one of the ways forwards in addressing issues on the African continent and finding possible solutions and also learning from the positive things the Continent has which can be an example to the world.

My take home quote I came up with after the conference is: "The world needs Africa and Africa needs the world".

Aisha

I really enjoyed the whole excursion. I would particularly like to highlight the atmosphere and the group dynamics. Everyone was free to do as they pleased so that we ended up doing some activities as a group, others in smaller groups or even alone. However, the latter rarely happened because for me it was more fun to spend the time together. As one of the organizers, I was also relieved that there was no unpleasant surprise regarding visa issues, flights or our accommodation. All in all the trip was worth the effort of organization and I will always keep it in good memory as one of the highlights of my studies.

Jan