

*Harriet Tubman Seminar*  
*October 12, 2010*

**The Provenance of Catherine Mulgrave Zimmermann:  
Methodological Considerations<sup>1</sup>**

Paul E. Lovejoy

Biographical accounts of women taken into the slave trade across the Atlantic are relatively rare. Consequently, much of what we have been analyzing as “Freedom Narrative” draws upon the lives of males, essentially. By “freedom narrative,” I am referring to that genre of narratives about slavery that are commonly called “slave narratives.” I distinguish “freedom narratives” to designate those biographical and autobiographical of Africans who experienced the “Middle Passage,” and who had been born free in Africa and who regained their freedom in the Americas. These accounts have particular relevance because they are first hand experiences of the notorious “Middle Passage,” which in the folklore, literature, and music of the descendants of Africans in the Americas has symbolic and political meaning that shapes public memory. In examining these accounts, it is important to take into account the gender and age of the individual who was enslaved in Africa and was sold across the Atlantic. Hence, the account of Catherine Mulgrave Zimmermann (c. 1820-1891) is important not only in its own right but also because it is one of the few voices of a woman from Africa whose story became known through what she told her husband.

As is argued here, Catherine was born in Angola, probably at Luanda, in the early 1820s, perhaps 1820.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines the details concerning her origins in Africa. Further examination of the details surrounding her African background also leads to the possibility that she came from the island of São Tomé. The purpose of this paper is to re-assess the evidence, including a consideration of why São Tomé, Benguela and Cape Town are unlikely and indeed improbable. In my opinion now, it seems most likely that she came from Luanda, and this paper presents the case for reaching this decision and thereby correcting my premature suggestion that

---

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank José C. Curto, Mariana Candido, Rafaela Jobbitt, Gerhard Seibert, and Vanessa Oliveira for their assistance with this paper, especially for images and references, and to Maureen Warner-Lewis for sharing documents from her research in Jamaica. This paper is written with the support of the Canada Research Chair in African Diaspora History. An initial draft was presented at the 4th International Conference on the History of Angola, Luanda, 28 September – 1 October 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For the most detailed account, see Maureen Warner-Lewis, “Catherine Mulgrave’s Unusual Transatlantic Odyssey,” *Jamaica Journal*, 32-43. Also see Jon Miller, *The Social Control of Religious Zeal. A Study of Organizational Contradictions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 120, 130.

she came from Cape Town.<sup>3</sup> The paper is methodologically oriented and hence requires a carefully reading of the most significant texts, which are reproduced in the Appendix.

Fortunately, there is considerable amount of information on Catherine's life in the Basel archives, although there is nothing actually written by her. The most authoritative accounts are those of her husband in a letter to the Basel Mission headquarters in Switzerland, dated 18 November 1852, that records Catherine's memories of her childhood, and the obituary by P. Steiner in 1891, which are transcribed in the original German in the Appendix, as transcribed by Peter Haenger.<sup>4</sup> These accounts are supplemented by other material, including a short article in the *Church Missionary Gleaner* about the wreck of Catherine's ship and aspects of her life in Jamaica and Moravian accounts from Jamaica.<sup>5</sup> While the available evidence provides numerous clues that suggest that Catherine was born in Angola, the evidence is far from conclusive. Her husband thought that she came from Luanda. More recently, Maureen Warner-Lewis has claimed that the combination of evidence leads her to the same conclusion. On the basis of what his wife told him, Zimmermann concluded, and he has influenced all subsequent authors, including Warner-Lewis, that "All of this and much other information makes me think it is the Portuguese harbor St. Paulo de Loanda in the South," that is, Luanda, from where she was from.<sup>6</sup>

Catherine Mulgrave-Zimmermann originally came to the attention of scholars at the Basel Mission Archives in Switzerland. Jon Miller published a brief account of her life in 1994 in his study of the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Peter Haenger published a

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, See "Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora," in Andrew Apter and Lauren Derry, eds., *Activating the Past Historical Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholarly Publishing, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> I wish to thank Peter Haenger for providing me with transcripts and translations of Zimmerman's account of his wife, written in 1852, and P. Steiner's obituary, written in 1891 (Letter from Peter Haenger to author, February 14, 1997). All translations are courtesy of Dr. Haenger.

<sup>5</sup> "Account of Converted Negress in Jamaica," *Church Missionary Gleaner*, 4 (1844), 131-32; and letter from Richard Berry, *Kingston Chronicle and City Advertiser*, Wednesday, 24 April 1833. Also see *Periodical Accounts relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren, established among the Heathen* (London: M'Dowall, 1834-44), vols. 13-17; John Henry Buchner, *The Moravians in Jamaica: History of the Mission of the United Brethren's Church to the Negroes in the Island of Jamaica, from the year 1754 to 1854* (London: Longman, Brown & Co., 1854), 113, 136-37; *Third Annual Report of the Female Refuge School at Fairfield, Manchester*, October 1832 (Pamphlet X LC 1881.F3, Elsa Goveia Reference Library, University of the West Indies, Mona).

<sup>6</sup> Warner-Lewis, "Catherine Mulgrave's Odyssey," According to Warner-Lewis, "Zimmermann thought that Catherine's natal town was Luanda, an interpretation which coincides with mine, given the *combination* of features this place shares with Luanda: the distinctive physical geography of a harbour enclosed by an island; the pervasive indications of a Catholic presence; the pronounced southern European physical characteristics of the white males; their implied involvement in trading activities; and the scarcity of European females. This combination of features is more significant than the *accuracy* of detail in a child's recollection, such as the number and location of forts (since there is no fort on Ilha da Luanda), though there may have been a redoubt."

<sup>7</sup> Miller, *Social Control*, 138.

short article in the course of his research on slavery and emancipation on the Gold Coast.<sup>8</sup> Maureen Warner-Lewis has since published the fullest account of Catherine's life, particularly focusing on her residence in Jamaica but also attempting to reconstruct her background in Africa as well as her later life on the Gold Coast and in Switzerland.<sup>9</sup> Daniel Domingues da Silva has also published a short piece, "Catherine Zimmermann-Mulgrave: A Slave Odyssey."<sup>10</sup> In all these accounts, it is claimed that Catherine came from Angola and specifically from Luanda. In my own initial analysis, I concluded that she did not come from Luanda but actually came from Cape Town, but this now seems unlikely.<sup>11</sup> Since then, I have explored the more likely possibility that she had actually come from São Tomé, and for various reasons this is to be rejected.

Catherine was kidnapped, along with her two sisters, in early 1833 on a beach and taken on board a slave ship, the *Heroína*, destined for Cuba. The kidnapping appears to have been at the end of loading slaves on board the Portuguese ship, whose captain "Sabin" apparently had no qualms about rounding out his cargo by kidnapping innocent children and quickly setting sail.

It was approximately April 1833 that a sister of my wife, a mulatto schoolgirl thirteen years old, with another sister who was also mulatto and about seven years old, took a walk along the sea and fished. An eight-year old boy, who was also related to the girls and who also went to school, was helping them. While they were playing in this way, along came a boat with a few European sailors, who got out on the beach and called to them. They were a bit far from the city, and it was evening. The boy ran away immediately. The older girl listened to the promises that the sailors made to give them sweets to eat, and the three girls were taken into the boat, although they were a little afraid, and the scoundrels rowed away with them; the poor girls lost their appetite for the sweets and began to scream, but in vain; they were brought onto one of the many ships that were lying at anchor, where the captain received them kindly in his cabin. On the same evening the ship left.

Fortunately for young Catherine the ship was wrecked off the coast of Jamaica near Old Harbour, at Rocky Point, then known as Rocky Key. She and a companion, apparently her sister, were lashed to the broken mast and thereby made it to shore, where they were rescued and taken to Kingston. Catherine and her sister were fortunate in coming to the attention of the wife of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Peter Haenger, "Ein Missionar fällt aus dem Rahmen," *Auftrag*, 1 (1995), 12-13, although Haenger does not mention Catherine in his thesis on slavery and emancipation on the Gold Coast, published in English as *Slaves and Slave Holders on the Gold Coast: Towards and Understanding of Social Bondage in West Africa* (Basel: P.Schlettwein, 2000, edited by J.J. Shaffer and Paul E. Lovejoy). Also see Jürg Schneider, "Die Hand der Basler Missionare : Leben und Wirken der Catherine Mulgrave-Zimmermann," *Basler Magazin*, 33 (1998), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Warner-Lewis, "Catherine Mulgrave Zimmermann's Odyssey."

<sup>10</sup> Domingues da Silva's account incorrectly states that Catherine divorced George Thompson in 1849, rather than in 1847. Domingues da Silva apparently writes her name as Zimmermann-Mulgrave because he draws on a catalogue of Basel Mission photographs and documents at the University of Southern California. The slave ship *Heroína*, which Catherine was on, was not initially listed in David Eltis et al., *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (<http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>).

<sup>11</sup> Lovejoy, "Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora."

Governor, the Earl of Mulgrave, who took the girls and a young boy as well into the official residence in Spanish Town for almost a year. When the Mulgraves left Jamaica in 1834, Catherine and her sister were sent to the Female Refuge School at the Moravian Mission, Fairfield, in Manchester Parish, while the boy was taken to England with the Mulgraves. Catherine subsequently became a teacher at the Refuge School, which suggests that she was a teenager, the practice being to use older students, aged 14-18, to teach younger children. Catherine's skills indicate that she had been to school before arriving in Jamaica. She mentions school in reference to her siblings at the time of their kidnapping, and her father was literate, so this is perhaps not surprising. Clearly Catherine excelled. She subsequently had a distinguished teaching career, first in Jamaica and then on the Gold Coast.

Catherine's adult life is reasonably clear. On 11 December 1842, she married an African, George Thompson, who hailed from Cape Mount on the Kru coast, now Liberia. Thompson had been taken to Switzerland as a boy and was subsequently educated at the Basel Mission headquarters in Basel. The Rev. Jacob Sessing brought the boy with him to Switzerland after closing the short lived Basel Mission at Cape Mount. In Switzerland, Thompson was placed in the Beugen children's home and trained to be a missionary. In 1842, the Basel Mission sent a delegation, including Thompson, to the Moravian Mission in Jamaica. The Basel Mission was having difficulty keeping its missionaries alive on the Gold Coast and hoped to recruit several families who would move to the Gold Coast from Jamaica, in the expectation that the Mission could be maintained. Thompson met Catherine and the couple quickly formed a relationship, resulting in their rapid marriage. Along with several other families, Catherine accompanied her new husband to the Gold Coast to teach at the Basel Mission. Thus Catherine returned to Africa.

With husband George, Catherine gave birth to two children, George, Jr., and Rosine, born in 1844 and 1846 respectively. The marriage with George did not work out, however. Indeed George was expelled from the mission for certain indiscretions, apparently including drinking and womanizing. Catherine divorced him in 1847 with the blessing of the Mission.<sup>12</sup> She continued to teach at the girls' school at Usu, that is, Christiansborg, where the Basel Mission was located in Accra. She became increasingly close to the head of the Mission, Johann Zimmermann, whom she married in 1851, despite considerable controversy and opposition in Switzerland. In the end, the Mission agreed to the marriage on the condition that Zimmermann effectively renounce his citizenship and promise never to bring his family to Europe. After they were married, the Zimmermanns first lived at Abokobi in the foothills of the Akwapim ridge, then at Akropona near the Volta River, and finally at Odumase in Krobo. Because of the prohibition on her going to Europe, Catherine did not accompany her husband when he went to Basel in 1862, where he had been summoned for "re-training" because of what were perceived to be his unconventional views. Zimmermann returned to the Gold Coast in 1863, where he remained until 1872. When he went to Switzerland this time, the ban was lifted and he was able to take Catherine with him; both returned to Accra in 1873. The couple remained on the Gold Coast until 1876, when Zimmermann's health began to fail and they returned to Switzerland. Shortly after Johann died on 13 December 1876, Catherine returned to the Gold Coast, living at Usu from 1877 until her own death on 14 January 1891 of pneumonia.<sup>13</sup>

The most authoritative account of her life is contained in a letter that Johann wrote to the Basel Mission in Switzerland, dated 18 November 1852. Because his marriage to Catherine was

---

<sup>12</sup> Warner-Lewis, "Catherine Mulgrave's Odyssey," 39.

<sup>13</sup> P. Steiner, "Obituary," 1891, Basel Mission Archives, Basel.

controversial, Johann provided a biographical account of his wife, which is reproduced here as transcribed in the original German (Appendix A). In his account, Johann reports that he thought Catherine was born in 1827, but it is more likely that she was born several years earlier and probably in about 1820. There are several reasons for reaching this conclusion. Most important, when she became a teacher at the Moravian Mission in Jamaica in 1836, she had to have been a teenager. If she had been born in 1827, she only would have been nine in 1836. Moreover, her own name, as recorded by Zimmermann in German, was Gewe [i.e., pronounced “Geve” in English]. Her relatives had Christian names, and hence she probably did, too, her own name possibly being Catarina, although her obituary states that she was named after Lady Mulgrave, her patroness, whose name was also Catherine. Her African name, Geve (Gewe in German sources), has been identified as an Umbundu and Kimbundu nickname (Ngeve = hippopotamus) for the younger child in a set of twins.<sup>14</sup> The ethnic name thereby reveals a possible link to Mbundu or Ovimbundu. It is likely, therefore, that one of the two sisters who seized with her was her twin, the mostly likely it was the thirteen year old girl, in which both twins would have been born about 1820.

Her mother was a mulatto whom Zimmermann reported as Sophine, but probably Sofia, who had certainly been baptized, which suggests that Catherine and her sisters had been, too. Catherine claimed her mother was from a prominent family. According to Catherine, her maternal grandfather had eleven daughters and one son, as well as grandchildren, like herself. She remembered that her grandfather had arranged that the whole family including grandchildren were vaccinated against smallpox. Catherine told her husband that some of her cousins were almost white, apparently meaning European. Her relatives had Christian names. Catherine’s father was the son of a chief who worked in the office of a businessman, where she saw him writing. She described the businessman himself as a man with black hair and a beard who treated her well. She noted that the faces of all Europeans she saw looked that way.

She describes her home town as a seaport that was larger than Usu, that is, Accra, with a large church, a school, two forts, one of which was on the other side of an arm into the sea, large European houses that were more numerous and bigger than those in Accra. Ships could sail up to the city, as there was no surf as at Accra. Catherine described the city as having a governor, a bishop, monks with vestments, choir boys, images of saints and the use of holy water, clearly identifying the Catholic religion. In addition, she reports that there were European soldiers in the town, and she even remembered seeing a European woman. Her own family used European, presumably Portuguese, eating utensils.

The description of the town and its fortification bears a remarkable similarity to Luanda. Catherine’s husband certainly thought so, although he had never been there. Because of her description, he thought: “All of this and much other information makes me think it is the Portuguese harbor St. Paulo de Loanda in the South.” Ships could sail up to the town, unlike at

---

<sup>14</sup> This identification was first confirmed with the assistance of Mariana Candido, who consulted Mateus Neto, at the time Archivist, National Archives, Luanda, who confirmed that Ngewe is a Kimbundu name, which means hippopotamus, and is usually given to the second born twin. The first born twin is named Jamba, elephant. In Umbundu, Ngeve is derived from “ongeve,” hippopotamus and is the “nome atribuído ao gémeo que nasce em segundo lugar, quando for do sexo feminino.” Njamba is derived from “onjamba,” elephant, is the “nome dado ao primeiro filho que nasce de um parto de gémeos, indistintamente do sexo.” The name does not appear to be Kikongo (Augustin D’Almida, 13 September 2010).

Accra, with which she compared her home. Catherine's two forts can be identified as the Fortaleza de São Pedro da Barra and the Fortaleza São Miguel, both in Luanda. The village beyond the canal with its big building or fort (“arsenal?”) seems to be a reference to the arsenal that was located on the island of Luanda, which is in fact a long sand bar that forms the harbor, and its fishing village. Luanda island is very close to the mainland and the sea in between is in fact forms a channel. In the 1830s, Luanda had several schools, the first school be opened in 1669. In the early 1850s the principal elementary school had one teacher and 60 students. The head school was under one master and had 312 students. There was also a school for girls.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, there are details in Catherine’s account that cast doubt on the identification of Catherine’s home with Luanda. Certainly the description does not correspond with Benguela or other points along the coast of west-central Africa. However, the details do raise the possibility that she was from São Tomé. Catherine told her husband that “the whole city is surrounded by the sea,” which perhaps suggests she came from an island, that is São Tomé. Equally suggestive, Catherine’s ship, the *Heroína*, which had 303 people originally taken on board in Angola, was associated with São Tomé, its captain claiming to have come from there. According to Richard Berry, who oversaw the rescue,

...on Saturday last, at 1 o’clock p.m. information reached me that a vessel, having a great number of negroes on board, was wrecked off Old Harbour, near Rocky Key.... The vessel is a complete wreck. She is a Portuguese schooner – the Heroína, Sabin, master, from St. Thomas, on the African Coast, out 40 days. She had 303 slaves on board when she sailed, and 232 were safely landed at Old-Harbour, the rest having died on the passage or in the wreck.<sup>16</sup>

Like Luanda, São Tomé also had a large church, a school, and two forts. Indeed Santa Sé is the oldest cathedral in sub-Saharan Africa, construction on the existing building beginning in 1576 on the site of an earlier church. The church was designated a cathedral in 1534. Fort São Sebastião is a substantial fortress on the sea commanding the harbour, with the much smaller Fort São Jerónimo a short distance away towards the town. The smaller fortress had been rebuilt in 1800.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, there was a governor, and while there was a cathedral, there was no bishop in residence in the 1830s, although there certainly were monks, choir boys and other attributes of Catholicism as Catherine described to her husband. In addition to the clergy, the resident Portuguese population included soldiers and merchants, as well as planters in the interior who had houses in the town.<sup>18</sup> However, there is no island separated from the mainland on which there are buildings at São Tomé.

---

<sup>15</sup> Valdez, *Traveller’s Life in Western Africa*, vol. 2, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Berry to the Collector & Comptroller of H.M. Customs, Kingston, dated Old Harbour, 21 April 1833. The account is located in the Letters to the Editor, the *Kingston Chronicle and City Advertiser*, Wednesday, 24 April 1833. Berry identifies himself as the Waiter and Searcher, stationed at Old Harbour on Jamaica’s south coast. I wish to thank Maureen Warner-Lewis for the reference.

<sup>17</sup> I wish to thank Rafaela Jobbitt for directing me to various accounts and to Gerhard Seibert for confirming the historical description of São Tomé.

<sup>18</sup> In 1844, the town of São Tomé had 1,432 houses; there were 33 white and mulatto men and 14 white and mulatto women. In addition there were 2,851 free African men, 3,081 free African

Catherine refers to a journey that she made into the interior where there were mountains that she thought were covered with snow, which is one reason that I initially favoured an identification of the town with Cape Town and then subsequently looked more closely at São Tomé. According to Catherine, “one can go on a day trip in boats far into the plantations.”

The last part of the way was by ox-drawn wagon and she slept along the way in a little village. On the plantation there was a lovely European house, where trading was carried on. She was there for fourteen days. Every morning she saw ice, snow, and frost in the ??? [sic] snow-covered mountains. She also saw zebras and elephants. Oranges, figs, mangoes, and foreign corn grow there. The South-African ox-drawn wagons are in use there.

In attempting to find snow or something that looks like snow, the mountains on São Tomé are good candidates, since from a distance they can appear to be covered in snow. As noted in the fourth edition of *Laurie’s Sailing Directory for the Ethiopic or Southern Atlantic Ocean* (1855), the highest peaks on the island were “frequently” covered with snow.

The Island of San Thomé is nearly all mountainous. In its central and western parts is a very high peak, called *Pico do San Thomé*, covered with a very dense mass of trees. Its peak is frequently covered with snow, and is 7,005 feet above the level of the sea. At 3 miles East of this is the peak of *Anna de Chaves*, 6,913 feet high, according to the estimate of Captain De Langle. A little to the North of this is another, equally high.<sup>19</sup>

While Catherine’s account to snow-covered mountains suggests the possibility that she was from Saõ Tomé, there has never been any snow or ice on the Pico de São Tomé (2024 m). Hence the description in *Laurie’s Sailing Directory* is what sailors thought they saw but it is wrong. Catherine’s account of snow, which she described in 1852 or earlier, was before she had ever seen real snow, and hence as a woman reflecting on what she thought she had seen as a young girl was most certainly with clouds or mist on a mountain or even a high hill at a distance. Perhaps this mountain top was not as high as she remembered, although she did know mountains in Jamaica, but her memory as a girl might consider a modest altitude as a mountain. Moreover, she claims to have traveled by boat for a whole day (“Tagesreise”) to reach her resting place, which indicates that this could not have been on São Tomé because the distance is too great.

In her discussion of Catherine’s journey into the interior, Warner-Lewis locates the visit to the plantation in view of snow covered mountains improbably in far southern Angola. Because there are no hills or mountains in the immediate interior of Luanda, Warner-Lewis concludes that Catherine travelled from Luanda by sea to Moçamedes, to the south of Benguela, and then inland, even though Catherine states that she went deep into a plantation, without mention of a long sea journey. According to Warner-Lewis,

---

women, 1,051 male slaves and 1,139 female slaves, for a total population of 8,169 inhabitants; see John Purdy and Alex. G. Findlay, *Laurie’s Sailing Directory for the Ethiopic or Southern Atlantic Ocean; including the Coasts of Brasil, etc., Rio de la Plata, the Coast thence to Cape Horn, and the African Coast to the Cape of Good Hope, etc., including the Islands between the Two Coasts* (London: Printed for Richard Holmes Laurie, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1855), 458.

<sup>19</sup> Purdy and Findlay, *Laurie’s Sailing Directory*, 458.

The most likely site of this visit was the hills surrounding Lubango, then called Sá da Bandeira, in southwest Angola. It is a mountainous district with a temperate climate, which in the winter months of June and July could fall to the 40s Fahrenheit. While its mountain peaks are not snow-capped, one wonders if Catherine, on seeing or hearing of the snow-capped Swiss mountains in later life, made comparison between them and the cloud-covered mountain-tops of the Central Highlands. It is no wonder that Catherine stayed two weeks there as Lubango is located some five hundred miles south of Luanda. To arrive there she would have travelled from Luanda by boat past Benguela to Moçamedes, a coastal trading town.<sup>20</sup>

In fact at the time, Moçamedes was a small place, not developed until after 1840. There were no plantations at the time, and there is no reference to Lubango. Catherine describes a plantation on a river, which does not accord with the interior of Moçamedes in the early 1830s.<sup>21</sup>

More likely, Catherine was referring to a trip up the Kwanza River, just to the south of Luanda. As reported by Valdez in the early 1850s,

The Cuanza is navigable for about 150 miles from the sea, for small schooners and pinnaces, which trade between Calumbo, on the right bank, Cambambe, touching at Muxima, on the left bank, and Massangano also on the right bank. At Cambambe, the navigation is stopped by a large cataract....<sup>22</sup>

Plantations owned by Portuguese and mulatto settlers dotted the river. There was a fortress at Muxima, 84 miles upriver, which had been established in 1599.<sup>23</sup> Catherine apparently went far enough up the Kwanza to see hills whose cloud cover could give the appearance of snow. At Bailundu, in the interior highlands east of Benguela, the Canadian missionary, Walter T. Currie, who certainly knew what snow was, reported seeing hail in mid October 1886. He reported that “a few days ago it hailed. Some of the hail stones were as large as marbles. The first ice I have seen in Africa.”<sup>24</sup>

Catherine’s reference to ox drawn wagons is another important consideration. As far as known, there is no record of ox-drawn wagons in the interior in the early 1830s. There were such wagons on São Tomé at this time, however; they had been introduced from Portugal because of the mountainous terrain.<sup>25</sup> If we accept that Catherine was from Luanda, then her

---

<sup>20</sup> Warner-Lewis, “Catherine Mulgrave’s Odyssey,” 40.

<sup>21</sup> For the development of Moçamedes, see W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Slaves, Peasants, and Capitalists in Southern Angola, 1840-1926* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Valdez, *Traveller’s Life in Western Africa*, vol. 2, 132.

<sup>23</sup> Valdez, *Traveller’s Life in Western Africa*, vol. 2, 133.

<sup>24</sup> Walter L. Currie to his mother, October 20, 1886, Bailundu. Walter Currie Fonds, Personal Papers, File 1, "Copies of Letters from W. T. Currie to mother and siblings, 1885-1903," United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto. I wish to thank Mariana Candido for this reference.

<sup>25</sup> I wish to thank Gerhard Seibert, Centro de Estudos Aricanos, Lisbon, for confirming the presence of oxen and wagons on São Tomé from an early period. As José C. Curto has commented, “São Tomé was like a Portuguese province, and of course there were wagons drawn by oxen, because of the terrain.”

account verifies their use in the interior at this time. There are no references to ox-drawn carts in Angola, even southern Angola, before c. 1840 and then the association is with the arrival of exploratory expeditions of Boers from South Africa. Francisco Jose de Lacerda e Almeida who traveled in the interior highlands in 1798 did not mention any wagons pulled by animals.<sup>26</sup> The first reference to ox driven wagons is the account of Georg Tams, who visited Benguela in 1844 and mentioned seeing them.<sup>27</sup> There may have been wagons earlier than the arrival of Boers from South Africa in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Valdez reported the use of oxen in the 1850s, and in the context of his observation, he appears to have been describing a practice that was well established, although for how long is not know. According to Valdez,

In the interior, the inhabitants have also another mode of locomotion, by means of what they call the horse-oxen, a description of oxen with a small hump on the back, which they guide in the same manner as the South African pack oxen, with a rein fastened to a ring which passes through the cartilage of the nose.<sup>28</sup>

Whether or not the oxen were hitched to wagons before the arrival of Boers from South Africa after c. 1840 is not clear.

The kidnapping of children on the beach at Luanda must have been unusual or the children would not have been there. Parents would certainly not have allowed it. According to Catherine, they were just playing. If the incident was unusual, and given her family's prominence, then it is likely that the kidnapping would have been recorded locally. Hence more research is required to seek additional information that might enable an identification of Catherine's family. Captain Sabin treated the girls well, keeping them in his cabin, where the girls found another kidnap victim. According to her husband's account, "In the cabin they found a chained mulatto female from their same city who was crying bitterly, as the girls of course were also doing."<sup>29</sup> The mulatto woman served as "interpreter" between the captain and Catherine and her sisters, which is unclear in meaning, since Catherine would have been able to speak Portuguese. Catherine claimed that "the captain treated them kindly, especially the three girls, the whole way." When the ship was wrecked, "the poor girls and the mulatto woman clung to the captain, who took care of them while wave after wave broke over them." It is not known what happened to the woman or to one of Catherine's sister, since later information only refers to Catherine and one sister.

This paper has raised issues of methodology in attempting to identify where Catherine Mulgrave Zimmermann was enslaved. The physical geography as described to a sympathetic

---

<sup>26</sup> For the account of Francisco Jose de Lacerda e Almeida, see R.F. Burton, trans. and annotated, *The Lands of Cazembe. Lacerda's Journey to Cazembe in 1798* (London: John Murray, 1873), which also includes accounts of P.J. Baptista, Amaro José, Monteiro and Gamitto, none of whom refer to wagons or oxen in the interior of Angola. While the date when ox drawn wagons were introduced in Angola, there are no references as early as c. 1830. If Catherine's account is accurate, then ox-drawn wagons were being used in the interior before the arrival of Boers from South Africa. I wish to thank Mariana Candido and José C. Curto for this information.

<sup>27</sup> Georg Tams, *Visit to the Portuguese Possessions in South-Western Africa* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1845]).

<sup>28</sup> Valdez, *Traveller's Life in Western Africa*, vol. 2, 266.

<sup>29</sup> Zimmermann letter, 1852; see Appendix.

husband holds the key to deciphering the evidence. Why does this matter? The account is conclusive proof that some of the enslaved from Angola were in fact of mixed background, partly of Portuguese and African descent, and even if Christian, were not protected from enslavement. What is the significance? The methodological issues demonstrate the difficulties of working with biographical materials.

## Appendix A

### Zimmermann to Basel Mission Headquarters, dated 18 November 1852, Usu [Accra]<sup>30</sup>

Usu 18. XI. 1852

Gottes Friede sei mit Dir!  
Herzlich gelieberter Bruder!

Dien 1. Brieflein vom 3. Juni erhielt ich erst jetzt. Vor Allem herzlich Dank für Deine Liebe! Dein Schreiben traf uns allesamt gesund u. fröhlich an. Schon ersteres ist Ursache zum 2., noch mehr aber macht uns fröhlich der Segen, den der Herr auf unsre schwache Arbeit legt, indem nicht mehr blos einzelne, sond. Ganze Häuflein der Söhne Hams sich zum Panier sich sammeln.

Ich willmich nun strict an die Beantwortung Deines Schreibens halten. – Vater – u. “Mutterfreuden” dürfen wir reichlich geniessen. Unsere Kindlein wachsen fröhlich heran. Unsere kleine, stark schnitter [???] Johanna fängt an, Zunge u. Füsse zu brauchen, erstere natürl. In der Ga-Sprache. Ihr Wortvorrath ist freilich noch klein u. besteht aus “baba”, das sie für Vater u. Mutter, “ba” (kommen), das sie für alles was sie nicht wünscht, “baa”, nicht kommen, das sie für alles was sie nicht wünscht, braucht u. dann nur abo (ogbo), dem Namen ihres Kindsmädchens. Sie macht uns viel Freude und ist uns ein grosser Segen.

Ich setzte stets voraus, dass der Lebensgang meiner 1. Catharina im Missionshaus bekannt sei u. wunderte mich daher, als ich aus dem Heidenboten u. nun aus Deinem Briefe sah, dass dem nicht so ist. Es macht mir Freude, darüber etlichen Aufschluss zu geben, besonders da des Herrn Hand darin so sichtbar ist. Und hiezu ist vielleicht ein Privatbrieflein an Dich das beste Plätzchen, wobei ich es Dir frei stele, von diesem Theile desselben auch anderen 1. Gliedern uns. Missionsfamilie, die sich dafür interessieren, einige Mittheilungen zu machen. Vielleicht wiederhole ich eins u. das Andere, wo ich schon früher schrieb, der Vollständigkeit wegen.

Meine 1. Catharina wurde geboren ungefähr im J. 1827. Ihre Mutter war eine Mulattin, Sophina mit Namen, wahrscheinlich getauft, aus einer angesehenen Familie. Sie erinnert sich noch ihren Grossvater der 11 Töchter u. einen Sohn hatte, gesehen zu haben, wie er seine Familie versammelte u. seinen Enkeln, worunter auch sie selbst war, die Pocken einimpfte. Einige dieser Enkel seien ganz weiss gewesen. Sämtliche Namen ihrer Tanten u. anderer Verwandten, die sie noch weiss, sind christlich. Ihr eigener Name war Gewe. Ihr Vater war Sohn eines Häuptlings, im Comtoir eines Kaufmanns angestellt, wo sie ihn mit Schreiben beschäftigt sah. Den Kaufmann selbst beschreibt sie als einen [?????] Mann mit schwarzem Haar u. Bart, der sie sehr freundlich behandelt habe. Dieselbe Gesichtsbeschreibung macht sie von allen Europäern, die sie dort sah.

Ihre Vaterstadt beschreibt sie als eine Seestadt grosser als Usu, mit einer grossen Kirche, einer Schule, 2 Forts, wovon das eine jenseits eines Meeresarms, grossen europäischen Häusern, höher u. mehr als in Usu. Die Schiffe können bis an die Stadt hinfahren, es existiert keine Brandung

---

<sup>30</sup> Transcribed by Peter Haenger.

wie hier (also liegt sie nicht mehr im Bereich der hiesigen Strömung), man geht auf Booten eine Tagereise weit auf die Plantagen. Die Stadt selbst hatte einen Governor, einen Bischoff, Mönchen mit verschiedenen Kutten, - Messgewänder, Chorknaben, Heiligenbilder, Weihwasser, sprechen noch deutlicher für die kath. Religion. Ferner sah sie europ. Militär, auch eine europäische Frau. – In ihrer eigenen Familien ah sie europäische Geräte.

Die ganze Stadt is umgeben von der See. Jenseits eines Canals ist ein Dorf u. ein grosses Gebäude od. Fort (Arsenal?) auf einer Insel. Das Alles u. noch manches andere lässt mich auf portugiesische Seestadt St. Paulo de Loando im Süden schliessen. Einmal erinnert sich meine Catharina, eine Tagesreise weit (meist im Boot) auf eine Plantage gegangen zu sein. Der letzte Theil des Wegs wurde in einem Ochsenwagen gemacht u. sie schlief unterwegs in einem Dörflein. Auf der Plantage war ein schönes europ. Haus, in dem Handel getrieben wurde. Sie war 14 Tage dort. Jeden Morgen sah sie Eis, Schnee u. Reif, in der [????] mit Schnee bedeckte Berge. Dort sah sie auch zebras u. Elephanten. Orangen, Feigen, Mangos, Welschkorn wachsen dort. Die südafrikanischen Ochsenwagen sind dort in Gebrauch.

Es war ungefähr im April 1833, das ein Geschwisterkind meiner Frau, ein Mulatten-Schulmädchen von 13 Jahren, sie u. ein anderes Geschwisterkind, ebenfalls ein Mulattenmädchen von etwa 7 Jahren, an die See spazieren nahm, wo sie Fische angelten. Ein Knabe von 8 Jahren, ebenfalls mit den Mädchen verwandt, der auch in die Schule ging, half ihnen. Während sie so spielten, kam ein Boot mit einigen europäischen Matrosen, die ans Land stiegen u. ihnen riefen. Sie waren eine Strecke weit von der Stadt entfernt u. es war Abend. der Knabe rannte sogleich weg. Das ältere Mädchen gab den Versprechungen der Matrosen, ihnen Leckerbissen zu geben, gehör u. die drei Mädchen wurden, obwohl mit etwas Angst, ins Boot getragen, mit welchem die Schurken davonruderten; das Essen war den armen Mädchen vergangen, sie fingen an zu schreien, aber vergeblich; sie wurden auf eines der vielen for Anker liegenden Schiffe gebracht, wo sie der Capitän in seiner Kajüte sehr freundlich aufnahm. Am selben Abend fuhr das Schiff ab. In der Cajüte fanden sie eine gefresselte Mulattin aus derselben Stadt, die bitterlich weinte, was die Mädchen natürlich auch thaten. Der Capitän suchte sie zu trösten, wobei dieselbe Mulattin ihm als Dolmetscherin diente. Am nächsten Morgen war das Land verschwunden. Der Mulattin wurden die Fesseln abgenommen. Doch blieben sie u. das ältere Mädchen noch versteckt in der Cajüte. Nach einter Woche wurde ein Neger aus dem Hohl des Schiffes heraufgebracht u. hrt geschlagen, weil er sich mit einem Federmesser hatte selbst tödten wollen. Nach wieder einer Woche wurde der Hohl geöffnet u. mehrere hundert Sklaven erschienen, die tägl. Auf dem Deck herumlagen u. die frische Luft genossen. Der Capitän behandelte sie freundlich, besonders die 3 Mädchen, auf dem ganzen Wege.

Nach etwa Wochen ashen sie Land, aber keine Wohnung; es war gebirgig. Ein Boot mit 2 Europäern kam. Der Capitän zitterte vor Angst; die Sklaven wurden alle sorfältig verborgen. Das Boot brachte Papiere u. die Papiere des Capitäns wurden visitirt. Dann fuhr es wieder ab. 3 Sklaven starben nachher unterwegs. Nach etwa 6 Wochen, in denen nichts besonderes vorkam, scheint das Schiff, das nach Kuba bestimmt war, den Weg verloren zu haben. Alles war unbesorgt u. ging eines Abends ruhig zu Bett, aber um Mitternacht kündigte schreckliches Krachen an, dass das Schiff auf Fels gerathen war. Es brach sogleich in 2 Stücke, das Vordertheil mit den moisten Sklaven wurde von den Wellen weggerissen, ins Hintertheil stürzte das Wasser mit gewalt; jede neue Welle brachte den Unglücklichen, die sich noch auf dem Hintertheil halten

konnten, dem Wassergrabe näher; die Masten stützten herab; - als die 3 Mädchen aufs Deck kamen, aßen sie das Vordertheil des Schiffes auf den Wogen treiben, bedeckt mit Unglücklichen; die Sklaven schrien u. Jammerten, der Capitän weinte, die Matrosen assen u. Tranken, - bis der Tag anbrach. Die armen Mädchen u. Die Mulattin schmiegt sich an den herstürzte. Als es Tag war, banden die Matrosen 2 Masten zusammen u. die Mädchen oben drauf, einer setzte sich vorn, ein anderer hinten, u. so ruderten sie dem Ufer zu. Die, die da schwimmen konnten, liessen sich ins Meer, die andern aber, etliche an Brettern, etl. Auf dem, was vom Schiff war, entgingen ans Land; freilich nicht Alle, den viele wurden weggewaschen u. fanden ihr Grab in den Wellen.

Das Land war Jamaika, wo der wackere Gov. Mulgrave das Jahr zuvor bereits die Freiheit der Sklaven verkündigt hatte. – Aber die Küste, wo unsere Schiffbrüchigen an Land kamen, war öde u. verlassen. 2 Tage lagen sie ohne Nahrung in der heissen Sonne; endlich erschien ein Pilotenschiff, das sie sämtliche auf ein Kriegsschiff nach Kingston brachte. Dort wurden Capitän u. Matrosen sogleich in Ketten gelegt u. ans Land geschickt. Die Sklaven wurden ebenfalls in ein grosses Haus gebracht, wo sie gepflegt wurden, bis der Governor, der eine Besuchsreise nach England machte, zurückkam. – Nach seiner Ankunft kam er, von seiner edlen Gattin begleitet, zu den Sklaven u. nahm meine 1. Catharina u. ihre Nichte [??], sowie eine Mandingo zu sich ins Haus.

Von dem Governor (jezigem Lord Normanty [sic], englischem Gesandten in Paris) und seiner Gattin wurden (von jetzt an ist die Schrift nur noch schlecht lesbar !) die beiden Mädchen wie die [??] des Hauses gehalten, speisten mit ihnen an derselben Tafel, der Governor [??] unterrichtete sie selbst.

## Appendix B

### P. Steiner, Obituary, 1891<sup>31</sup>

Frau Missionar C. Zimmermann

1891

Am 14 Jan. d. J. ist in Christianborg auf der Goldküste das älteste Glied unserer westafrikanischen Missionsfamilie aus diesem Leben geschieden u. zur Ruhe des Volkes Gottes eingegangen. Es ist dies Catherine Zimmermann, Gattin des am 13. Dez. 1876 heimgegangenen verdienten Missionars Joh. Zimmermann, an dessen Seite sie 25 Jahre lang mit viel Hingabe u. Treue der Mission gedient hat.

Ihrer Abstammung nach eine Afrikanerin, wurde sie als kleines Kind an der Küste von Süd-Guinea (wahrscheinlich in Loango oder an der Angolküste) am Meeresstrand spielend, von Sklavenjägern erfasst u. auf deren Schiff verbracht. In der Nähe der westindischen Insel Jamaica wurde indes das Sklavenschiff von einem englischen Kreuzer aufgegriffen u. die darin befindlichen Negerklaven in Freiheit gesetzt. Catharina hatte das Glück, dass sich ihrer der Gouverneur von Jamaica, Mulgrave samt seiner Gattin, leblich annahm u. in der dortigen Missionsschule der Brüdergemeinde in einer Mädchenschule derselben als Lehrerin, bis sie sich 1842 mit dem Neger-Missionsgehilfen G. Thompson verheiratete. Letzterer, ein Eingeborener von Kap Mount an der Liberia Küste, war seinerzeit mit dem heimkehrenden Missionar Sessing nach Europa gekommen u. in seiner Jugend in der Kinderrettungsanstalt zu Beugeen bei Basel erzogen worden. Später trat derselbe für kurze Zeit in das Basler Missionshaus ein, um im Jahr 1842 als Missionsgehilfe in die Arbeit auf der Goldküste einzutreten. Er begab sich zu dem Zweck mit den Basler Missionaren A. Riis u. Widmann zunächst nach Westindien, um daselbst christliche Kolonisten in den westindischen Negergemeinden für die Goldküste zu werben u. mit denselben die Mission daselbst neu aufzunehmen. Auf Jamaika trat er mit Cath. Mulgrave in die Ehe u. an Ostern 1843 langten sie mit den Negerkolonisten in Christiansborg auf der Goldküste an. Thompson musste aber wegen grober Sündenfälle schon nach kurzer Zeit aus dem Missionsdienst entlassen werden. Schliesslich geriet derselbe immer tiefer in die Sünde hinein u. liess sein Sündenleben eine gerichtliche Scheidung von seiner gottesfürchtigen Ehefrau notwendig werden, u. zwar aus Gründen, kraft welchen nach Christi Wort (Matth. 5,32) eine Ehescheidung auch vor Gottes Augen gerechtfertigt ist. Frau Mulgrave lebte von da an im Missionshaus in Christiansborg u. arbeitete im Segen an der dortigen Mädchenschule u. unter der weiblichen Stadtbevölkerung, bis sie 4 Jahre nach ihrer Scheidung 1851 die Gattin von Missionar Joh. Zimmermann wurde. An seiner Seite hat sie sich auf den verschiedenen Stationen Christianborg, Abokobi, Akropong u. besonders im Kroboland, wo ihr Mann nach einander wirkte, viel Liebe u. Achtung unter Christen u. Heiden erworben u. ist zugleich ihrem Gatten eine treue Lebensgefährtin gewesen. Im Mai 1872 begleitete sie denselben nach Europa, wodaselbe nach 22 jähriger ununterbrochener Arbeit in Afrika Erholung suchte. Von dort 1873 auf sein afrikanisches Arbeitsfeld zurückgekehrt war demselben nur noch ein kurzes Tagewerk beschieden. Schon 1876 war er genötigt wegen langsam fortschreitender Krankheit in die europäische Heimat zurückzukehren, wo er am 13. Dez. des. Hagres starb u. nur zu früh dem

---

<sup>31</sup> Transcribed by Peter Haenger.

afrikanischen Missionswerk entrissen wurde. In ihm verlor die Mission nicht nur einen für Afrika begeisterten, sondern auch genialen Arbeiter, der ausser vielen sprachlichen Arbeiten dem Ga-Stamm die Bibel übersetzt u. den Gemeinden die schönsten Kirchenlieder in der eingeborenen Sprache geschenkt hat. Seine Witwe kehrte 1877 nach der Goldküste zurück u. es lebte dieselbe seither still u. zurückgezogen, aber immer noch mit warmen Interesse für die Missionsarbeit auf der Station Christiansborg, bis sie am 14. Jan. d. J. infolge einer Lungenentzündung – ungefähr 65 Jahre alt –heimgehen durfte. Unter grosser Beteiligung seitens der christlichen wie heidnischen Bevölkerung wurde sie am gleichen Tage auf Kreise der Missionsfamilie birgt, zur Ruhe bestattet. Mit ihr ist eins der letzten Glieder de rim Jahre 1843 von Westindien nach der Goldküste Eingewanderten zu Grabe getragen worden.

P. Steiner