

THE MAGAZINE OF THE BONN CENTER FOR DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES

# DEPENDENT

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GIRLS AND INFANTS

## GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

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FOR DEPENDENCY  
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STUDIES

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Secker Street entrance to St Patrick's Catholic school, London Waterloo, 2012. Above the door is a sign reading „Girls and Infants“. Presumably the door is no longer just for the use of girls and infants. ©Tom Morris, Wikimedia CC BY-SA 3.0.

Dear Readers,  
Welcome to the ninth issue of our Cluster Magazine *DEPENDENT*, an edition dedicated to Research Area E: *Gender and Intersectionality*. The lead article, a collaborative work by ten BCDSS scholars, explores new insights into our core concept of *Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies* by looking through the lens of *Intersectionality* and widening the gaze beyond the still prevalent triumvirate of class, race, and gender. Following on, Lisa Hellman and Julia Hillner examine *Segregation and Asymmetrical Dependency*, with a special focus on gender-based segregation, thus prompting a revaluation of both, the concept of 'segregation' and 'gender'. Thirdly, in her opinion piece *Otherness and Gender*, Birgit Münch argues that gender is part of the broader conceptualization of 'otherness'. She advocates an interdisciplinary analysis of its intersectional relationship with other aspects of alterity over time and across the Arts and Humanities. To round off our special focus, we take a little tour of the cluster to reveal the role of *Gender and Intersectionality* in the research activities of individual cluster members.

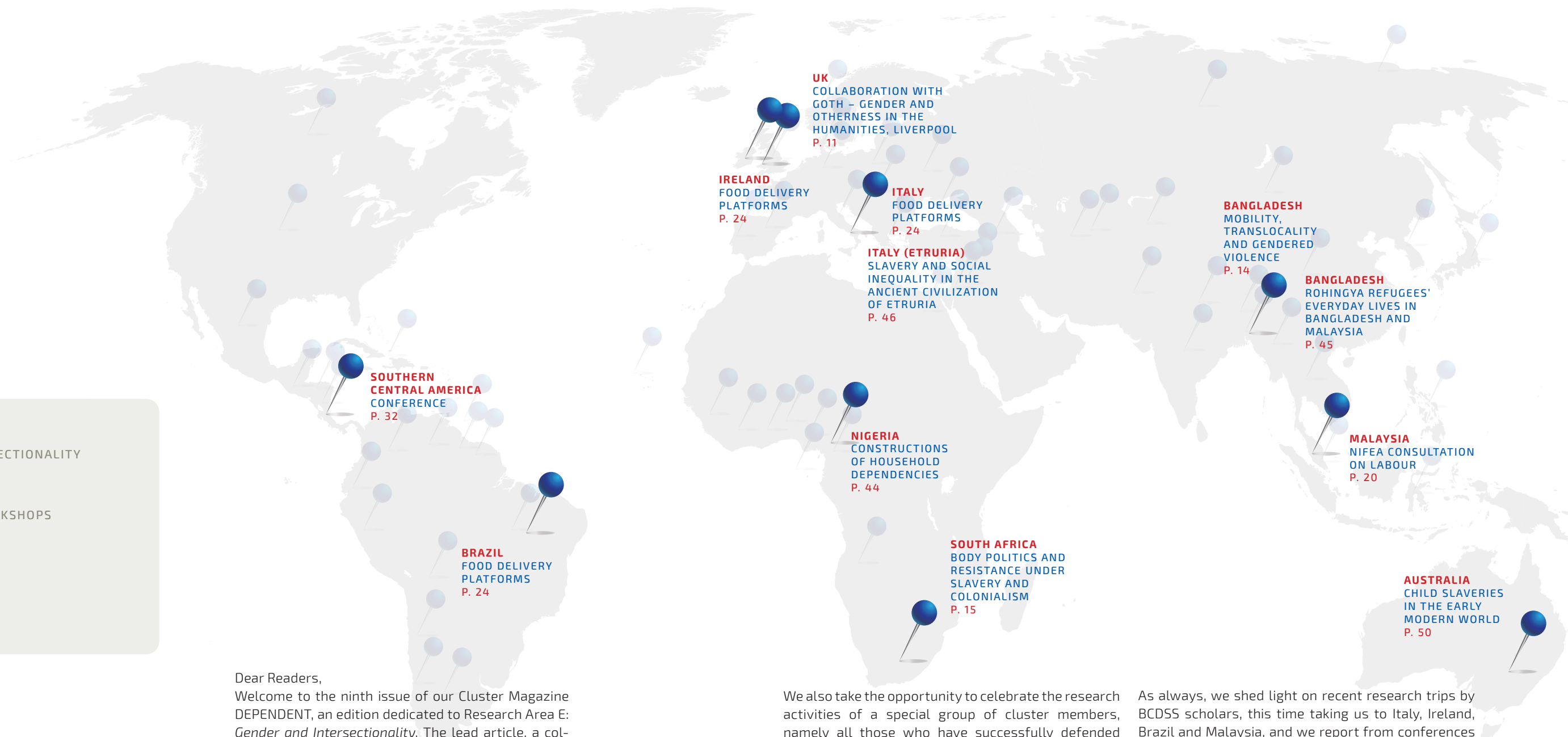
We also take the opportunity to celebrate the research activities of a special group of cluster members, namely all those who have successfully defended their PhD theses by now! Some of our first PhD graduates agreed to provide a little glimpse into their research projects. Together their research on strong asymmetrical dependencies spans 2800 years and multiple civilizations across the globe: from *Etruscan Visual Arts and Classical Roman Law* to *Contemporary Nigerian Literature*, a *Global-Historical Comparison of Elite Bodies*, and the analysis of the current *Rohingya Refugee Situation in Bangladesh and Malaysia*.

Elsewhere in our *News* section, we would like to draw attention to some important additions to our website: the new web pages dedicated to *Mental Health and Wellbeing at the BCDSS* and a new online resource that connects us with the *World of Roman Bonn*. For more on the above and further news, including a list of who is *New at the Cluster*, check out chapter four (pp. 44 ff.).

As always, we shed light on recent research trips by BCDSS scholars, this time taking us to Italy, Ireland, Brazil and Malaysia, and we report from conferences and workshops, such as on *Monumentality in Southern Central America* or *Why Words Matter in Academia*. We cover a vast range of topics and regions from multiple perspectives when we continue to explore our concept of *Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies*.

Enjoy the read!

Cécile Jeblawei





# ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCIES AND INTER-SECTIONALITY

What new insights for the exploration of strong asymmetrical dependencies can we gain by looking through the lens of intersectionality? We argue: a lot! With an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together expertise from a range of global epochs and different regions, we show that contextualising and specifying how categories of difference structure social life enables scholars to better understand the ways in which hierarchies and strong asymmetries are (re)produced and enacted.

By Kristina Großmann,  
Marion Gymnich,  
James Harland,  
Julia Hillner,  
Caroline Laske,  
Eva Lehner,  
Royce Mahawatte,  
Danitza Márquez,  
Lisa Phongsavath,  
Laurie Venters



Extract from "Heidelberger Sachsenspiegel, Landrecht", early 14<sup>th</sup> century: Calefurnia addressing the emperor directly without a guardian. She has an issue WITH him rather than about something – see her hand pointing at him. Intervisually, she is linked to a wild animal that must be tamed – see II, 63§1. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, public domain <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.85#0027>.

The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), states that various categories of difference, such as gender, race or class, do not exist in isolation, but are instead linked by complex and interwoven relationships. Intersectionality thus argues that all factors informing the identity and the social position of a person are inextricably connected. In the study of asymmetrical dependency, the focus on the dynamic and multifaceted ways in which assumed and perceived categories of difference engage with the formation of power has not been sufficiently applied. Thus, our intersectional outlook in terms of objects of analysis as well as academic practices helps to correct this imbalance. Thereby, intersectionality should not be seen as the application of a fixed set of ahistorical categories, but rather as an approach through which the dynamic interplay of various taxonomies in establishing dependence can be analysed.

“II, 63§1: No woman may be a pleader, nor may she bring a suit without a guardian. Calefurnia forfeited this [right] for all [women] when she misbehaved before the emperor in a fit of rage because her demands could not proceed without a spokesman. Of course, any man can be a pleader and a witness, and bring suit and defend himself [...]”



Also,

“we break up the still existing triumvirate of class, race and gender that constitutes the bedrock of intersectional thinking. For example, social status, honorary rank, age, religious orientation, descent, marital status, social reputation, citizenship, residency, knowledge and bodily constitution all influence the shaping of dependency relations and thus one's positioning and self-positioning in social, cultural and political orders.”

## REVEALING THE DYNAMIC INTERPLAY OF MULTIPLE CATEGORIES

The dynamic interplay of a whole range of categories of differentiation is underpinned by the research of Eva Lehner at the BCDSS, who is working on Early Modern church registers from German parishes. From the sixteenth century, Christian priests (protestant and catholic) recorded their parishioners in entries on baptism, marriages, and burials throughout Europe, and later on globally. In the evolution and prioritisation of specific categories, the category of gender only mattered intertwined with other categories, such as age, personal status (single, married, widowed), social status, and religion. Women thus were not registered as women but as wives belonging to a household and a husband. Children were also registered as daughters or sons belonging to a housefather (*pater familias*). Unbaptized children were documented without gender. No baptism meant having no name. No name meant no gender. Thus, church registers do not only make visible dependencies but also dependent actors who rarely have a direct voice in historical sources. The dynamic interlinkage of multiple contextual categories is also shown in the BCDSS in Lisa Phongsavath's research on family, childhood and coerced mobility in the Tai World in the 18th century. She describes that the dependencies, for example, in a mother-child constellation are influenced by many factors, such as the number of other members within this family, the ages of the children, or whether they were adopted, as well as other factors relevant to this relation, such as the family's economic history, their personal emotional attachments, and prescribed cultural expectations of mothers and children in the wider social fabric. All of these factors, rooted in the

The dynamic interplay of multiple categories is underpinned by the research of BCDSS scholars Eva Lehner and Lisa Phongsavath.

very experience of any given mother-child relation, contribute to how asymmetrical dependencies were felt and articulated by afflicted actors. Thus, looking at the intertwinement of different categories provides a better understanding of dependencies. Searching for their indirect, however still effective, interagency through these relationships might be a new pathway to accessing dependent actors who have been made invisible in most other sources. An intersectional lens thus gives a "voice to those who previously were excluded", as argued by Christine Bose (2012, 68), and dependents become visible in and through their relationships and dependencies on others.

## DIFFERENT MEANINGS IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

In history, it is always a challenge to study the past while minimising the effect our present situation, thinking, culture and social paradigms on the way we view the past. Today, some Western notions of thinking are conditioned by concepts such as individual rights and freedoms, notions that were, in turn, less hegemonic in premodern or non-Western societies. Each category of differentiation that scholars are investigating needs to be understood and explained in reference to the specific socio-cultural and epochal context. Scholars must be aware, for example, that ideas of 'race' or 'class' do not have the same meaning for different (past or non-European) societies.

In this regard,

“we draw attention to how the concept of 'race' is currently used among premodern scholars, and how we can make these debates productive for work on asymmetrical dependency.”

Conventionally, premodern historians have followed modern historians in arguing that 'race' as we understand it today in the English language did not gain currency until the late 1800s. Scholars like Catherine Hall (2014) have argued that the abolition of slavery changed the meaning of the word, which hitherto had referred to "lineage" rather than a biological state of being. As the transatlantic slave trade diminished and the British Empire expanded, categorizations of 'race' as a skin colour hierarchy, with whiteness at the top, replaced the idea of enslavement as a primary marker of social differentiation. Race discourse became a justification for other forms of asymmetric dependency (and even genocide). For premodern historians the question arises if the concept of 'race' can even be used outside a post-1800 context. Scholars employing Critical Race Theory have however reinforced the



usefulness of the concept even for the premodern world. After all, the contemporary understanding of race is that it functions through mechanisms of categorisation upon the basis of perceived essentialist traits, which then determine the organisation of power relations. Such mechanisms certainly existed in premodernity.

This debate has been productive in that it allows us to retain a historian's emphasis on the alterity of the past. At the same time, scholars have to be attentive to the presence of phenomena that can be productively analysed through Critical Race frameworks, provided the social institutional mechanisms necessary for such phenomena to take form are present (such as those of a premodern state). An example of this can be found in research on the later Roman Empire, which has shown how normative expectations about ideal gendered behaviour within the household intersect with normative expectations about civic versus martial, or civilised versus 'barbarian' behaviour. Fused with Greco-Roman geographic and ethnographic intellectual frameworks, such discursive mechanisms drove the production of social categories in the late antique world characterised by perceived superiority or inferiority, which was, as race-thinking always is, inconsistently determined by a combination of socio-cultural behaviours, geographic, biological, and epidermal features, and asymmetrical dependencies. Such classical frameworks were retained by post-Roman successor states whose identities were partly defined by their 'barbarian' heritage. This enabled peoples who had formerly been placed

James Harland explores how social categories contribute to the transformation of socio-political identities in the late antique world.

in subaltern categories by these mechanisms of race-making to themselves re-apply these same inherited categories elsewhere. At BCDSS, James Harland has shown how such inheritance has forced a fundamental rethinking of how certain forms of material culture, previously assumed to passively reflect barbarian migration and ethnicity, instead worked to construct new identities, which allowed formerly asymmetrically dependent peoples from the peripheries of the Roman Empire to establish new political hierarchies in which they took ascendancy, creating new asymmetrically dependent relationships in the process.

#### IDENTITY FORMATION AS A WAY TO USE 'ETHNICITY'

The category of 'ethnicity', understood as ethnic identity, makes the concept applicable to research on colonial times. In social science and humanities, the 'classical' understanding of ethnicity that perceived ethnicity as static and primordial has been challenged

by the constructivist turn since the 1970s, with researchers increasingly conceptualizing ethnic groups as constructed and imagined. Ethnicity is thus seen as ethnic identity and as a biographically grounded way of experiencing and remembering everyday situations, both enabling and constraining social action. BCDSS scholar Danitza Márquez, working on Colonial Peru, underpins this in her research and argues that certain self-ascriptions in Colonial Peru depended on the prerogatives a determined category may bring. Land ownership lawsuits within the kin were common as the number of coheirs increased through time. At the same time, subsequent division and allocation of inheritance developed alongside recurring conflicts between noble native lineages and indigenous communities over a more particular control of commonly-granted lands. Márquez shows that some women circumstantially claimed their noble indigenous descent and used it as a strategy to legally contend for land ownership, even though they did not identify themselves in notarial records nor socially performed as *indias*. Parties in lawsuits could attempt to delegitimize these women's claims by pejoratively addressing them as *mestizas*. In these contexts, the category *mestiza* referred to an indigenous woman who 'denied' her indigenous descent by publicly dressing *a la española*. Following this narrative, *indias* who 'pretended' to be *españolas* through clothing were to lose their condition of coheiresses to kinship lands, especially if noble indigenous ancestors obtained them in the first place. Therefore, self-identifying as *indio* or *india* and, most importantly, socially performing as such (as in dressing-in-public, granting notarial records, or being socially acknowledged as such) was a legal strategy to be granted land ownership in such cases.

However, it is important to stress that the formation of identity is different in the past and in the present. Identity formation in social sciences is conceptualised as social identity and as such a dynamic process based on the relationship and interaction between individuals and groups. It is, however, closely tied to a notion of the individual, which is not as flexible as it might appear. The modern notion of the individual envisions human beings as independent entities. In history, the rhetoric of identity is thus fraught with problems. The current Western core concept of (individual) identity has been identified as a modern European concept, which cannot simply be transferred to pre-modern and/or non-European discourses and practices. Similarly, the notion of the 'subject' as a prime site of intersectional resistance against

BCDSS scholar Danitza Márquez looks at the category of 'ethnicity' in Colonial Peru and why women would self-identify and socially perform either as 'indias' or 'españolas'.

oppression is informed by the legacy of European Enlightenment philosophy. Therefore, it has been suggested to replace the loaded term 'the individual' by 'person/persona' when it comes to premodern analyses across and within cultures and spaces and times. 'Person' pertains to insights by many scholars who discovered in close proximity to ethnological and microhistorical studies that humans in premodernity conceived of themselves not at all as independent entities but as genuinely social beings whose identity is formed in social relations, including those to institutions and norms. However, we also need to be wary of not just replacing terms, while still referring to the same concepts.

#### REVISING PRECONCEPTIONS AND ENHANCING (SELF-)REFLEXIVITY

In order to analyse intersectional entanglements, which might not be familiar or recognisable to us as researchers, we have to critically rethink our own stance, positionalities and pre-assumptions. In this sense, intersectional approaches might also provide an impulse for a critical examination of the premises adopted by research on asymmetrical dependency. It is important to critically rethink paradigms that have been established in the study of strong asymmetrical dependencies and whether they might have to be reconceptualized in light of intersectional thinking. This makes us examine our own preconceptions, which tend to inform our research unconsciously and inhibit our openness to cultural nuances. Also long-standing stereotypes, which have been reproduced and reiterated in academic discourse, need to be addressed.

“ This includes that scholars have to move away from the binaries that might have accompanied the field (not least the dichotomy enslaved/free), and focus on understanding the categories of gender, race, class, religion and status, which are often the key players here. ”

These categories are highly contingent on asymmetries of power and also historical paradigms, and they need to be understood and analysed as such. A self-reflexive approach thus enhances the awareness of how we as researchers understand and use certain concepts; if we are reproducing stereotypes and imposing known categories or if we rather try to deconstruct these categories and shed light on new categories of differentiation.

#### PARADIGM SHIFT

Research on asymmetrical dependencies benefits enormously from adopting an intersectional way of thinking. Intersectionality refers to the spotlighting of entwinements, that is, underscoring and explaining how different social and cultural categories mutually reinforced or influenced one another in specific historical or present circumstances. Intersecting ways of looking into and arranging material make scholars see the formerly unseen. Intersectionality can reveal silenced voices of marginalised individuals, who might otherwise slip through the researcher's net. In this sense, including intersectionality in dependency studies helps to critically rethink paradigms and stereotypes that have been established in the study of strong asymmetrical dependencies. Intersectional thinking gives impulses to reconceptualize concepts and methodologies and may even give rise to a paradigm shift.

An extended version of this contribution has been published as BCDSS Discussion Paper, available on the BCDSS website.



#### LITERATURE

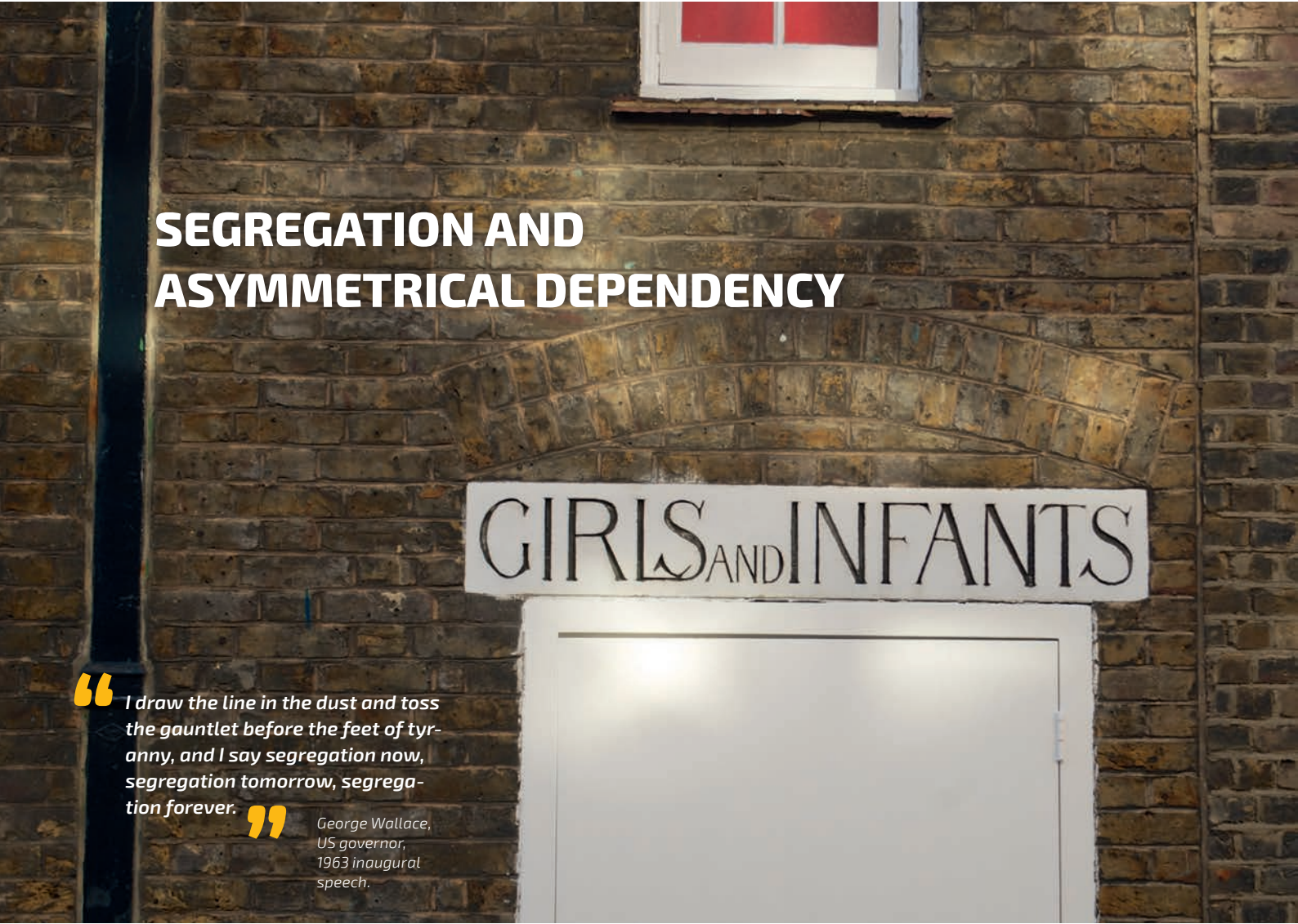
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Secker Street entrance to St Patrick's Catholic school, London Waterloo, 2012. Above the door is a sign reading „Girls and Infants“. Presumably the door is no longer just for the use of girls and infants. ©Tom Morris, Wikimedia CC BY-SA 3.0.



# SEGREGATION AND ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCY

“ I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever. ” George Wallace, US governor, 1963 inaugural speech.

By Julia Hillner and  
Lisa Hellman

**There is nothing inherently unusual about people being apart. Just as generally as people have gathered to form communities, there have been instances when individuals in those communities chose to depart: for business, familial obligations, or religious purposes.**

However, when separation is systematic and institutionalized, based on uneven relations of power, it transforms into what we term *segregation*. The concept of segregation is extensive, and might evoke instances such as "harems", Jim Crow laws, Apartheid, but also Victorian separate spheres, or even Romans excluding slaves from military service or the Tang dynasty laws regulating Uigur dress and marriage patterns? Central to understanding segregation, as we see it, is, on the one hand, its creation, legitimisation and perpetuation in relations characterized of *asymmetrical dependency*. Segregation can be the practice of denying someone access to resources and opportunities and impeding

mobility, ideologically justified on the grounds of perceived and usually binary social difference. On the other hand, we accept that segregation is not only a framework of control, but can also be used as a mechanism to *cope* with asymmetrical dependency or as a strategy of subversion. Women's shelters, single sex toilets, age differentiated playgrounds, or gender segregated sports come to mind here. While we see all such practices as elements within the history of segregation, we contend that it is when they are considered collectively that their full societal impact is revealed.

At BCDSS we are running a project that focusses on *segregation on the base of gender*, arguing that this perspective unveils multifaceted relations of power. Led by BCDSS researchers Lisa Hellman and Julia Hillner, together with Rachel Jean-Baptiste (Stanford) and Daniel Grey (Hertfordshire), it convenes scholars with research spanning from antiquity to the present day, and across diverse regions. After sharing our research at a conference in April 2024, the results will be published in a special issue of *Gender & History*, the leading international journal on global gender studies from a historical perspective.

In this project, we observe how segregation has been, and must continually be understood as, a *multi-varied concept*: it could be spatial, occupational, or temporal; the boundaries could be perceived as absolute, or permeable; it could be based on ideas of a binary, such as black/white or man/women, or on a scale, such as that of stages of leprosy. Consistent with the work in the cluster, this conference intentionally amalgamates studies from various periods and regions for the very plurality of contexts and relations they reveal.

For this reason, it is necessary for us to apply an *intersectional* view of gender. The societies under scrutiny conceptualized for example gender, social standing, functionality, race, age and sexuality in vastly different ways – not to mention spatiality or labour. Each of these interwoven and interacting factors would in turn affect how they understood, legitimised and structured segregation.

In our view, bringing together various practices and understandings of gendered segregation will enable us to reassess both categories: both 'gender' and 'segregation' offer rich grounds for discovery and nuance.

To take a concrete example, from Lisa Hellman's work, the foreign quarters of 18th century Canton were based on an ethnic and occupational divide: there, all foreign traders, be they French, Danish, Armenian, or Jewish lived in an urban area no more than two kilometres long. There, they would stay for six months at a time while buying goods for their respective trade company,

many of them East India Companies. Their space of segregation was lucrative, but isolated, and the traders themselves spoke of a "golden ghetto". For the duration of the stay in Canton, there was not supposed to be any interaction with Chinese women, and the traders were not allowed to bring any women from their own homes with them. It made for a gendered segregated sphere: at one point the British traders threw an all-male ball, forming dancing couples to amuse their Chinese colleagues. This segregation was absolute – in theory. In reality, the men frequented floating brothels, but the Tanka boys and girls populating them counted neither for the Han Chinese officials nor the foreigners. In the early 19th century, in step with growing imperialist ambitions, an increasing number of British women would try to enter Canton; their presence was an attempt to disrupt the system, and was also regarded as such. The be or not to be of the gendered segregation developed into a symbolic struggle about the entire system of trade, showing both conflicting ideas of gender, and the types of processes a focus on segregation can reveal.

At the earlier end of history, and the other side of the world, segregation was equally trialled as a form of social order. As Julia Hillner's work shows, across the Roman Mediterranean, men held the firm belief that women's natural environment was the home. So entrenched was this idea, that it was only for women that Roman law ever developed a formal custodial penalty. At the end of antiquity, adulterous women, judged as spectacularly disregarding the rules of correct female behaviour, were to be confined to monasteries. In reality and unlike in the previous example, in Rome's deeply hierarchical and status-conscious world, attempts to curtail mobility never extended to all women, however. Calls for female segregation not only sought to shield women from men, but also to draw distinctions *between* women, to separate "reputable" from "disreputable" women, to draw a line between free and freed, and in this way to define the essence of respectable "womanhood". And neither were the walls of elite homes impermeable. For domesticity to work as a virtue, it had to be witnessed. Many rituals developed that allowed respectable women to display their proper management of relations with the outside world, from public outings surrounded by enslaved entourages to the employment of household staff as gatekeepers for visitors. In this way, elite women also accrued agency from segregation practices.

Even today, gender segregation structures societies at various levels and in forms shaped by the interaction with class, race or life-cycle stages. To take an example from contemporary Japan, numerous studies highlight the gender aspect of occupational segregation here, where women are pushed towards low-paid jobs



with lower degree of job security. This situation is compounded by the difficulty many face in returning to full-time occupations or to the same or equivalent career ladder after an extended period of parental leave. In a parallel research strand, urban geographers have noted the structured economic segregation in Japanese urban areas. This trend has intensified since the Urban Reconstruction policy from 2014. While intended to create more compact cities to address population decline, these policies have in fact accelerated residential segregation. The next step would be to analyze these developments collectively: economic and spatial segregation intersect with gender, evident in housing pattern among for example divorced or widowed women, and they should be analysed jointly.

This coupling of occupational and housing segregation with gender could be further nuanced in light of the revised immigration act of 2018. This act allows for the admission of so-called 'low-skilled' migration workers (a category that hitherto has been subject to severe restrictions), aiming to meet the needs of the Japanese labour market. However, this admission has not been coupled with new housing policies. Housing segregation must also be considered in conjunction with cultural gendered segregation, where certain spaces are dominated by one gender: many migrant women work in informal sectors, such as domestic work, characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, limited labour and social protections, and exposure to physical and sexual violence.

The societal impact of gender segregation practices, and their economic costs, have recently received much attention through the award of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences to Claudia Goldin from Harvard University in 2023, for her groundbreaking work on the barriers that even today exclude women all around the globe from fully participating in the labour market. Goldin has shown that the reasons for women's exclusion from certain occupations are as much cultural – linked to age-old anxieties about the loss of prestige when women are permitted into male spaces – as they are financial. Such historically grown fears about "pollution" can be applied to many kinds of segregation beyond gender – racial, ableist, or age-related. In our project, we study such processes by practicing the very opposite: working collaboratively, acknowledging each other's views and positionalities, and embracing the differences in our specialties and case studies.

#### FURTHER READING:

Claudia Goldin, "A Pollution Theory of Discrimination. Male and Female Differences in Occupation and Earnings", in *Human Capital in History: The American Record*, edited by Leah Platt Boustan, Carola Frydman and Robert A. Margo, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, pp. 313-354.

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Lisa Hellman, *This House Is Not a Home: European Everyday Life in Canton and Macao 1730-1830*, Brill: 2018.

Julia Hillner, "Female Crime and Female Confinement in Late Antiquity", in *The Violence of Small Worlds: Conflict and Social Control in Late Antiquity*, edited by Kate Cooper, Jamie Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 15-38



#### Prof. Dr. Julia Hillner

took up the position of Professor of Dependency and Slavery Studies (Imperial Rome, Late Antiquity) in October 2021 and was Research Area E Representative "Gender and Intersectionality" in 2022-2023. She works on the transformations of the family and the household in the period 300-750 and currently researches structures of dependency within the late Roman imperial household. In 2023, Hillner published the biography "Helena Augusta: Mother of the Empire" for the *Women in Antiquity* series. She is currently PI, together with Prof. Richard Flower (Exeter), on the project "Connecting Late Antiquities", funded by a UK-German collaborative grant from the AHRC and DFG from 2023-2025.



#### Prof. Dr. Lisa Hellman

works at the intersection between social, cultural, maritime and global history in East and Central Asia. Her research focuses on the early modern period, and spans from European lives in Canton to diplomatic activities of prisoners of war and slaves in Russia and Central Asia, and the emotional history of Japan. She is currently the PI for the international Research Environment „Moved Apart“ at Lund University, and a Pro Futura XV fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study. Previously, she was leader for the BCDSS research group "Coerced Circulation of Knowledge" at the University of Bonn.

## STAGING AND DEPICTING GENDER AND OTHERNESS: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES IN ART HISTORY, THEATRE STUDIES AND CREATIVE WRITING

by Birgit Ulrike Münch

Barbara van Beck had the so-called Ambras syndrome or hypertrichosis and became internationally famous working as an entrepreneur and celebrity in shows. In the *Acta Medica et Philosophica Hafnensis* the gender dimension is obvious when it is discussed if "her genitals resemble those of a monkey". Anonymous Artist: Barbara van Beck, c. 1640, London, Wellcome Collection, Creative Commons, public domain.

"Otherness" refers to the quality or fact of being different, "othering" being the process or act of demarcation and drawing boundaries, in the course of which people are made into the "other" on the basis of their skin pigmentation, origin, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability or even their gender, and placed in contrast to their own. This categorisation into the group of the "other" is based on stereotyping and devaluation. A prominent example of "othering" is the questioning of the origin of a person who lives in Germany, for example, but does not embody the stereotypical characteristics of a "German" person. The artist Isaiah Lopaz, for example, showed this in his blog by printing the racist comments directed at him daily in supposedly liberal Berlin on T-shirts and thus making them public. This art project is entitled [Things You Can Tell Just By Looking At Him](#).



Racist comments directed at Isaiah Lopaz in supposedly liberal Berlin. He printed them on T-shirts and published them in his blog ["Things You Can Tell Just By Looking At Him"](#).



To shed light on the relationship between gender and otherness/othering, it makes sense to start with Simone de Beauvoir. In her main work *Le deuxième sexe*, English title: *The Second Sex*, from 1949, she writes about the relationship between "he" and "she", between man and woman – and therefore also about the category of the "own" and the "other": *She* is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. *He* is the Subject, *he* is the Absolute – *she* is the Other" (de Beauvoir 1949). This expression of a duality, the Self and the Other, can be found in ancient mythology as well as in earliest indigenous societies. However, this separation was not originally linked to the separation of the sexes. Rather, it denotes otherness as a fundamental category of human thought. Otherness, in short, means that the representation of different social groups is controlled by those with greater political power. Jean-François Staszak (2008) described the process of othering as the creation of an out-group, whose identity is considered lacking and who may be subject to discrimination by the in-group.

Identities are not natural and innate, rather female identity is constructed by men to serve their own interests. It is interesting to note that de Beauvoir's work is translated in almost all languages with the "second gender", with the exception of the German ("Das andere Geschlecht") and Swedish editions ("Det andra könet"). The concept of othering has been strongly shaped in the field of postcolonial theory (e.g. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha), but the connection between gender and othering is found above all in the work of the US-Indian feminist literary scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In her publication *The Rani of Sirmur. An Essay in Reading the Archives* (1985), the researcher was able to demonstrate on the basis of diary records of the East India Company how the British colonial powers constructed a distorted image of the Rani (ruler, queen) of the Himalayan princely state of Simur, on the one hand within the patriarchal structure in India and on the other within imperialist objectification, making it impossible to look at the Rani, and at the same time reveals the different dimensions of Othering. Here, as in other cases, the process of othering always or almost exclusively takes place within a power imbalance.

#### COLLABORATION OF THE CLUSTER WITH GOTH – GENDER AND OTHERNESS IN THE HUMANITIES

Gender and Otherness in the Humanities (GOTH) is a research centre based in the, [Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences](#) at The Open University, Milton Keynes. Its name underlines gender's often complex intersections with different types of "otherness". Gender is a particular aspect of the broader characterisation of "otherness" as a deviation from "the norm". The relationship between gender and otherness through-

out time and across the Arts and Humanities forms the focal point of investigations. This relationship is multifarious: people are othered due to their gender, or their expression of their gender; gender plays a role within intersectional identities, leading to more complex forms of otherness; gender politics can itself be intersected by various kinds of othering; and there are those who feel othered by the very concept of gender. The diverse facets of the relationship between gender and otherness form a rich array of material for academic study, and are of great significance in modern scholarship. GOTH encourages and supports research in otherness more broadly: an awareness of the centrality of human diversity to an understanding of the Humanities is crucial to The Open University, to its exceptionally large and diverse student body and its impact on society.

Additional activities include the hosting of visiting scholars, supporting and initiating bidding for research funding. For the latest news, discussions, and reports of its [events](#), see the [GOTH blog](#) (<http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/goth/>).



Prof. Birgit Ulrike Münch with "Gender and Otherness in the Humanities" (GOTH) research partners and GOTH- director Prof. M.A. Katritzky (second from the left), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes. ©B.U. Münch.

Birgit Ulrike Münch was invited to co-organise the annual conference of GOTH in 2023 and 2024 and the collaboration will continue in 2025. Together with the director of GOTH, Prof. Dr. M.A. Katritzky, Münch has been researching the so-called "abject" for some time and shares research interests on disability and dependency in the field of medical humanity, such as "Siamese twins", female hairy people, sexually transmitted diseases and those stigmatized by them and, above all, people of short stature (project Münch) entitled: *Dwarfs in the global cosmos of courts and collections*. The project deals with a specific, historically well documented group of people of short stature, with court dwarfs in the pre-modern period, and proceeds from the basic assumption that the historical group of people of short stature, which has so far been considered very homogeneously, turns out

to be historically far more diverse. Thus, in line with contemporary discussions, we shall consider how the question of dis/ability as well as dependency, gender, and agency of individuals can be concretized here.

The special potential of the collaboration with GOTH lies in the range of subjects: on the UK side, art and visual studies are juxtaposed with theatre studies and creative writing, and music, which can offer central synergies in the interdisciplinary analysis of Otherness and Othering, primarily in the early modern period, but also extending into the present.



The image shows a map of the „court dwarfs“ project by Birgit Ulrike Münch, including the artefacts of some of the premodern global collections and wunderkammers telling us more about dwarfism, dependency, and disAbility. ©B.U. Münch.



Sinéad Burke, CEO, teacher and Blogger and born with achondroplasia, on Cover of the April 2023 Vogue Britain, dedicated to disabled trailblazers. On otherness and disAbility she wrote: "People didn't take me seriously because of my physical aesthetic, so I started blogging ... and collaborating with the fashion industry".

Within the two research colloquia 2023 and 2024, 18 papers analysed central topics of the research field Gender and Otherness. Among them, Michelle MOSELEY (Virginia Tech) examined the visualisation of large primates in the curiosity culture of the century, as they were constructed as a necessary "other" between humans and animals and all depictions show female primates. The paper by Marina VIDAS (Copenhagen) dealt with otherness, gender and race in the portraits of African children as slaves at the Danish court, 1550-1700. Through the resulting dichotomy, "Blackness" becomes part of their constructed identity, and they are also painted with much more emotion shown in their faces compared to how the white aristocrats are depicted. In another portrait by a Danish painter, an animal with allusions to Africa

is depicted together with a Black girl. As they stand in a similar pose, have the same dark skin colour and their arms are intertwined, the painting dehumanises the child, while the exploration of these paintings contributes to the understanding of power relations, the role of otherness in the construction of identity and historical, cultural, gender and racial prejudices.

Jennie E. OWEN (Milton Keynes), poet and creative writing lecturer at the Open University, explores the writing of place and trauma and poetry as memorial in regard to gender and otherness with the well-known 2004 Cockling tragedy in Morecambe Bay, in which 23 male Chinese labourers trafficked to the UK died, especially in relation to build memorials and art objects on this modern form of slavery.



Jan Jebsen (after?): (Enslaved) girl with an ape, ca 1690, Royal Collection, Rosenborg Castle, photo: private.



#### Prof. Dr. Birgit Ulrike Münch

is Investigator at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, as well as Vice-Rector for International affairs of the University of Bonn and co-director of the Centre Ernst Robert Curtius (CERC), the Bonn Center for French Studies. As a

Professor for Art History she analyses the iconology of slavery and Strong Asymmetrical Dependency, illness, disAbility and the abject body. Münch co-curated several exhibitions and is interested in innovative ways artists and museums deal with their colonial pasts and how monuments and memorials on slavery are currently recoded. Currently, she studies the hidden visual and textual archives of prostitution/sex working in the early modern colonies and the main centers of the Empire.





Child-Friendly Space for children with disability in Camp 5 run by a local NGO in Bangladesh ©Benjamin Etzold, August 2023.

RESEARCH PROJECT:

MOBILITY,  
TRANSLOCALITY  
AND GENDERED  
VIOLENCE



Anas Ansar,  
PhD researcher



Dr. Benjamin Etzold,  
Postdoctoral researcher,  
BCDSS



A poster with  
helpline number for  
support on gender  
based violence in a  
Rohingya refugee  
camp in Bangladesh  
©Benjamin Etzold,  
August 2023.

A cooperation project between bicc and BCDSS in the Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme, funded by UK International Development.

The lives of displaced Rohingya women in Bangladesh's refugee camps is marked by violence and vulnerability. Beyond their gender, their legal status, class position, age, religion, education, family role and (dis)ability intersect in their situation and compound their dependency and precarity – each in a specific way. Against the disturbing reality of manifold forms of gender-based and socially normalized violence, our research shows that female Rohingya are not helpless but make use of their agency-in-waiting to navigate through the politically charged landscape of refugee reception and the translocal Myanmar-Bangladesh borderlands. They draw on tacit knowledge, informal practices, mobility, and networks of solidarity to evade, cope with and resist to violence. Drawing on intersectionality as

methodological tool for our analysis, we aim to assess which identity markers shape their experiences of and resilience to violence, and how. On this basis, we seek to expand the oftentimes narrow understanding of refugee women's vulnerability to gender-based violence in humanitarian discourse.

RESEARCH PROJECT:

MASCULINITIES,  
SEXUAL  
EXPRESSION, AND  
ASYMMETRICAL  
DEPENDENCIES

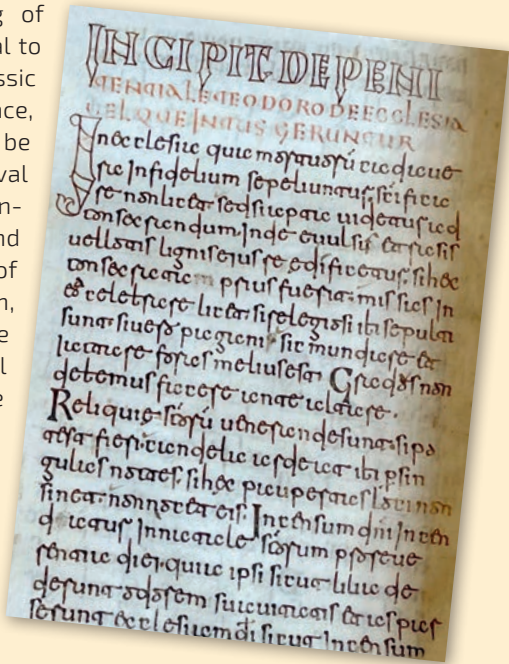
IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL  
PENITENTIALS



David B. Smith,  
PhD researcher, BCDSS

My dissertation project explores how early medieval Christian confessional manuals (penitentials) both assume and generate relationships of asymmetrical dependency around gender and sexuality for biological males who engage in sexual intercourse with other males. An intersectional understanding of dependencies is essential to my work. The now classic intersectional triad of race, gender, and class can be adapted to early medieval sources like the penitentials. Yet, intertwined and overlapping categories of gender, sexual expression, religion, status, and age have emerged as pivotal considerations for the current project.

Penitential, Preußischer  
Kulturbesitz, Hamilton 132(H),  
Berlin Staatsbibliothek  
photo by David B. Smith.



RESEARCH PROJECT:

BODY POLITICS  
AND RESISTANCE  
UNDER SLAVERY  
AND COLONIALISM

AT THE CAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA  
(1652-1806)



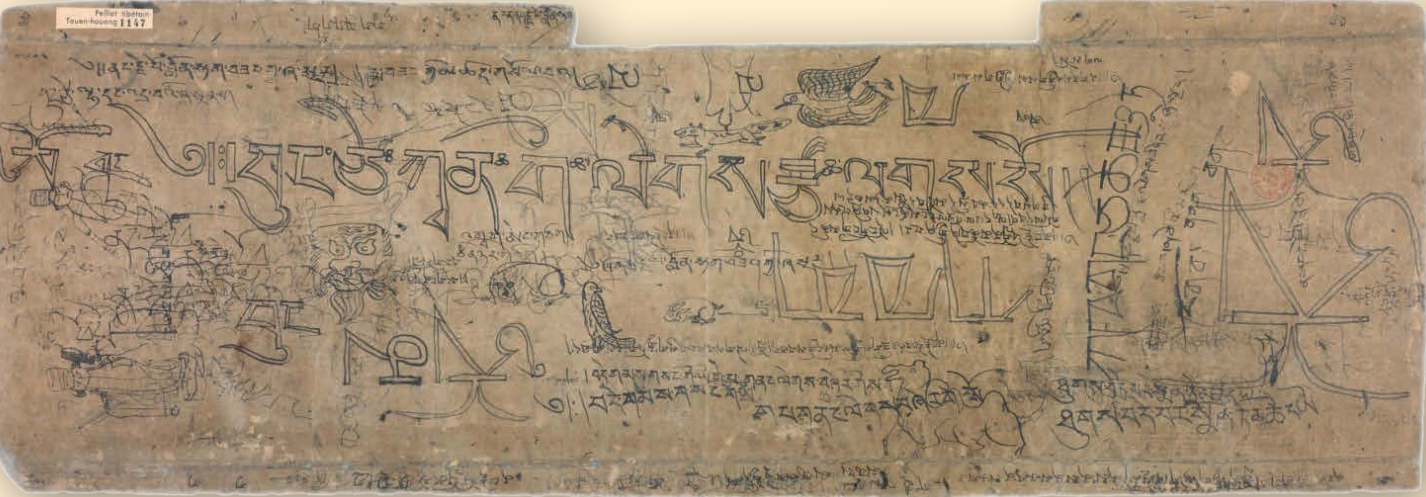
Dr. Eva Marie Lehner,  
Postdoctoral researcher,  
BCDSS

In my current work, I am exploring the intersection of gender, unfree status, and race. Specifically, I am delving into the living and working conditions of enslaved women in the colonial Cape of South Africa during the eighteenth century. One aspect I am exploring is wet nursing — where enslaved African and Asian women who had recently given birth to a child or children were utilized as wet nurses for European settler families. Drawing on intersectionality, I argue that intersecting categories (like gender, unfree status, and race) profoundly shaped these women's lives in a way that differed significantly from both enslaved men and free European women. Focusing on wet nursing enables me to scrutinize the commodification and objectification of enslaved women and female bodies under slavery and colonialism. Additionally, I am exploring the question of agency from an intersectional perspective: did these women have any opportunity to influence their circumstances and that of their child or children?



"Sleeping Madonna, with child."  
1799, No. 7055, Lady Anne Barnard  
Collection, MSB68, National Library  
of South Africa, Cape Town.  
Courtesy of the National Library of  
South Africa.





Pelliot tibétain 1147, courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale De France, Paris

RESEARCH PROJECT:

ASYMMETRICAL  
DEPENDENCIES IN  
SOCIAL STATUS,  
DAILY LIFE AND  
SELF-IDENTITY  
OF PRE-MODERN TIBETANS  
AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

Buddhist monastic subjects in the Silk Road site of Dunhuang, on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan Empire (ca. 600–850) held intersectional statuses as mostly of Chinese ethnicity but under Tibetan rule, while also being subject to both imperial and monastic rule. Nuns were even more constrained, since the Buddhist monastic guidelines restricted them through more regulations and an inferior status to all monks (regardless of age or seniority). Nonetheless, these people found innovative ways to maintain agency of lifestyle, employment and legal recourse within these constraints that bear comparison cross-culturally with religious inhabitants of other imperial peripheries.



Prof. Dr. Lewis Doney,  
Investigator, BCDSS

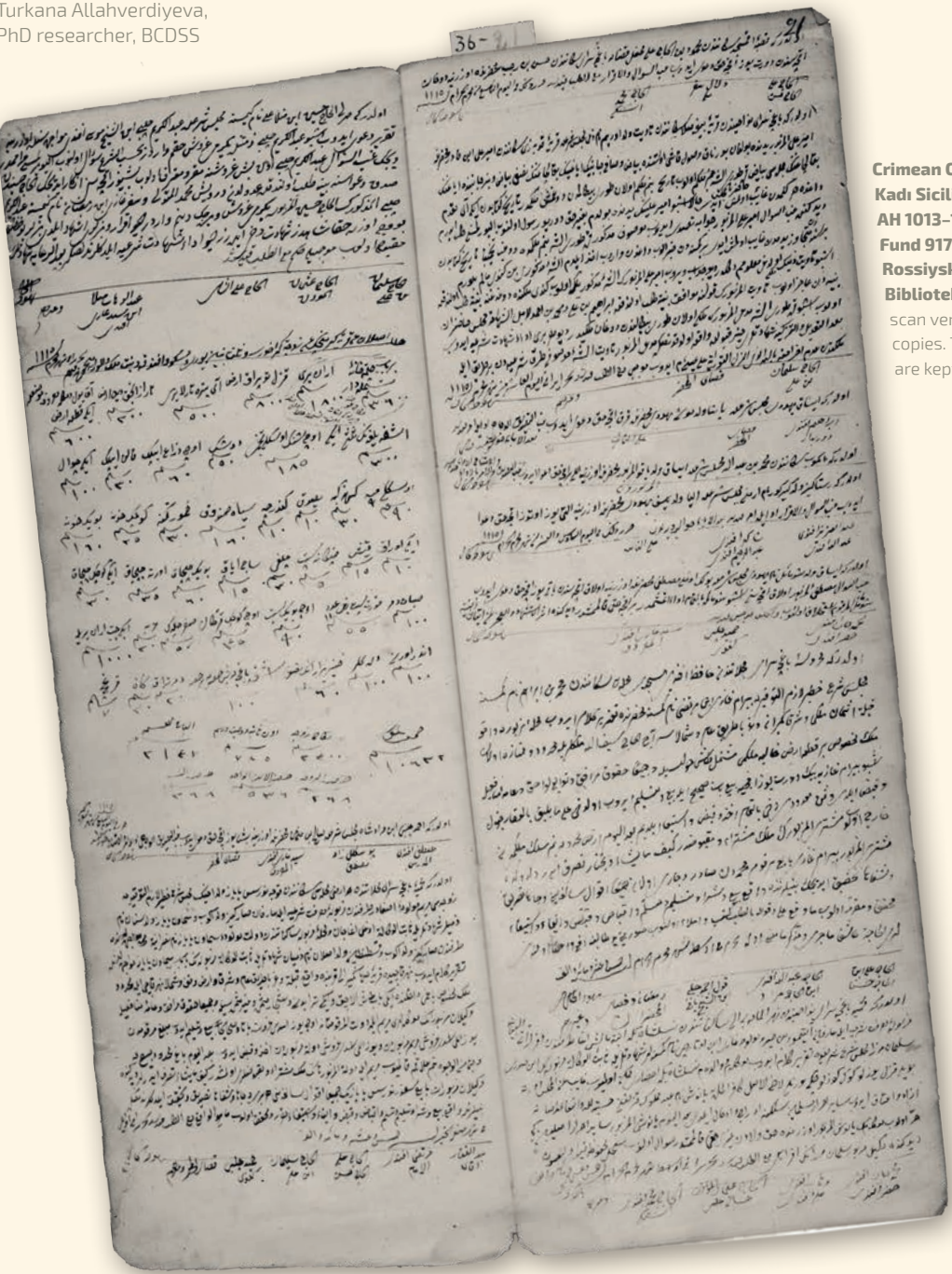
RESEARCH PROJECT:

NON-ELITE  
HOUSEHOLD  
SLAVERY

IN THE EARLY MODERN  
CRIMEAN KHANATE



Turkana Allahverdiyeva,  
PhD researcher, BCDSS



Crimean Court Register [Kırım  
Kadı Sicili], Volume 36/21,  
AH 1013–1118, AD 1701–1706,  
Fund 917, Ottdel Rukopisey  
Rossiyskoy Natsionalnoy  
Bibliotek (ORRNB). This is a  
scan version of the original  
copies. The scanned versions  
are kept at ISAM, Istanbul.



# FIELD RESEARCHERS' REPORTS

Economics & Management for  
Life  
| GEM School | 2023 |

NIFEA Consultation o  
| Labour |

As they investigate **strong asymmetrical dependency**, our scholars go beyond the study of written records. They travel to the regions they research in order to scrutinize historical sources and artefacts. They also conduct interviews with experts and communicate with local people. In the following pages, the scholars share impressions from their historical, archaeological or anthropological field research.

21 AUGUST- 01 SEPTEMBER 2023, CCM ECUMENICAL CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA







2023 NIFEA Consultation Cohort ©Adam Sam Suthagar/CCM

## RELIGIOUS ACTORS, SOLIDARITY, AND THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR:

### REFLECTIONS ON THE 2023 NIFEA CONSULTATION ON LABOUR AND GEM SCHOOL IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

by David Brandon Smith

The 2023 New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) Consultation, which included representatives from the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Council of Churches (WCC), World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), World Methodist Council (WMC), and Council for World Mission (CWM), and was hosted by the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), gathered in Kuala Lumpur on August 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. Upon the conclusion of the NIFEA gathering, many of the clergy, theologians, social scientists, activists, labour leaders, lay workers, and others remained together from August 24<sup>th</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup> for the 2023 Ecumenical School on Government, Economics and Management (GEM School).

**“In [a] Christian understanding, labour is not merely the realm of human activity. In some creation stories of the Abrahamic faiths— Judaism, Christianity, and Islam— the divine labours as well [...] In many places in the Hebrew Bible, God is portrayed as performing labour, including menial labour and feminised labour [...] Moreover, in the ancient stories of Exodus, God joins in solidarity with the Hebrew slaves and in the incarnation [of] Christ, both human and divine, joins the working majority of his time ”**

(NIFEA Consultation, Theological Communiqué on Labour 2023).

Both gatherings were held at the Ecumenical Centre of the CCM, which is on a bustling four-lane street in Petaling Jaya ('PJ') in the greater Kuala Lumpur area. The daily ten-minute walk from the La Salle Residency, where many participants had their room and board, to the centre was an excursion into Malaysia's dense religious landscape. Upon disembarking from the lodge and rounding a corner, our crew encountered a Roman Catholic primary and secondary school. At the next intersection, we were greeted by a Theravada Buddhist temple to our left. Turning right, we made our way up a gentle slope. Below our hillside path, we could see a minaret peeking out amid the high-rises.

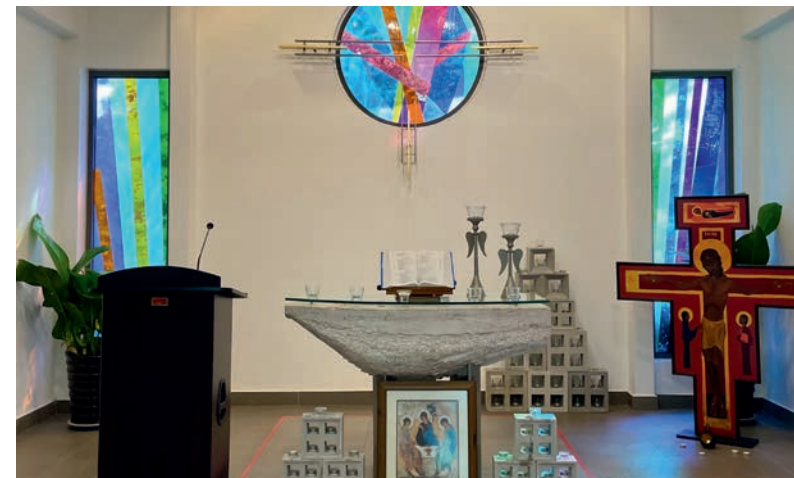
Before long, we passed the Bible College of Malaysia (Pentecostal, Assemblies of God), which was directly adjacent to a store that sold “exclusive Indian hand-crafts” and was watched over by large *murti* of what appeared (from a bit of a distance and perhaps in differing order) to be the gods Shiva, Durga, Krishna, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Hanuman, Ganesha, Brahma, and Saraswathi. After willing ourselves up a set of surprisingly steep steps and crossing a walk bridge that took us over a four-lane highway, we trekked through a parking lot that included a Catholic social service centre and shop that sold statues of the Madonna. The shop prefigured the modernist façade of the Catholic Church of St. Francis Xavier, which stood a few hundred yards beyond the shops.

After another few hundred paces, we finally made it through the gates of the Ecumenical Centre of the Council of Churches of Malaysia. The membership of the council, which was founded in 1948, includes Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Syrian Orthodox, and indigenous denominations. The Coptic Orthodox Church of Malaysia is an affiliate member. The body is also associated with the national YMCA, various Bible societies, Christian relief organisations, and other groups.

While the diverse experiences of people of faith in Malaysia provided the contextual immersion that is so essential to ecumenical formation, our discussions at the NIFEA Consultation and the GEM School addressed both global and 'glocal' challenges. Considering that the church and “Christian theology [have] a complex relationship with labour” (NIFEA Consultation, *Concept and Programme* 2023), it is perhaps unsurprising that delegates to the consultation would discuss and listen to presentations on the “Theology of Work” from noted scholars who spoke from diverse perspectives. After theologising our task, we moved into a period of interfaith reflection on labour that explored possible convergencies between Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian worldviews. Listening to the voices of young people, community organisers and activists, we then



Lecture Session of the NIFEA Consultation ©David Brandon Smith



Chapel of the Ecumenical Centre of the Council of Churches of Malaysia ©David Brandon Smith

participated in a panel titled “Globalisation of Labour and Inequality: Voices of Workers, Women, Youth, and Churches.” Before gathering for a formal reception hosted by the leaders of the CCM, we also discussed “the future of work” as it relates to the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 4IR panel focused on building solidarity between workers' movements, the relationship between religious actors and the ILO in contemporary technical diplomacy, and links between the evolution of labour markets and climate change.

During the second day of the consultation, we sojourned into Kuala Lumpur (KL), where we gathered at the YMCA's event facility. There, we met with people who are campaigning for higher wages, more dignified working conditions, social protection, basic income grants, and informal education in migrant communities within and around KL. We also heard from a wide range of organisations and initiatives, including PCK Yeongdeungpo Urban Industrial Mission, the social reform arm of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the Southeast Center for Cooperative Development (based in the U.S.), and the ILO's Social Justice Global Coalition. After meeting with individuals who work among migrant communi-



ties at various locations around the city, we returned to the Ecumenical Centre to discuss and finalise a brief *Theological Communiqué on Labour*. The communiqué, which I quoted above, is best understood as a resource for prompting conversation on religious actors' role in upholding the dignity of labour and building solidarity across contexts.



**Discussion of Labour Migration in Malaysia at the YMCA in Kuala Lumpur** ©David Brandon Smith

The GEM School, which is administered by the same groups that organised the NIFEA efforts, at least on the church side of things, picked up where the consultation left off. Both programmes are outgrowths of the "Ecumenical Action Plan for a New International Financial and Economic Architecture," which strives toward "an economy of life for all now" (WCC, *EAP-NIFEA* 2013). The action plan is itself a consequence of deliberations within the WCC and a predecessor to the WCRC (namely, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches – WARC, which formally united with the Reformed Ecumenical Council – REC in 2010 to form the WCRC).

In 2004, after years of discernment, which can be described as a *processus confessionis*, the 24<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WARC gathered in Accra, Ghana. The global Reformed body declared a *status confessionis* or a 'state of confession' (i.e., a situation prompting the issuance of a formal statement in response to a theological or praxiological crisis that threatens the peace, unity, and purity of the church). According to many within the alliance, the need for a new confession had emerged due to the "increasing urgency of global economic injustice and ecological destruction" (quoted in WARC, *Accra Confession*, Preamble). Ultimately, the assembly adopted what became known as the *Accra Confession*.

The Accra Confession was drafted and affirmed largely in response to pressure exerted by representatives of churches in the global south and their allies: it has received paltry attention within most sectors of the Reformed communion and the theological academe. While one might critique the polemical style employed by the wordsmiths who shaped the document, many Reformed Christians would affirm key elements of the critique it raises of the prevailing global economic system. As a document that aims to establish theological foundations for responding to trans-contextual challenges, the Accra Confession does little to recommend workable alternatives to the globalised systems it so ardently condemns– a fact that almost immediately gave rise to critiques that the text enshrined an idealistic and grievance-driven response to the complex challenges involved in the maintenance, reform, or (as some would prefer) replacement of trans-national economic structures.

In response to these critiques and due to the pro-active efforts of many within the communion, the WCRC partnered with the WCC's Alternative Globalisation Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) Process and other ecumenical bodies to host the Global Ecumenical Conference on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture from September 29<sup>th</sup> to October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012, in São Paulo, Brazil. The result of that gathering was the *São Paulo Statement*, which sought to develop concrete responses to the (arguably) unsustainable rise of global economic inequality that increased in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. The statement was highly critical of globalised capitalism and the neoliberal market economy: it employed the rhetoric of anti-imperialism and called for "an active radicalising of our theological discourse" based on "liberative theologies that respond to concrete systematic struggles, inclusive of feminist, womanist, black, ecological, post-colonial, grassroots, minority and public theology, and indigenous spiritualities" (WCC, *São Paulo Statement* 2013). More importantly for the present discussion, the statement also outlined a framework for developing workable alternatives to the economic structures of which documents like the Accra Confession had been so critical. The São Paulo Statement's proposals were then further developed in the Ecumenical Action Plan referenced above.

As the flagship educational mechanism of the Ecumenical Action Plan, the GEM School brings together a select number of well-established and emerging leaders within the ecumenical movement to develop skills in and knowledge of global governance, economics, and management. The wide-ranging sessions at the 2023 GEM School included not only a rock-star lineup of lecturers from around the world but extensive

background readings and a practice-oriented project that participants were encouraged to implement upon returning to their contexts. The GEM School cohort also furthered the work of the NIFEA Consultation by engaging in an ecumenical consultation on labour issues, exploring the relationship between labour and Christian mission and developing an understanding of the relationship between theology and economics. The program also provided additional opportunities to learn from the socio-economic context of Malaysia and our host churches, especially regarding their humanitarian efforts in migrant communities and advocacy for migrant workers. Furthermore, we also participated in discussion sessions and seminars that explored critical approaches to market analysis, international trade policy, and global finance.

Some lectures and panels addressed the impact of debt on emerging economies, short-sighted or exploitative development policies, global reliance on the U.S. Dollar, transnational currency diversification, and the presumed need for the development of alternative currencies. Some speakers also employed broad critiques of cooperate models of sustainability management that drew on approaches ranging from classical social analysis to eco-feminist economics. Practical sessions offered a chance to learn about various ecumenical efforts to develop a biblical concept of 'jubilee' into an economic policy proposal, reparations, and transnational tax justice, including the (potentially) controversial #ZacTax campaign.

Few delegates used the language of dependency, either in classic geopolitical terms or in the sense of asymmetrical social relationships between two or more actors characterised by high degrees of inequality, marginality, exclusion, and– in 'strong' cases, oppressive labour or status conditions. However, the term asymmetrical dependency, as we use it at the BCDSS, could most certainly be used to describe many of the same contextual realities and experiences that received so much critical attention at both events. Indeed, underpinning the discourse at the NIFEA Consultation and the GEM School was a genuine and theologically grounded commitment to identifying asymmetrical dependencies and working to improve the lives of vulnerable people and populations worldwide.

Like any ecumenical encounter, both the consultation and the school challenged me to consider new perspectives on a diverse array of topics. Whether one comes away from such gatherings in full agreement with every aspect of the programmes or not, they are always transformative and profoundly educational experiences. Nevertheless, like much contemporary discourse around global economics, identity, and

social justice, introductory sessions on the relationship between nation-states and other actors on the international stage could have been strengthened by a robust class analysis that acknowledges the need to build solidarity among the world's working majority– the 99%, as they (we) are commonly called. On another note, perhaps including more of what many participants may have considered discordant strands of thought (e.g., corporate or broadly neo-liberal perspectives) would have proved disruptive. Yet, without a bit of antiphonal interaction, events like the GEM School risk reproducing the somewhat predictable, dull, and uninspiring tones that people have come to expect from the chorus of ecumenists. Such gatherings, when they do not allow sufficient space for complexity and realism, may also feed into narratives of division and 'us vs. them' mentalities that undermine rather than promote solidarity across contexts.

These humbly submitted critiques aside, the 2023 NIFEA Consultation on Labour and the GEM School provided remarkable opportunities to experience the diversity of religious understandings of labour, good governance, and just management of economic life. The organiser's primary aim of testifying to the role that religious actors can play in upholding the dignity of labour and building trans-contextual solidarity was most certainly achieved.



**David B. Smith**

is a Ph.D. candidate in Protestant Theology (Church History) at the BCDSS and Research Associate in Research Group "Structures of Dependency in the Late Antique and Early Medieval". His research project explores the entanglements of masculinities, homoeroticism and dependencies in early medieval penitential literature and ecclesial law.





View of Phibsborough, a neighbourhood on the Northside of Dublin, Ireland, where many Brazilian couriers make deliveries. ©Lucas Santos Souza

## FOOD DELIVERY PLATFORMS: EMERGING ACTORS IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION IN EUROPE

by Ayesha Hussain and  
Lucas Santos Souza

BCDSS doctoral researcher Ayesha Hussain and postdoctoral researcher Lucas Santos Souza from our partner institution, the Universidade Federal Fluminense (PPGH-UFF), both conduct research into precarious work and migration, Ayesha with a special focus on Pakistani migrant workers in Italy while Lucas focuses on precarious work in Brazil and by Brazilians in Europe. The two met earlier this year during Lucas' guest fellowship at the BCDSS. This article, a short comparative study, is one of the outcomes of their collaborative research.

The incorporation of new information and communication technologies into the world of work has led to significant transformations in labor relations. Terms like *industry 4.0*, *artificial intelligence*, and *algorithms* increasingly feature in discussions across academic fields. While various types of digital work have emerged worldwide, digital labor platform work has gained significant visibility, owing to its expansion across the globe and into various sectors of the economy. However, this process has resulted in a general increase in work precariousness, with growing job insecurity, longer working hours, and misclassification of workers as self-employed.

A survey by the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* from 2021 confirms that migrants workers constitute over 70% of workers in *platform economy*. In the sector of gig economy mediated by digital platforms, delivery workers, especially those in the food delivery sector, have gained significant visibility in the world in the third decade of the 21st century. Although these workers are not a product of new technologies integrated into the labor market, the food delivery apps have introduced a new dynamic to this group, notably increasing the level of precarity, further exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The absence of social security and traditional employment structures, exemplified by subcontracting and freelance contracts, combined with the relative ease of entry into these activities and the self-organized networks of workers, facilitates the intersection of precarious platform work and migration. In this context, the concept of "platform migration" (Collins, 2020) elucidates the transformations in social relationships and migratory patterns induced by new technologies. Below we will examine the role of food delivery platforms among migrant laborers from Brazil and Pakistan in Ireland and Italy respectively, with a particular focus on structured dependencies in different contexts.

### MIGRANT CATEGORIES IN FOOD DELIVERY JOBS

Migrants are overrepresented compared to natives in the platform economy, and variations in migrant status, skill sets, and other characteristics lead to different experiences and levels of precarity within similar platform jobs.

Brazilian delivery workers constitute a significant segment of the labor force in Dublin, however, they do not form a homogeneous entity, as their migration trajectories and expectations exhibit considerable variation. Our research in Dublin enables the categorization of Brazilian delivery workers in at least two distinct groups.

The first group comprises individuals who migrated to Dublin with the intention of pursuing careers aligned with their professional qualifications. These individuals resorted to app-based delivery work due to the relative ease of entry and the challenges in securing employment within their fields of expertise. Typically, these workers engage in delivery services temporarily while seeking opportunities that match their qualifications. In contrast, the second group consists of individuals who migrated specifically with the intention of working in the delivery sector. This group includes those who had prior experience as food couriers in Brazil and leveraged their established networks of Brazilian contacts—both in Brazil and Ireland—to facilitate their entry into the sector. Some members of this group view

delivery work as a short-term means to save money, while others regard it as a long-term occupation despite its inherent uncertainties and insecurities. A significant driving factor for migration is the higher earnings in Europe compared to Brazil.

Legal issues related to visas significantly shape the daily lives and dependencies of these workers, highlighting specificities among migrants from the Global South in Europe. The provision allowing Brazilians to stay in Europe for up to three months without a specific visa serves as a facilitating factor, though some opt for student visas. This legal context plays a crucial role in their employment dynamics and overall experiences within the sector.

As compared to Brazilian migrant workers in Dublin's gig economy, delivery workers in other parts of Europe, particularly Pakistanis in Italy, encounter markedly different migration contexts and trajectories. Many Pakistani migrants arrive through agents and human smugglers due to limited work visa options. Newly arrived and undocumented Pakistani migrants often apply for asylum in Italy and engage in various informal job sectors such as agriculture, construction, and hospitality while waiting for the decisions on their applications.



Delivery workers in Brescia, Italy. ©Ayesha Hussain

A significant shift occurred with the advent of digital and app-based delivery jobs in Italy since 2020. Undocumented Pakistani migrants, who previously earned approximately 25 Euros from various informal daily wage jobs, could earn this amount in just 2-3



hours through app-based delivery work. This shift has impacted the availability of cheap labor for employers in the informal sector, who struggle to retain undocumented migrants that have transitioned to digital platform jobs. Additionally, migrants with more secure visa statuses and stable jobs in formal sectors often choose food delivery jobs to generate an extra income.



Migrant delivery worker on the job in Brescia. ©Ayesha Hussain

### ROLE OF NETWORKS IN PLATFORM JOBS

Brazilian delivery couriers who migrate with the explicit intention of working in the food delivery sector often possess extensive connections within established social networks. This group's migratory movements are heavily reliant on these pre-existing contacts, which are critical for facilitating their entry into the industry. Many of these individuals had prior experience as food couriers in Brazil and leverage their networks, comprising Brazilians both in Brazil and Ireland, to transition into the European market. These networks, primarily maintained through social media and communication apps play a fundamental role in this process.

These pre-established networks are especially crucial due to legal constraints: student or tourist visas do not officially permit the creation of accounts on delivery apps for riders. Therefore, the practice of renting accounts – commonly mediated by fellow Brazilians

or other individuals involved in the sector – becomes essential for these migrants. Similarly, undocumented Brazilians also rely heavily on these networks. Furthermore, many of these workers have limited English proficiency. Delivery apps provide an advantageous platform, allowing them to earn income with just basic operational knowledge.

The Pakistani migrants with irregular status also resort to borrowing the identity of a friend, relative, or other documented individuals within their networks. Typically, the individual who lends their identity details takes a percentage of the income earned by the irregular worker. However, this arrangement can vary when the individuals are from the same family. Consequently, the different levels of migrant networks yield varying outcomes for Pakistani migrants working in app-based food delivery jobs in Italy. The expectation of sharing earnings in exchange for identity details is a prevalent norm among different categories of migrants, facilitated by these supportive networks.

### SOCIAL PROTECTION IN FOOD DELIVERY SECTOR

Individuals possessing legal documentation can access certain social security benefits, contingent upon their full compliance with governmental regulations and the requirements set forth by app-based food delivery companies. However, a substantial portion of Brazilian and Pakistani workers in Europe operate under rented accounts, precluding them from social protection. The financial repercussions of accidents can be significant due to their use of rented accounts and often irregular status. Additionally, the vehicles utilized by these workers are typically rented through pre-existing networks, further exacerbating their precarious situation. There have also been reports of xenophobic physical attacks against these workers, with their undocumented status rendering it difficult, if not impossible, to report these incidents to official authorities. This limits their ability to engage with various social institutions and constrains their autonomy.

Most undocumented migrants use bicycles for delivery jobs, whereas those with secure work visas and appropriate licenses utilize motorbikes or cars. In the event of a workplace accident, digital companies do not provide compensation or cover medical expenses. Documented migrants with secure visa status, who have paid taxes, might receive support from state institutions as compensation for their injuries. However, undocumented workers using rented accounts, face discriminatory treatment in such incidents due to their lack of recognition by both state institutions and employing companies.



Migrant delivery worker in a street in Dublin, Ireland.  
©Lucas Santos Souza

### REGULATIONS IN PLATFORM JOBS: WHOSE BENEFIT?

There has been substantial discourse regarding the regulation of platform work in Europe over the past few years (Garben, 2021). In the specific context of Ireland, Brazilian food delivery workers as well as those who rent accounts, express concerns that increased legal oversight by the government and companies could complicate their ability to work as couriers. Such regulated contracts could impose restrictions on working hours, which is particularly troubling for this group. The major attraction for many migrants in this field is the ability to work extensive hours, utilizing multiple apps and often operating more than one rented account. According to interviews, the absence of immediate social ties – since many individuals migrate alone, leaving their families in Brazil – drives them to work for long hours and making more and more money.

There is apprehension that new legal frameworks and increased platform control over the status of these workers could limit their earnings, which is a major incentive for many Brazilian migrants in this sector. It is also plausible that intermediaries and the structure of contact networks could be affected by legal changes. Although regulation suggests increased rights and long-term security for platform delivery workers, the specific characteristics of the immigrants

who comprise a substantial portion of this workforce indicate that such regulations do not necessarily lead to improved working conditions.

In Italy, for example, pressure on platform food delivery companies to formalize employment contracts for workers – who are otherwise treated as self-employed – has led to notable outcomes in recent years. However, the financial implications of transitioning to contracted work are not favourable for the companies due to low profit margins as well as for workers. An informant in Brescia cited an example of a digital food delivery company that, under pressure, introduced work contracts for its workers. Previously, migrant delivery workers could earn nearly 2000 Euros per month using bicycles for deliveries, but after the introduction of contract-based work, their monthly income dropped to 700-800 Euros. Despite benefits such as sick leave and accident insurance, the drastic reduction in monthly income is a significant concern for workers who prioritize higher earnings over social security and benefits. The trade-off between increased security and benefits in case of sickness and accident versus higher income has even driven some migrant workers to leave one company in search of another.

In the case of Brazilian migrants in Dublin, many engage in full-time employment through platform-based work. However, a subset of individuals pursues multiple jobs, often facilitated by established networks with other Brazilians. These additional engagements frequently involve tasks typically associated with undocumented workers, particularly within pubs and restaurants owned or managed by Brazilians. In these establishments, the group is enlisted for both part time and permanent roles, with compensation often provided off the books, devoid of formal registration or contractual agreements. These social networks operate beyond regulatory frameworks, and any heightened regulatory measures could significantly disrupt the dynamics within this segment of the workforce.

Additionally, food delivery work extends beyond undocumented migrants to include many documented migrants who also engage in offline regular employment. These individuals often undertake platform-based jobs to supplement their income. Some workers, already employed in regular jobs in Italy and paying taxes can earn less than 5000 Euro annual and are not obliged to pay any taxes on this income. However, failure to report earnings exceeding 5000 Euros annually, a threshold frequently met through platform-based work, can lead to government sanctions, such as the closure of the individual's identity, which is reinstated after some time. Consequently, governmental regulations regarding platform-based jobs remain ambiguous.





Rare sight of a female bicycle courier in Brescia, Italy. ©Ayesha Hussain

### GENDERED INEQUALITIES

App-based delivery work exhibits a notable gender imbalance, with predominantly male participation. Female representation in this sector is minimal, as evidenced by our fieldwork conducted in Brescia, Italy, where only a few South Asian women, including two Pakistani and one Indian (residing with legal visa status), were found working in delivery jobs. Interestingly, these women opt to use cars for their deliveries instead of bicycles, possibly to conceal their ethnic identity within their communities. This disguise serves as a protective measure for these women, who may face societal disapproval for participating in a predominantly male-dominated job sector.

A similar gender dynamic characterizes the delivery sector in Dublin, potentially influenced by the prevailing context in Brazil. In Brazil, the delivery sector is primarily male-dominated, contributing to the predominantly male composition of migrants, particularly those relocating to Ireland specifically to work in this industry. The reality of platform delivery work, not only in Brazil but also in various countries across the Global North and South, is marked by instances of gender-based violence in traffic, harassment from customers, restaurant staff, and platform users. Women working in urban areas, especially during night shifts, face inherent dangers that significantly constrain their daily working hours (Souza, 2023).

Reports gathered in Dublin also highlight instances of wives migrating alongside or shortly after their partners, sometimes assisting in the work by sharing shifts or delivery days. Additionally, instances were noted of Brazilian men utilizing accounts rented from Brazilian women, who, being documented residents in the country, are eligible to create accounts. Consequently, it can be argued that the gender distribution reported by platforms, information typically not disclosed by these companies, may not accurately reflect the true gender dynamics within the sector.

### CONCLUDING IMPRESSIONS FROM THE FIELD

In conclusion, the examination of migrant labour in food delivery jobs in the European context sheds light on the structural inequalities that continue to shape the experiences of migrant workers. Through the focus on food delivery migrants in Dublin and Brescia, it becomes apparent that contact networks play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of delivery work and the dependencies that emerge within the sector. Moreover, the heterogeneity inherent within this migrant group introduces nuanced variations in their experiences, highlighting the diverse ways in which individuals navigate the challenges of platform-mediated work.

Importantly, this analysis underscores the reciprocal relationship between migrant labor and *platformization*. While the rise of digital platforms has undoubtedly impacted migrant work and influenced South-North migration flows, it is equally clear that migrants themselves have played a significant role in shaping the process of delivery digitalization. Their agency, resilience, and adaptability in leveraging social networks and navigating the complexities of platform work demonstrate the multifaceted nature of migration in the contemporary era.



Migrant delivery workers on the job in Brescia. ©Ayesha Hussain

Moving forward, it is imperative to recognize and address the gendered and structural inequalities and vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers in platform-mediated industries. Policies and interventions aimed at promoting fair labour practices, protecting workers' rights, and fostering inclusive economic opportunities must consider the diverse needs and experiences of migrant communities. By doing so, we can strive towards creating a more equitable and just labour landscape for all workers, regardless of their migration status or background.



#### Dr. Lucas Santos Souza

is a postdoctoral researcher in the Graduate Program in History at the Universidade Federal Fluminense (PPGH-UFF), where he focuses on the History of the Brazilian

Republic. At the same institution, he completed his undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies. His research centers on the history of precarious work in Brazil, platformization of labor, and contemporary migrations. In 2024, he was a Guest Researcher at BCDSS (Research Grant Alexander von Humboldt Foundation).



#### Ayesha Hussain

is a social and cultural anthropologist and a PhD researcher at the BCDSS. Ayesha's research revolves around the micro and meso-level structures of migration. Her

work examines the complex web of relationships within migrant families, ethnic networks, and diasporas, shedding light on the nuanced processes underlying the mobilization of social capital. Her research project focuses on the intricacies of asymmetrical dependencies within the social fabric of Pakistani migrants engaged in Italy's informal labour sector through her ground-breaking ethnographic research in migration studies.



# CONFERENCES & WORKSHOPS

We want our conference reports to showcase the wide thematic range covered by our Cluster of Excellence. Researchers from various disciplines approach the topic of strong asymmetrical dependency through a variety of questions and perspectives across different epochs. Throughout the year, the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies organizes conferences with international scholars to enable this multi-disciplinary approach, flanked by series of workshops, seminars, lectures and panel discussions. The core questions and findings of these events will be found in the following pages.







Professor Nikolai Grube opening the conference „Monumentality in Southern Central America“, November 8, 2023. ©BCDSS.

## MONUMENTALITY IN SOUTHERN CENTRAL AMERICA:

### COMPLEXITY, INEQUALITY, DEPENDENCY?

by Dita Auziņa

#### CONFERENCE HELD IN BONN, NOVEMBER 8-9, 2023

Does the appearance of monumentality in the pre-Columbian archaeological record of Southern Central America indicate the existence of complex societies and perhaps even social inequality and dependency? This question was overwhelmingly answered with "unlikely" and "it's much more complicated than that" at the conference "Monumentality in Southern Central America: Complexity, Inequality, Dependency? Perspectives on Human and Other-than-Human Relationships", which took place in Bonn on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2023.

The conference was organised and co-funded by the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies and Leiden University, Faculty of Archaeology. It brought together established and early-career scholars from Europe and the Americas, who are working with case studies (sites, objects, phenomena) in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala that invite the notion of monumentality.

#### THE DISCUSSION OF MONUMENTALITY AND DEPENDENCY

Monumentality is a widely used term in archaeology, both as a descriptive category for objects and structures that stand out in landscapes, and as an interpretative category used to theorise on the ways in which societies are organised. However, the understanding of what constitutes 'monumentality' varies considerably.

On the one hand, the focus may be on large architectural structures, whose planning, creation, and maintenance require sophisticated technical and logistical skills and are enabled by considerable economic resources, sometimes referred to as XXL phenomena (Bunke et al. 2016, Gass et al. 2016). On the other hand, monumentality may be understood as being generated by the relationships between humans and the involved materials and the subsequent meanings these relationships produce (Osborne 2014, Pauketat 2014). Additionally, the appearance of monumentality in certain societies has been theorised as evidence of social stratification, as part of a society is able to mobilise others, accumulate surplus, and create lasting landscape markers that exceed narrowly viewed practical needs (Pollock 1999, Trigger 1990). Alternatively, it has been argued that monumentality can arise from unintended consequences (Joyce 2004) or from community-building processes (Notroff 2015).

Monumentality in pre-Columbian Southern Central America is rarely discussed (but see Frost and Quilter 2012). Existing studies align with the thermodynamic approach proposed by Trigger more than 30 years ago, arguing it results from social stratification. More recent case studies have observed that monumentality in Central America may result from communal practices (Joyce 2004, Geurds and Auziņa in press). This contrasts with studies from Eastern Mesoamerica, such as the Classic Maya Lowlands, where monumentality is often seen in the context of architectural taxonomies and as a theatrical backdrop to communal events, alongside being the domestic context of elites.

#### NEW AVENUES EXPLORED IN BONN

In this workshop, we explored Southern Central American monumentality as a process of community-building among human and other-than-human actors. When seen as a result of human-nature relationships, monumentality is not primarily interpreted as a result of social stratification or inequality among human societies. Rather, it can be seen as an attempt to anchor and express dependency relationships with the surrounding (meta-)physical world.

The conference was opened by the organisers, who provided an introduction on current theoretical debates about monumentality in world and American archaeology (Auziņa) and called for a new way to look at lower Central American monumentality (Geurds). Alexander Geurds argued that the complexity of Isthmo-Colombian monumental landscapes lies not in the ubiquity of their features but in the subtle ways they suggest relations to flora, fauna, and mineral components, putting human dependency on their surrounding landscapes as a central factor. Nikolai Grube demonstrated that even in the Maya world, the presence of monumentality within

societies with limited institutionalisation challenges the long-standing tradition that closely links monumentality with state power. He argued that the concept of scale is relative, practicality is culturally contingent, and societies without centralised leadership structures can indeed undertake significant construction projects. Therefore, definitions of monumentality should consider the cultural context of size and the symbolic significance of construction. He questioned whether the appearance of monumental structures could relate to the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to settled living, primarily driven by an increased reliance on maize agriculture.



Dita Auziņa introducing the current theoretical thinking on monumentality and dependency ©BCDSS.

The idea of monumentality as a result of relationships formed between humans and their other-than-human peers through the interaction with and transformation of the environment was a prominent theme recurring in various presentations. Francisco Corrales, introducing the term "compound monumentality", demonstrated that the most prominent structure in Antigua Finca 7 in the Diquís delta, Costa Rica, was constructed to better withstand the periodic flooding of the alluvial plain. Monumentality could be a marker of resilience that helped societies deal with various shocks without losing their basic structure and functions. Karen Holmberg discussed Humboldt squids represented on golden breastplates made in Panama and buried with rulers at the end of the first millennium AD. The Humboldt squid is a sensitive creature that migrates away from Panama during El Niño/ENSO events, which bring extreme weather changes, including drought. As a result, representing the squid, which in the pre-Columbian context served as a bio-indicator that allowed prediction of atmospheric events, gave people a sense that they could potentially control or mitigate their consequences.



Natalia Donner and Lucy Gill, as well as Chriss Begley pointed out the colonial context when using the term monumentality and the need to consider indigenous perspectives on what they might consider monumental and what it entails. Otherwise we might risk to recreate epistemological dependencies in our current scholarship.

By comparing case studies from Nicaragua and Guatemala, Paul Graf demonstrated that what we, as archaeologists, consider monumental (or simply big) is very dependent on the context and our own (archaeologists') professional biases, even when so-called non-biased computing measurements are used. Adrien Martinet and Whitney Goodwin explained that monumentality could be seen in the event itself, not just in the form it leaves, by discussing the monumentality of the feasting practice. Martin Künne and Gloria Lara-Pinto addressed rock art sites as places of memory in cultural landscapes and as "zones of contact and exchange between different polities or functioning as libraries of spiritual knowledge whose access and availability were protected by their inaccessibility".

#### DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The most beneficial part of the conference was undoubtedly the lively discussions at the end of both days, in which not only the participants but also the audience actively took part. While not everyone agreed on everything (and what would be the enjoyment in that?), several main conclusions were drawn:

We see monumentality as a material representation of meaningful activities by several actors (humans and other-than-humans alike). Monumentality can be embodied in the fact of intentionality or unintended consequences; it can be a result of building, using, destroying, or maintaining the unchanged form of a 'monument' (again, by humans and other-than-humans).

We recognise that the term monumentality is contested with various meanings; it has been used in research in the past and is still used in popular discourse today. However, we see the term monumentality as useful to maintain, to distinguish expressions of 'awesomeness' with form and those that are meaningful events without form. Additionally, archaeological interpretations of the past can't exist in a vacuum of contemporary socio-political realities. The term monumentality can be a useful tool for local Central American archaeologists to position the heritage of Central America in the context of wider heritage debates, and it could provide a tool for indigenous activists to define meaningful places in terms that are internationally recognised.

We do not see added value in drawing a distinction between Mesoamerican and Southern Central American monumentality. Regarding their form, understandings of monumentality within Southern Central America differ from each other as much as from those of Mesoamerica. Meanwhile, the ways monumentality comes into being and how it forms relationships with humans and other-than-humans are rather comparable.

We do not see monumentality as a result, representation, or necessity for one type of social relationship within human society (dependency or inequality). Rather, we encourage that each interpretation of monumentality should be data-driven. We view the expression of monumentality in Southern Central America mostly as the result of a co-production between humans and nature, an attempt by humans to navigate their social relationships with the surrounding world. However, monumentality as a result of human dependency on nature should not be a blanket explanation applied to everything if data from the case studies implies something else.

The topic initiated at the conference was continued at the American Association of Archaeologists annual meeting in New Orleans, April 2024. The papers presented in Bonn will be published in a BCDSS edited volume, expected to be released at the end of 2025.



#### Dita Auziņa

is an archaeologist of the Central American and Caribbean region currently completing her PhD at the BCDSS. She is interested in the way past societies interacted with the landscape and how this interaction shaped the social structures in communities. Her Ph.D. project focuses on understanding the role of human and other-than-human dependencies in the appearance and disappearance of monumentality on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua during the pre-Columbian period.



Prof. Dr. Miriam Cooke addressing the participants of the 'Islamic Feminisms and Dependency' Workshop, March 7th, 2024. ©BCDSS

## MARKING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AT THE BCDSS

### A COLLABORATIVE TWO-DAY EVENT SERIES PROVIDING NEW PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCIES

by Dima Al-Munajjed and David B. Smith

Marking International Women's Day in 2024 was certain to be special with the BCDSS's current thematic focus on "Gender (and Intersectionality)." In a first-time collaborative event, members of Research Area E joined forces with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts at the Cluster and the Center for Development Research (ZEF) at Uni. Bonn to organise a two-day event series including a workshop, film screening, and public lecture that would present new perspectives on gender, intersectional dependencies, and feminist activism from the Arab world and Asia. Leading the discussion on both days, Prof. Dr. Miriam Cooke, Braxton Craven Distinguished Professor Emerita of Arab Cultures at Duke University, shared her expertise on gender and conflict in the Arab world.

Day one of the event series, March 7<sup>th</sup>, took place at the BCDSS and began with Prof. Cooke's 'Islamic Feminisms and Dependency' Workshop, which was open to all members of the BCDSS, other members of the University of Bonn, and invited guests. The aim of this workshop was to "begin a conversation on the relationship between Islamic feminist thought, intersectionality, and asymmetrical dependency research in hopes that it will open new pathways of engagement on the theoretical, analytical, and conceptual levels."



Participants were asked to read pre-circulated excerpts from Dr. Cooke's "Women Claim Islam" and an article on "Hijab Activism." The workshop delved into the intersections of gender, war, religion, and modern Arabic literature. It also shed light on the relationship between Islamic feminism(s) and enduring forms of asymmetrical dependency that, prior to the workshop, had yet to receive substantial attention at the Cluster.

Perhaps the most innovative theoretical insight from the workshop arose when the lectures and the free-flowing discussions that followed placed the analytical concept of asymmetrical dependency in conversation with Prof. Cooke's work on "multiple critique," as well as broader reflections on intersectionality theory. Like intersectionality theory, multiple critique acknowledges multi-faceted and multi-vectored webs of marginalization experiences so that they can be constructively targeted by oppositional discourses. Multiple critique highlights the complexity of identity for Islamic feminists who "have a difficult double commitment: on the one hand, to a faith position, and on the other hand, to women's rights both inside the home and outside" (*Women Claim Islam* 59). As a concept, multiple critique also aims to do justice to how these women navigate and mobilize their multiple identities to oppose and contest the exclusion of women.



Interview with film maker Snow Hnin Ei Hlaing prior to the screening of her documentary "Midwives". ©BCDSS

Islamic feminists have long engaged with social structures that we at BCDSS might define as asymmetrical dependencies. Indeed, as Prof. Cooke noted more than two decades ago, "Some women are joining religious groups despite their gender conservatism. Others are fighting these same groups, fearing the dangerous chemistry of politics and religion. Whether through or against religion, they are choosing to become part of the struggle for a better world" (*Women Claim Islam* 55). Within the discourses that emerge out of diverse experiences of religious and gendered identity, "Islamic feminism works in ways that may be emblematic of



PhD researcher Anas Ansar and panel members during the discussion of the documentary "Midwives". ©BCDSS

postcolonial women's jockeying for space and power through the construction and manipulation of apparently incompatible, contradictory identities and positions" (59).

The Islamic Feminisms and Dependency Workshop was followed by a film screening and discussion of the Documentary "Midwives" by Snow Hnin Ei Hlaing, which addressed the topics of gender, religion, and race in Myanmar. As Anas Ansar, BCDSS PhD Researcher and organizer of the film screening, summarized, the documentary follows the stories of "a Rakhine Buddhist Woman and founder of a rural antenatal clinic and her Muslim Rohingya apprentice. The film delivers a nuanced portrait in which the clinic acts as a microcosm of contemporary Myanmar. With an eye toward peace and reconciliation, the film reveals how categorical markers of social difference, including ethnicity, religion, and gender, contribute to forming and perpetuating dependency relations." After the film screening, Mr. Ansar led an open and free-flowing panel discussion. The panelists included Rohini Mitra (ZEF), OhnMar Khin (FEMNET, e.V.), along with Sophia Löttsch and Stefanie Profus (Frauennetzwerk für Frieden, e.V.).

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, the second day of the event series, Prof. Cooke gave a public lecture titled "Arab Feminism and Politics" at the Center for Development Research (ZEF). In her lecture, Prof. Cooke presented numerous examples of Arab feminist criticisms of the absence of gender justice in their societies in journalism, academic studies, fiction, and poetry over the last century. By discussing these examples, she attempted to highlight the major

threads weaving the intricate tapestry of Arab feminist thought, which works to counter misogynistic interpretations of scripture, denounce impunity for violence against women, devise strategies to combat intersectional discriminations, demand civic rewards for women's participation in national conflicts, and to call societies around the world to respect women's right to live as they wish.

The event series was organized by the authors of this article, Dr. Emma Kalb (BCDSS Post-Doctoral Researcher), Dr. habil. Eva Youkhana and Dr. Dennis Lucy Avilés Irahola (Co-Coordination of the ZEF Gender Group) and Anas Ansar (BCDSS PhD Researcher).

It provided deeply impactful and thought-provoking opportunities to reflect on how the analytical concept of asymmetrical dependency can interact with other established discursive heuristics. It also provided a rare chance for scholars from across multiple disciplines

and fields to engage with questions of social and political influence through the lenses of Islamic feminist writings, thinkers, and activists. The opportunity to partner with the Gender Group at ZEF demonstrated new and, perhaps, unexpected points of commonality and possibilities for ongoing collaboration between the efforts of our respective organizations.



**Dima Al-Munajed**

is BCDSS Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator. She creates antidiscrimination policies and procedures, raises awareness of diversity-related issues, and ensures that the BCDSS is a diverse, inclusive space. A social research and development professional with over 10

years of experience in the non-profit sector in the Middle East, Dima moved to Germany in 2017 to pursue a doctoral degree in conflict and gender studies at the University of Bonn.



**David B. Smith**

is a PhD researcher in Protestant Theology (Church History) at the BCDSS and Research Associate in Research Group "Structures of Dependency in the Late Antique and Early Medieval". His research project explores the entanglements of masculinities, homoeroticism

and dependencies in early medieval penitential literature and ecclesial law. David is currently serving as the Elected Representative of Research Area E, which focuses on Gender and Intersectionality and the BCDSS Anti-Discrimination Team.



Prof. Dr. Cooke with two of the workshop organizers, Dima Al-Munajed and David B. Smith. ©BCDSS





Containment is one of the multiple forms of violence that displaced people, here Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, are confronted with whilst living in large refugee camps – often for years and years without any prospects to rebuild their lives. ©Benjamin Etzold, August 2023.

## MOBILITY, VIOLENCE AND ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCIES IN LABOUR RELATIONS – EXPLORING INTERSECTIONS

by Benjamin Etzold

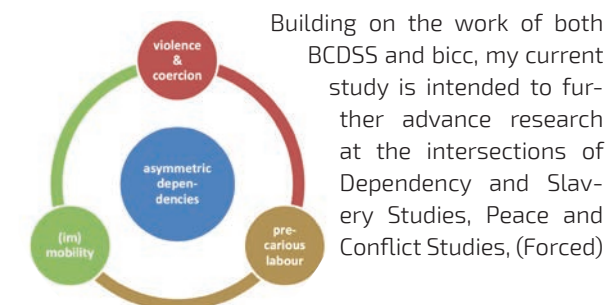
As a social geographer, migration scholar and conflict researcher at the Bonn Centre for Conflict Studies (bicc), I have for long been interested in better understanding violent conflicts and, more generally, highly unequal power relations, and how both shape the everyday lives, vulnerabilities, labour relations and mobility trajectories of people – all aspects that are pertinent in the work of the BCDSS. Since January 2024, I have now been formally collaborating with the BCDSS in my current role as postdoctoral researcher. Exploring 'Mobility, Violence and Asymmetrical Dependencies in Labour Relations' from a contemporary perspective, my aim is to work along the intersections between Dependency and Slavery Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, (Forced) Migration Research, and Labour Geography, and to thereby build bridges between different theories, epistemological positions, and methods employed in these different fields.

To kick off the discussion, I organised a small workshop on "Intersections between Dependency and Slavery Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies" in April 2024. We invited scholars from BCDSS and bicc to get to know one another and to reflect about pathways of collaboration and common research interests. After an introduction to BCDSS' work and the concept of asymmetrical dependencies by Professor Claudia Jarzebowski, Professor Conrad Schetter and Dr Marc von Boemcken

jointly presented bicc and its approach towards 'organised violence' and violent conflicts. A mapping exercise followed in which colleagues shared insights into their ongoing work, and how they work with the notions of asymmetrical dependencies and/or violence, respectively.

bicc has built an outstanding knowledge base on how violent conflicts impact people's everyday lives and security strategies. Several projects at bicc have, for instance, investigated the coping practices and livelihoods of displaced people and returnees in conflict-affected settings; oftentimes noting precarious and sometimes exploitative labour relations. Moreover, experiences of violence and how minority groups aim to protect themselves through 'everyday securitescapes' came to the fore in studies in Central Asia. Highly unequal power relations and livelihoods under the conditions of conflict are also addressed in work on militant groups and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of (ex-) combatants in West Africa. Overall, it became evident that the interrelations between violence and political economies of conflict, on the one hand, and employment and labour relations, on the other, have only rarely been systematically explored. To address this research gap, BCDSS's core analytical framework of strong asymmetrical dependencies seems to be particularly valuable.

Experiences of violence as well as the mobilities and immobilities of slaves and other (dependent) labourers are common themes in the BCDSS's research. Colleagues at the centre are, for instance, looking at the inherently violent act of enslavement and drives for (and against) abolition of slavery at different historical periods, or how physical, emotional and sexual violence are employed in child slavery and the trafficking of humans as (potential) slaves. The traces that violence and dependencies leave on bodies and in the memories of enslaved people are also discussed at BCDSS. The methodological question then is how these traces – as literally incorporated forms of violence – can be reconstructed and interpreted through people's testimonies and artefacts. Overall, there seems to be great potential to link such historical reconstructions and conceptualization of asymmetrical dependencies, slavery and trafficking with contemporary thinking about violence, (im) mobility and labour precarity.





Migration Studies, and Labour Geography. In particular, I aim to introduce new ideas to scholarship on livelihoods and precarious labour relations in conflict-affected settings, exploring how they are inherently shaped through systems of violence and coercion, human (im)mobility, and asymmetric dependency relations.

In the coming months, I will engage more closely with central research findings from the BCDSS and its' perspectives on asymmetric dependencies, coercion, precarity and mobility in labour relations. My meta-study aims to complement these insights from two angles. First, I draw on conceptual discussions in Peace and Conflict Studies to further reflect on the notion of violence, which often seems to be taken for granted or is under-theorized in Dependency and Slavery Studies, in order to operationalize it for further use in research. The, by now 'classical', three-dimensional distinction between direct, structural and cultural violence by Johann Galtung is certainly a useful starting point for this. More recent perspectives that centre on actors' respective power positions, their social relations and practices as well as interactional processes in violent conflicts, which can be labelled as a 'micro-sociology of violence' also offer a particularly helpful avenue for such a re-conceptualization. In addition, as the human body is the most important site and medium of direct violence, I resort to scholarship that offers nuanced understandings of how violent interactions are lived and mediated through bodily encounters and how violence, including coercive labour, leaves traces on bodies, in the psyche and relationships of human beings. Second, in this study I aim to re-analyse existing data from qualitative research on forced migration, now adding the conceptual lens of asymmetric dependency and more nuanced understandings of bodily encounters and experiences of violence. I was part of a large EU-funded research project called TRAFIG (Transnational Figurations of Displacement; 2019-2022), which investigated the everyday lives and (trans)local social networks of protractedly displaced people in 11 countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. While central aspects such as patterns of mobility and translocal connectivity under conditions of displacement have been well documented, there is great potential for a further in-depth analysis of our data set. Through the re-analysis of a survey (n=1900) and biographic interviews (n=146), I aim to re-assess how displaced people reflect on their experiences of violence, (im)mobility trajectories, labour relations, and diverse forms of asymmetric dependencies, for instance within displaced families or in the setting of refugee camps, that shape their protracted displacement situation. Another ongoing study, entitled "Mobility, Translocality and Gendered Violence" (Feb. – Oct. 2024, funded by UK International Development in the XCEPT research programme) has the potential to add further in-depth insights to this. Together with BCDSS

colleague Anas Ansar and Professor Syeda Rozana Rashid (Dhaka University), I am currently looking into the highly precarious situation of displaced Rohingya women, now living in refugee camps in Bangladesh. During initial empirical research in April/May it became quite evident that stark asymmetric dependencies, e.g., between men and women, between refugees and the state, between civilians and armed groups, decisively shape the lives of Rohingya women and (re)produce a 'continuum of violence'. They fled from violent conflict in Myanmar, encountered violence on the journeys, and now remain vulnerable to poverty, discrimination, and sexual and gender-based violence, partially due to systematic social exclusion, hindered mobility and prohibited access to more sustainable livelihoods. While these diverse forms of violence leave deep scars in their lives, on their bodies and psyche, the research also shows that the displaced women are not helpless: They rather draw on tacit knowledge, informal practices, mobility, and networks of solidarity to evade, cope with and resist to violence; some thereby also manage to – partially – overcome dependency relations in which they are entangled.

Insights like this will not only inform conceptual reflections on the intersections between violence and asymmetric dependency as well as labour relations and (im)mobility, they also hold emancipatory potential as they highlight people's agency in the face of violent conflict and precarity that warrants further attention. By engaging in stimulating discussions on the above topics, by bringing together scholars from different academic fields, epistemological positions and research traditions through a series of workshops, and by writing academic papers that offer conceptual clarifications, synthesis of empirical findings, and methodological tools for further research, I hope to contribute to the advancement of scholarship in both BCDSS and bicc. Furthermore, I hope to leave some imprints far beyond our collaborating research institutions.



**Dr. Benjamin Etzold**

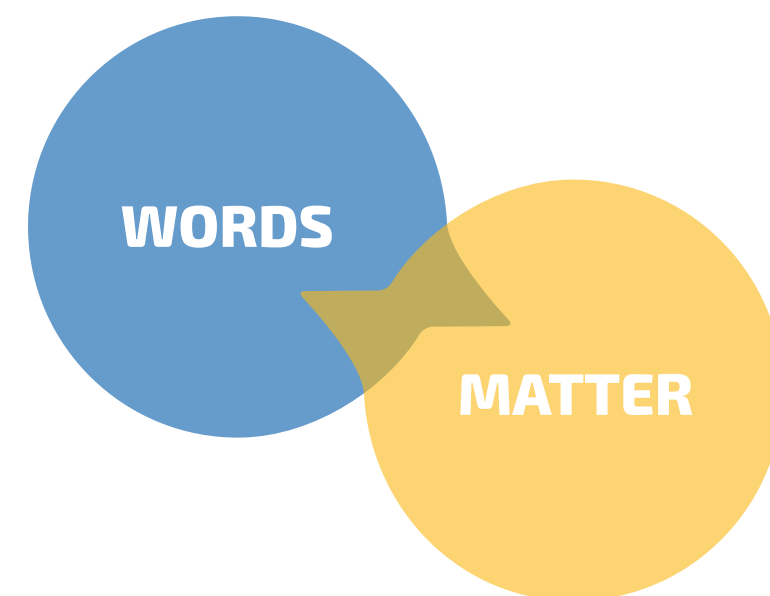
is a postdoctoral researcher at the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC) and currently guest researcher at the BCDSS. With a background in human geography, sociology, migration research as well as peace and conflict

studies, he explores „Mobility, Violence and Asymmetrical Dependencies in Contemporary Labour Relations". His research focuses particularly on livelihoods and labour precarity in conflict-affected settings in the Global South by examining how these are shaped through human (im)mobility, systems of violence and coercion, and asymmetrical dependencies.

## WHY WORDS MATTER IN ACADEMIA:

### CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES, POLICIES AND SOLUTIONS

A Workshop Led  
by Dima Al-Munajed and  
Imogen Herrad  
at the University of Bonn's  
Diversity Days 2024



**The first day of this year's Diversity Days at Uni Bonn, 22 May, was dedicated to the topic 'Language Connects'. We held a workshop in which we presented the BCDSS as a case study for how institutionalised policies can contribute to combatting institutionalised discrimination. Most of the participants were from various departments of the University administration, as well as teaching staff, student DEI representatives and some management team members of other Clusters.**

Dima Al-Munajed first introduced the BCDSS' approach to managing diversity within the Cluster through a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Framework that places great emphasis on a participatory approach and the inclusion of its members in DEI processes. She also presented the DEI structures at the Cluster, the DEI Coordinator, Equal Opportunity Representatives, DEI Working Group and the Antidiscrimination Team, explaining how each is involved in DEI policies and procedures. One of the outputs of these structures is the BCDSS Antidiscrimination Policy, a living document that represents the Cluster's commitment to countering identity-based discrimination and harassment in research and teaching environments. The policy, which includes a section on language, puts forward a definition of discrimination based on age, ethnicity, nationality, race, gender & sexuality, religion or belief, physical and mental ability, and socioeconomic background and outlines the procedures for addressing incidents of sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination based on identity.

Imogen Herrad then discussed the BCDSS Language Policy. As many of you will know, while our Language Policy previously demanded that texts be written in either American or British English, we have now opened this up to also include other, regional or national, Englishes. Our priorities continue to be clarity and grammatical correctness. We first developed this policy at the BCDSS

in 2022 after extensive discussions in a one-day workshop that was open to all BCDSS members. We felt that the privileging of Global North Englishes continued to reinscribe colonial power structures, something that runs counter to the Cluster's own mission to explore asymmetrical dependency. The vast majority of our authors are international scholars, who write in different varieties of English. We originally planned to apply the Language Policy only to the flagship book series *Dependency and Slavery Studies* with de Gruyter. So, at the time we also discussed the new policy with de Gruyter representatives, who approved it in 2022. Last year, we extended the policy to *all* BCDSS publications, including the *DEPENDENT* magazine. This move was approved by the BCDSS Steering Committee. Imogen introduced this history, and illustrated it with the findings of studies which show that scholars who use English as an acquired language or who write in what is perceived as 'non-standard' English face more difficulties in publishing their work in academic journals, spend more time on editing their texts, or even (have to) pay for language professionals to do this work for them.

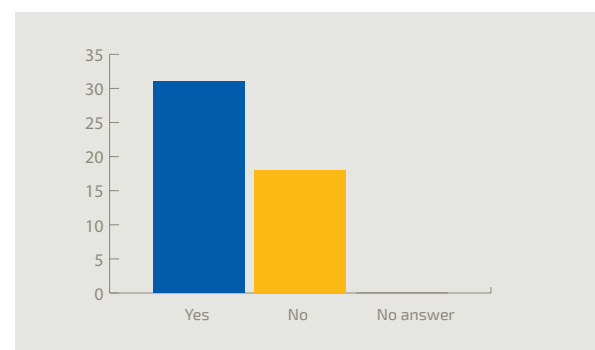
In the following discussion, the participants showed appreciation for the idea behind the Language Policy: to show respect for all Englishes and to make texts more accessible to all readers, including those for whom English is an acquired language. Great interest was expressed in the concept of English as Academic Lingua Franca (ELFA), and several participants, who use English as an acquired language, said that they prefer a simpler type of international academic English that is less rich in idiomatic expressions and so more universally understandable. Participants encouraged the BCDSS to spread information about the Language Policy, and enquired whether we have had expressions of interest from other academic bodies or from publishers. (Not yet, but we are working to make the Policy more widely known.)



Imogen also shared some of the reactions to the recent survey about the Language Policy, which was sent out to all BCDSS members to give everybody the opportunity to share their opinions and suggestions. At the time of writing, 49 people had responded to the survey, with 37 answering all questions.

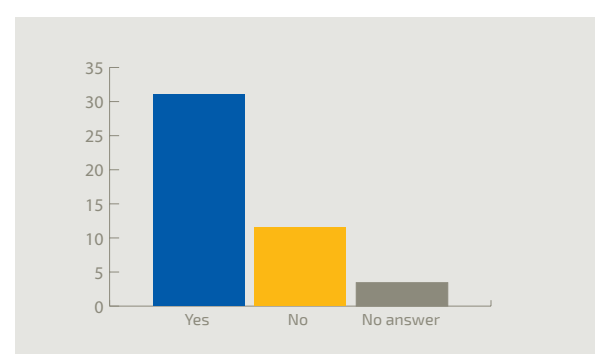
The majority of respondents knew about the Language Policy (31), although a significant minority (18) did not.

Fig. 1. Responses to Q2: **Had you heard of the BCDSS Language Policy prior to this survey?**



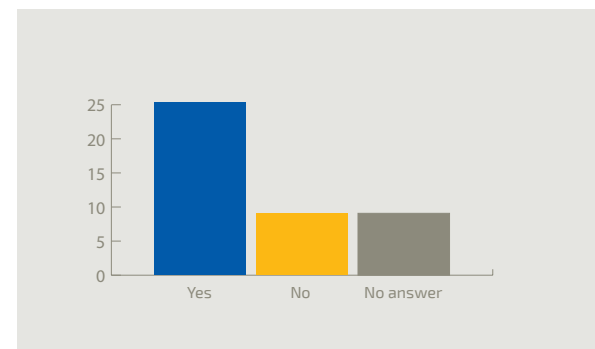
A majority felt that the policy was relevant to them (31), while eleven respondents said that it was not, and three did not enter a response. (The difference in total responses is explained by the fact that some people chose to break off after answering the first question, so the number of responses dwindles the further one gets into the survey. This is a normal phenomenon.)

Fig. 2. Responses to Q4: **Do you feel the BCDSS Language Policy is relevant to you?**



Eleven respondents said that it was not relevant to them, and only seven thought it was unnecessary, while another seven did not enter a response.

Fig. 3. Responses to Q6: **Do you think that the Language Policy is necessary?**



Below are some selected statements made by respondents on why they said that the policy was both relevant and necessary:

- Because we need to reflect on the language we are using and the attendant practices and norms.
- Because we (and by 'we' I also mean the Academia) should acknowledge that there are many Englishes spoken around the world, given that English has become a lingua franca.
- Language partially shapes the way we view the world and is an expression of attitudes, especially towards social parameters like race, class and gender.
- There is not enough awareness of language-based power structures.
- An official language policy signals that the impact of language is taken seriously. While this may seem superfluous to some people, it is welcoming to others.
- As a non-native speaker, I would like not to be hindered by the fact that my English evidently does not conform to the British or American English, even though it is understandable.
- As a member of the BCDSS, where researchers and students from all over the world gather and mainly use English to communicate, I think it is within the scope of our cluster to identify and discuss dependencies also stemming from the use of language. A language policy is a necessary step in that direction.
- Because it emphasizes that there is not only one variety of the English language that is 'correct'. It also reflects the diversity of the people working at the BCDSS.

• Within global academia, it is important to recognise the diverse needs and practices of colleagues around the world.

• Even though the English language is my lingua franca, it is the language of my country's colonisers. Coming from a multi ethnic country, there are usually cases of mother tongue interference in written and spoken English, which has been acknowledged and even accepted in the society. An understanding and acceptance of these diverse forms of English is crucial.

• The language policy is important because the BCDSS is a made up of a group of multicultural and multilingual researchers and scholars who have so much context to bring to the table. Language barrier should not be an obstacle to their knowledge production.

• Understanding that power dynamics are everywhere and language is a strong tool to do it so, the fact that the BCDSS is aware of it, makes me feel more comfortable being part of it and gives us all a freedom to write with our own words instead of standardising it without the understanding the diversity of the Language.

• Super relevant for awareness and reduction of discrimination.

And from those who did not think that it was either relevant or necessary:

• I think that it is difficult for individual academics to change global practices with their contributions. I see the danger that the individual publications going against the standard (British and American English) will not be taken seriously by academia.

• Some people say it is just an excuse for the editorial staff to do less work.

The editorial staff were, frankly, baffled by this last response. (I can assure you that working with multiple Englishes is fascinating, rewarding and broadens our horizons; it is also more work than just sticking with AE and BE.) Our purpose, in a nutshell, is to ensure that the knowledge contained in the texts produced by our authors is shared as widely as possible, by being in the best, clearest and most grammatically correct English it can be – which is the whole point of open-access academic publishing.

The first response (concern over not being taken seriously) is one that we encounter from time to time, and one that clearly needs addressing. Perhaps the fact that

de Gruyter, one of the leading academic publishers in the field of humanities and social sciences, supports the BCDSS Language Policy and clearly has no fear that it will negatively reflect on the quality of their publications, will go some way to allaying this concern. We have had expressions of interest from members of the other Clusters, and at the workshop it was agreed to arrange a follow-up meeting with DEI representatives of the University and of the other Clusters of Excellence at Bonn, to discuss and share the various inclusion policies, including the Language Policy.

Lastly, we see our DEI Policies as living documents that are in an ongoing process of evolution. In response to the survey, the DEI Coordinator and members of the Publications Team put together a Frequently Asked Questions list to clarify the Language Policy and address the areas of concern that emerged, and we will also continue to make the policy more widely known. We are encouraged by the very positive feedback we have received both from the survey of BCDSS members and from the workshop participants.

Link to the [BCDSS Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\)](#) pages, where you will find the text of our Antidiscrimination and Language Policies and further information about our DEI framework:



**Dima Al-Munajed**

is BCDSS Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator. She creates antidiscrimination policies and procedures, raises awareness of diversity-related issues, and ensures that the BCDSS is a diverse, inclusive space. A social research and development professional with over 10 years of experience in the non-profit sector in the Middle East, Dima moved to Germany in 2017 to pursue a doctoral degree in conflict and gender studies at the University of Bonn.



**Imogen Herrad**

is translator and language editor at the BCDSS. Imogen translates (from German and Spanish) or language-edits, where applicable, texts for all academic BCDSS publications: the series *Dependency and Slavery Studies* and *Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture*, as well as Concept and Working Papers. She is also co-responsible for the development and implementation of the BCDSS' Language Policy. She has lived in Berlin, London, Buenos Aires and Cardiff as a freelance writer, broadcaster and translator, and is currently writing her PhD thesis (in her spare time) about disobedience in ancient Sparta.



# NEWS

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR FIRST PHD GRADUATES!

We congratulate all our PhD researchers who have successfully defended their theses! We asked them to sum up their research project in 300 words. Five have got back to us: *From Etruscan Visual Arts and Classical Roman Law to Contemporary Nigerian Literature, a Global-Historical Comparison of Elite Bodies*, and the analysis of the current *Rohingya Refugee Situation in Bangladesh and Malaysia*, together their research on strong asymmetrical dependencies spans 2800 years and multiple civilizations across the globe.

### First PhD Graduates



**Malik Ade**  
**Kitchen Martyrs? Constructions of Household Dependencies in Nigeria**

Studying Nigerian novels published between 1950 and 2020 as cultural texts, I explore the representations of households as the foundational space of social relations and hierarchies, and how these can be read as forms of asymmetrical dependencies. To analyze selected novels, I engage critical approaches; foremost among them are gender and intersectionality, dependency studies and masculinity studies. These approaches aid my reflections on social roles and status projected as dual but also as shifting social relations in varying contexts: husband/wife, master/servant, senior/junior, insider/outsider, masculine/feminine, etc. Shifting social relations, in this sense, inform the complex manifestations of layers of dependencies. For example, a husband in a particular household can also be serving as a servant in another household. I argue that the analyzed novels construct household dependencies by showing, displacing and replacing power hierarchies that function through institutional "belonging", "othering" and "control". The literary constructions of households which are examined in this study thus open up a conversation on the social processes and spaces in which relations are often manipulated in a way that benefits the dominant participant(s) in relationship contracts, without necessarily drawing attention to the detrimental effects of the relationship on the oppressed. This study tries to reveal veiled manifestations of coercion by drawing attention to how discourses project the idea that the sustainability of the household rests on the shoulders of the oppressed, whereas the oppressor dominates and controls social institutions and is thereby often seen in public as the one ensuring sustainability of the household. The varying depictions of household dependencies in the novels also enable me to contribute to conversations about postcolonial Nigeria, particularly on the notion of inequalities within spaces of social relations that often evade legal scrutiny. The conceptual constructions of households in *Kitchen Martyrs?* thus joins the discourses of engagements about possible impacts of the manipulations of institutions on certain category of people, on account of their social positions in relation to others.

### First PhD Graduates



**Anas Ansar**  
**Interconnected Spectrum of Precarity: Rohingya Refugees' Everyday Lives in Bangladesh and Malaysia**

This study adds to the emerging literature on everyday life practices in the context of forced migration and protracted refugee situations. Focusing on the case of Myanmar's Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Malaysia, this study offers an in-depth analysis of how historical legacies of exclusion, along with contemporary practices of marginalisation and otherisation contribute to transcending the spectrum of precarity. Although violence, persecution and forced displacement have been recurring phenomena in the lives of the Rohingyas since at least the 1970s, the situation turned into a major humanitarian crisis in August 2017, with nearly a million Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar into neighbouring Bangladesh. Over the years, with no solution in sight, their plight in exile has turned into a protracted crisis, with diverse actors, policies and arbitrary governance practices producing and expanding the conditions of precarity. Documenting the contextual interplay of change and continuity, the findings chronicle a nuanced and empirically driven analysis of how precarity is experienced across a wider spectrum at discrete and overlapping scales and shaped by statelessness, vulnerability, politics of uncertainty, onward migration and everyday practices of exclusion. They also underline the multi-layered dependency and spontaneity ingrained in their everyday lives. Bringing together the diverse manifestation of precarity along the lines of identity, status, space, mobility, gender and labour, the study proposes a comprehensive understanding of precarity, conceptualised as the "interconnected spectrum of precarity". Framing precarity as a process and capturing their intersectional vulnerabilities and constrained expressions of agency shaped across time and space, the findings argue that the manifestation of precarity in Rohingya's lives is far more complex, non-linear, transitional, and multi-faceted. Elucidating the intricate web of structural constraints that both predate (in Myanmar) and are continually reconstructed and actualised (in exile), this research underlines how the continuum of precarity manifests itself in the extended transnational spaces. In cataloguing these multifaceted and multi-sited experiences, another key goal of this study is also to offer a nuanced reflection of some of the negotiated practices of survival and coping mechanisms across different places. It captures the spatially and temporally distributed (and disrupted) social space of displaced people and the pursuit of belonging through clandestine citizenship practices. Doing so presents how space of exception and the acts of resilience figure in and collide with everyday life practices at various junctures.

By integrating diverse perspectives, the study sheds light on an inclusive understanding of precarity, arguing that the wider spectrum of precarity, including that of labour, needs to be reoriented from the practices and constellations of borderland dynamics, otherisation, and exclusion that vividly shapes their limits of belonging.



**Magnus Goffin**  
**Extrema Necessitate? Self-sale in the Classical Roman Law**

Not only those who were born as slaves or were enslaved in war could become slaves in terms of legal status. The classical legal sources recognise other cases in which at least the appeal for freedom was denied in the status process. Marcian, for example, mentions the case of someone over the age of twenty who allowed himself to be sold into slavery in order to participate in the purchase price. But could free people also enslave themselves legally in this way? And why would someone voluntarily seek the way into slavery?

The legal part of the thesis focuses on a detailed analysis of classical legal sources, in particular of the case of sale in order to participate in the purchase price (*ad pretium participandum*) and the case of sale in order to become a manager (*ad actum gerendum*). After analysing non-legal sources in the second part, the sources are brought together in a third part in order to provide answers to the partly legal and partly socio-historical questions.

“ [...] iure civili, si quis se maior viginti annis ad pretium participandum venire passus est. ”  
D. 1,5,5,1 (Marcian 1 inst.) ”



First PhD Graduates



**Alexander Rothenberg**  
**Elite Slavery and Asymmetrical Dependencies.**  
**Historical Continuities and Discontinuities in the Production of Elite Bodies**  
**Using the Example of Professional Football**

My dissertation uses a global-historical and comparative approach to examine the production and use of elite bodies. The term ‚elite slavery‘ refers to the abduction, years of training and discipline of children who were then deployed in high and top positions and were sometimes able to possess great wealth. This term was used to describe the (elite) asymmetrical dependencies of palace eunuchs, concubines, military slaves (mamluks, janissaries) and others. Abolition has provoked new forms of slavery and asymmetrical dependencies, so that in a second step my dissertation is dedicated to potential new forms of elite slavery on the basis of a working definition.

Using a dispositive-analytical approach, I have therefore examined the asymmetrical dependency relationships of elite sport, especially football, and compared them with the identified characteristics of elite slavery in order to make continuities and discontinuities visible. I was able to show that the production, instrumentalization and capitalization of elite bodies has a long history and is still relevant today. While I focused on sports, especially football, these kinds of dependencies seem to exist in different shapes all over the entertainment industry and elsewhere as well. It was possible to trace clear continuities up to the present day as well as identify specific differences between traditional and contemporary forms, which have cultural, social, political and economic causes. The parallels were found both in practice and in the inscription and visibility of power.

Common to all forms is the intention to control elite bodies at their most productive and capable age in order to have them perform specific tasks. At the same time, this result is a call for a critical examination of the serious effects on the bodies and lives of children today, which in the context of talent searches has neo-colonial traits and whose physical and psychological consequences are usually either not sufficiently explained or have hardly been researched.



**Patrick Zeidler**  
**Slavery and Social Inequality in Etruria:**  
**A Study on the Iconography of Dependency in Etruscan Visual Art**

My PhD thesis aimed at investigating slavery and other forms of dependency and social inequality in Etruria (pre-Roman central Italy) in the period from the late 8<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. My focus was on the iconographical analysis of pictorial depictions of dependent and marginalized social groups (e. g. captives, servants, wet nurses, dancers, musicians, acrobats, craftsmen and foreigners) in different kinds of media (wall and vase paintings, urns, sarcophagi, figurines, mirrors, gems, etc.). While scenes of ‚daily life‘ are very scarce, the majority of the depictions feature different narratives from (mostly Greek) mythology. Possible iconographic indicators for the existence of dependency relationships and social inequalities include amongst others nudity or certain types of garment, the hairstyle, a reduced size, specific physiognomic traits and the type of activity executed by the figure. In addition, Etruscan inscriptions and literary accounts of Greek and Roman authors were considered for drawing socio-historical conclusions.

NEW AT THE CLUSTER

Investigators



**Jun.-Prof. Dr. Julia Binter**  
Argelander Professor of Critical Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Bonn  
  
Africa, Anthropocene, Gender, Heritage, Material Culture, Postcolonialism, Temporality/ Spatiality



**Prof. Dr. Birke Häcker**  
Director of the Institute of International and Comparative Private Law, Schlegel Chair in Civil Law, Common Law and Comparative Law, University of Bonn  
  
*German, English and European Private Law* (esp. Contract, Tort, Unjust(ified) Enrichment, Property Law and Succession)  
*Comparative Law* (esp. „Civil Law – Common Law“ and „Comparative Common Law“)  
*Legal History* (esp. European Legal History as well as Common Law History and Evolution)



**Prof. Dr. Britta Hartmann**  
Professor of Film Studies/Audiovisual Media Cultures, University of Bonn  
  
Theory, history and aesthetics of film, film narratology, documentary forms, media dramaturgy, text pragmatics and audience theory, video activism in social media



**Prof. Dr. Jens Schröter**  
Argelander Professor Professor of Media Cultural Studies, University of Bonn  
  
His research examines infrastructures of dependency and suggests that the production and stabilization of asymmetrical dependency is eminently dependent on technical-media infrastructures.

Postdoctoral Researchers



**Dr. Vitali Byl**  
Race and Freedom: Africans in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on the eve of Modernity (DFG research grant)



**Dr. Benjamin Etzold**  
Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC)  
  
Mobility, Violence and Asymmetrical Dependencies in Contemporary Labour Relations (MoVAL)



**Dr. Rapti Siriwardane-de Zoysa**  
German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)  
  
My present focus at the BCDSS and IDOS broadly examines the fraught cultural histories and politics of infrastructural development and littoral placemaking, as witnessed in municipal agendas of modernist climate adaptation in the Indo-Malay-Philippine archipelago.



**Dr. Jessica van 't Westeinde**  
Connecting Late Antiquities (AHRC-DFG-funded project)



**Dr. Jeroen Wijnendaele**  
Connecting Late Antiquities (AHRC-DFG-funded project)



Fellows



**Dr. James Almeida**  
Weber State University, US  
05/2024 – 08/2024  
  
Minting Slavery, Coining Race: Human Difference, Discipline, and Labor in Colonial Potosí



**Dr. Ryan Kemp**  
01/2024 – 09/2024  
  
Critics on the margins: Parrhesia, admonitio, gender, and social status in High Medieval Europe (c. 1000–1200)

**Özgül Özdemir**  
Stanford University, US  
04/2024 – 06/2024  
  
Trans-Imperial histories of the Red Sea Slavery in the Age of Abolition



**Joel Pollatschek**  
University of Oxford, UK  
04/2024 – 09/2024  
  
The Ideologies of Slavery in Ancient Greece



**Prof. Dr. Theresa Wobbe**  
University of Potsdam, Germany  
04/2024 – 05/2024  
  
Parasitism in human power relations: Re-reading Carsten McCullers fiction on the topic of black women's domestic work



**Prof. Dr. Paulo Cruz Terra**  
Fluminense Federal University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
02/2024  
  
Coercion, Anti-Vagrancy Legislation and Workers in the Post-Abolition in Brazil and the Portuguese Empire in Africa (1878–1933)



**Dr. Lucas Santos Souza**  
Fluminense Federal University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
02/2024 – 05/2024  
  
Autonomy and Control in the Work of Food Couriers in the 'Pre-Apps Age' in Rio de Janeiro



**Dr. Chechesh Kudachinova**  
08/2023 – 05/2024  
  
The Sea of Siberian Slavery: Human Commodification and Empire in Early Modern Northeast Eurasia, 1600s–1800s (Research Grant Gerda Henkel Foundation)



**Kofi Asihene**  
University of Ghana  
01/2024 – 03/2024  
  
Finding the Voice of the Disabled Black Slave: An Analysis of the Concept of Slavery through the Lens of Disability



**Maria Fernanda Ribeiro Cunha**  
Fluminense Federal University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
05/2024 – 07/2024  
  
Construction of the Class Suspicion and Compulsory Labor from the Terms of Well-Living (Brazil, 1870–1890) in High Medieval Europe (c. 1000–1200)



**Dr. Claude Chevalet**  
CNRS (Lyon Institute of East Asian Studies)  
05/2024 – 07/2024  
  
China Human Trafficking and Slaving Database



**Dr. Klara Boyer-Rossol**  
Centre International de Recherches sur les Esclavages (CIRES), France  
04/2024 – 03/2025  
  
History and Becoming of human remains and cultural objects in museum collections from the slavery and dependencies context in the South-West Indian Ocean



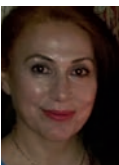
**Prof. Dr. Gregory Goulding**  
University of Pennsylvania, US  
05/2024 – 08/2024  
  
Indigeneity, Art, and Dependent Relations of Learning in Modern Central India



**Mariana Kelly da Costa Rezende**  
Fluminense Federal University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
05/2024 – 09/2024  
  
The stray kids from Rio: Minors and the fight against vagrancy in Rio de Janeiro (1890–1926)



**Asha Sumra**  
Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark  
06/2024 – 08/2024  
  
Itineraries of Residue: Building Culture through Mechanical Clay Tiles (1841–)



**Prof. Dr. Behnaz Mirzai**  
Brock University, Canada  
06/2024 – 09/2024  
  
Cultural Identity of the Saharan and Indian Ocean Communities

THE WORLD OF ROMAN BONN WEBSITE

The World of Roman Bonn Website is a new comprehensive online resource developed by the Roman Bonn Team to complement their on-site visits to Roman remains in the city of Bonn. It offers an overview of the archaeological and historical record of Roman Bonn and places it in the context of the themes relevant to the research conducted at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies: imperialism, military conquest, methods of surplus extraction, local responses to colonial rule and, of course, slavery and freedom. The focus lies on the stories of the women, men and children who lived and died in this region two-thousand years ago.



"The Euthenia gravestone" located in the Rheinaue, Bonn. The inscription can be dated to the first legionary settlement in Bonn in the second half of the first century CE. Euthenia is assumed to be one of its first inhabitants.



WEBSITE:  
**THE WORLD OF ROMAN BONN – BCDSS (UNI-BONN.DE)**



VIDEO TEASER:  
**WORLD OF ROMAN BONN – BCDSS (UNI-BONN.DE)**



The Roman Bonn Team



**Maja E. Baum**  
PhD Researcher



**Giulia Cappucci**  
PhD Researcher



**Dr. James M. Harland**  
Postdoctoral Researcher



**Prof. Dr. Julia Hillner**  
Professor of Dependency and Slavery Studies



## CHILD SLAVORIES IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD

by Lisa Phongsavath and  
Joseph Biggerstaff

**SAVE THE DATE:  
SEPTEMBER 12-14, 2024  
CONFERENCE ON  
"CHILDREN, DEPEND-  
ENCY, AND EMOTIONS  
IN THE EARLY MODERN  
WORLD, 1500-1800:  
ARCHIVAL AND VISUAL  
NARRATIVES"**



### GERMAN-AUSTRALIAN COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

June 17, 2024 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "The Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention" held by the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The convention responded to a growing concern about the worst forms of child labour, which it defined as slavery or "practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict." Child pornography, the use of children for the sale and trafficking of drugs, and even work, were also included in this broad definition.<sup>1</sup> The U.N correctly recognized the obvious correlation between globalization, uneven development, and the prevalence of these worst forms of child labour. Its roots have manifested across continents over several centuries. Curiously, however, children have rarely figured into the academic projects organized within the growing field of global history in the last two decades.

This neglect of children, and their experiences in these worst and otherwise unsavory conditions, in a spectrum of historiographical traditions, from global history to the history of slavery and beyond, is precisely what prompted a group of early career researchers from the BCDSS (Lisa Phongsavath and Joseph Biggerstaff) and the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Australian Catholic University Melbourne (Kristie O'Flannery and Jessica O'Leary) to apply for a two-year collaborative project [Child Slaveries in the Early Modern World: Gender, Trauma, and Trafficking in Transcultural Perspective \(1500-1800\)](#). With the support and mentorship of BCDSS Cluster Professor Dr. Claudia Jarzebowski and Professor Susan Broomhall, leader of the Gender and Women's History Research Centre in the Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Australian Catholic University, the project brings together case studies from world regions other than Europe over a broad period of time to explore not only the topic of labor and slavery, but more broadly the emotional and psychic lifeworlds of children. Just as they are influential social agents today, children have always been seminal actors in history.

So far, the project has included several rounds of knowledge exchange involving visits and workshops between Bonn and Melbourne. A particular high point was the workshop in November 2023, "Child Slaveries in the Early Modern World," hosted by the BCDSS and featuring working papers by the project.

CONFERENCE

## Children, Dependency, and Emotions in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800: Archival and Visual Narratives

Annual Event Series on Gender and Intersectionality

September 12-14, 2024

"Child Slave in China, 17th Century" © Kullungth

KEYNOTES BY

SEPTEMBER 12, 2024, 6:00 pm

**Ann Laura Stoler**  
New School for Social Research

Childhood Scenes of Resentment, Humiliation, Indignation: On the Making of Political Rage

Moderated by Claudia Jarzebowski followed by a wine reception

SEPTEMBER 13, 2024, 1:45-2:45 pm

**Bianca Premo**  
Florida International University

The Ethics of Writing Latin American Children's History from Spanish Colonialism to the Internet

Moderated by Kristie O'Flannery

SEPTEMBER 14, 2024, 7:00 pm

**John H. Coatsworth**  
University of California, San Diego

Religion, Power, and Persuasion in Early Modern Latin America

Moderated by Lisa Phongsavath

The two-year project "Child Slaveries in the Early Modern World: Gender, Trauma, and Trafficking in Transcultural Perspective (1500-1800)" is a German-Australian collaboration. It is supported by a cooperation scheme of the **Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD)** and **Universities Australia (UA)** that enables the mobility and promotes the development of early career researchers (ECRs).



#### Joseph Biggerstaff

is PhD researcher at the BCDSS. His dissertation studies the mutation of the plantation complex in Barbados by extra-economic means, particularly inheritance. At the center of this history are both free and enslaved children and the dependency networks foisted upon them. At the BCDSS, he is member of Research Area E "Gender and Intersectionality" and co-founder of the "History and Theory" working group.



#### Lisa Phongsavath

is a PhD researcher at the BCDSS, investigating the coerced movement of children in the eighteenth-century Tai world of central mainland Southeast Asia. Her research seeks to reveal the complex underpinnings of child slavery during this little-examined period of regional tension and global connection prior to colonisation and abolition. At the BCDSS, she is a research associate in Research Group "Coerced Circulation of Knowledge" and a member of the "Gender (and Intersectionality)" Research Area.

<sup>1</sup> General Conference for the International Labour Organization at its eighty-seventh session, "Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 183) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/worst-forms-child-labour-convention-1999-no-183>



# Mental Health & Wellbeing

## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT THE BCDSS

At the BCDSS, we are committed to supporting our employees in every way possible. This includes their mental wellbeing. To this end, new structures are being put in place and will continue to be developed in the future.

The structures include preventive measures as well as confidential guidance, such as advice on counselling in emergencies. When it comes to prevention, we offer, for instance, regular informal meetings where problems and concerns can be discussed confidentially, as well as yoga sessions. In the event of a mental health emergency, there is a certified mental health first aider on the management team. Rather than diagnosing or even treating a person in need of help, the mental health first aider will listen to the person seeking help, offer reassurance, suggest professional help and explain the support structures available.

On our [Mental Health & Wellbeing web pages](#), we have put together an overview of all the preventive measures offered by the BCDSS and the University of Bonn. On these pages you will also find the contact details of the BCDSS Mental Health First Aider, as well as links to institutions and other places you can turn to if you are looking for professional support and counselling opportunities.

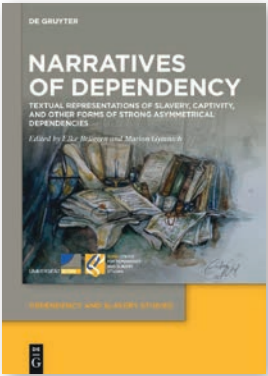


# NEW PUBLICATIONS

## NARRATIVES OF DEPENDENCY – TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SLAVERY, CAPTIVITY, AND OTHER FORMS OF STRONG ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCIES

Volume 11 in the BCDSS series “Dependency and Slavery Studies” (DSS)  
edited by Elke Brügggen and Marion Gymnich

with articles by Zeynep Y. Gökçe, Marion Gymnich, Honey Hammer, Clara Hedtrich, Anna Kollatz, Hermut Löhr, Markus Saur, Gül Şen, Elena Smolarz, Veruschka Wagner, Pia Wiegink and Michael Zeuske



Elke Brügggen and Marion Gymnich, eds., *Narratives of Dependency – Textual Representations of Slavery, Captivity, and Other Forms of Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024)  
ISBN: 9783111379807

Given that strong asymmetrical dependencies have shaped human societies throughout history, this kind of social relation has also left its traces in many types of texts. Using written and oral narratives in attempts to reconstruct the history of asymmetrical dependency comes along with various methodological challenges, as the 15 articles in this interdisciplinary volume illustrate. They focus on a wide range of different (factual and fictional) text types, including inscriptions from Egyptian tombs, biblical stories, novels from antiquity, the Middle High German Rolandslied, Ottoman court records, captivity narratives, travelogues, the American gift book *The Liberty Bell*, and oral narratives by Caribbean Hindu women. Most of the texts discussed in this volume have so far received comparatively little attention in slavery and dependency studies. The volume thus also seeks to broaden the archive of texts that are deemed relevant in research on the histories of asymmetrical dependencies, bringing together perspectives from disciplines such as Egyptology, theology, literary studies, history, and anthropology.



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# SLAVING AND THE FUNDING OF ELITE STATUS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE (CA. 800–1000 AD)

Volume 21 in the Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series  
by Alice Rio



Alice Rio,  
*Slaving and the Funding of Elite Status in Early Medieval Europe (ca. 800–1000 AD)*  
(Berlin: EBVERLAG, 2024)  
ISBN: 9783868934663

In the last few years research on early medieval slavery has seen an ever-growing emphasis placed on long-distance slave trading, and on the raiding practices that fed this trade. There has been relatively little link-up between this and older historiography looking at slavery in terms of labour and social history: the slaves who moved and the slaves who stayed have largely been kept in separate conversations. The increased profitability of slaving, though, should lead us to expect a rise in the internal importance of slavery as well as in slave-raiding and trading to external markets. This is what we find in many of the regions most intimately associated with the trade. There were, however, profound regional differences in the profiles and forms of engagement in slaving activities across Europe. I suggest that Joseph C. Miller's idea of slaving as a political strategy adopted by marginal players seeking to bypass normal forms of elite competition is helpful in thinking through the logic of these different responses to the opportunities and challenges presented by the slave trade: what motivated and constrained elite choices and possibilities? And what made slaving a more viable political strategy in some regions than in others?



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# THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE, MERCHANTS AND RURAL ELITES IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RIO DE JANEIRO, THE MAIN PORT OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

Volume 22 in the Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series  
by João Fragoso



João Fragoso,  
*The Transatlantic Slave Trade, Merchants and Rural Elites in Eighteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro, the Main Port of the South Atlantic*  
(Berlin: EBVERLAG, 2024)  
ISBN: 9783868934762

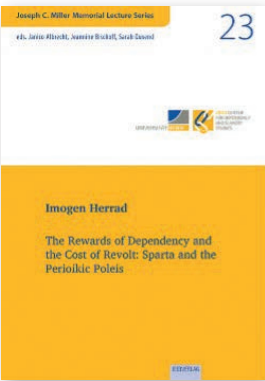
The thousands of African slaves and goods taken to the port of Rio de Janeiro in the eighteenth century had to further travel across vast territories, until they reached the numerous markets and agricultural areas of Portuguese America. These territories in the captaincy of Rio de Janeiro were controlled by colonial rural elites. The African slave trade depended not only on the dynamics of African societies and on general commercial fluctuations, but also on the particular social system of Portuguese Brazil, which was characterised by land concentration and political disputes between factions of the rural elites. In the first decades of the eighteenth century, the port of Rio de Janeiro was situated in the agrarian society of the slave-based Ancien Régime which, in turn, was one of the overseas conquests of the pluricontinental Portuguese monarchy. This essay analyzes the commerce of Rio de Janeiro and the features of the Atlantic trade, highlighting the importance of the dynamics of colonial society for understanding the Atlantic trade, including the slave trade.



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# THE REWARDS OF DEPENDENCY AND THE COST OF REVOLT: SPARTA AND THE PERIOIKIC POLEIS

Volume 23 in the Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series  
by Imogen Herrad



Imogen Herrad,  
*The Rewards of Dependency and the Cost of Revolt: Sparta and the Perioikic Poleis*  
(Berlin: EBVERLAG, 2024)  
ISBN: 9783868934786

The ancient state of the Lakedaimonians was composed of Spartiates – citizens of Sparta with full citizenship rights – and the so-called perioikoi (literally: 'those who dwell around'), who lived in small, self-governing towns around Sparta. The perioikoi were personally free but lacked the ability to autonomously decide matters of foreign or military policy. Spartiates and (elite) perioikoi were fellow, if unequal, citizens: they fought side by side, worshipped the same gods and upheld the same conservative values. To the outside Greek world, all alike shared in the legendary military glory of Lakedaimon, but inside their home state, the perioikoi were second-class citizens. Even so, only very few perioikic poleis attempted to shake off Spartan overlordship during their centuries of shared history. This essay seeks to determine the costs and the rewards of unfreedom, and to answer the question of why some poleis chose the risky course of revolt when so many did not.



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# TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES – RETHINKING SLAVE AGENCY IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE THROUGH RELIGIOUS CONVERSION PRACTICES

Volume 14 in the BCDSS Working Paper Series  
by Ottoman Slavery Working Group – Veruschka Wagner, Zeynep Yeşim Gökçe, Zeynep Dörtok Abacı, and Turkana Allahverdiyeva



Veruschka Wagner, Zeynep Yeşim Gökçe, Zeynep Dörtok Abacı, and Turkana Allahverdiyeva,  
"Transcending Boundaries – Rethinking Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire through Religious Conversion Practices,"  
*BCDSS Working Paper 14* (2024)  
ISSN 27479331

This article explores the religious conversion of slaves in the Ottoman Empire and the Crimea as a profound and transforming event in the lives of slaves. We will analyze the conditions, reasons, and consequences of conversion by studying court records from different cities from the 16th to 18th centuries. It will also explore the relation between religious conversion and the agency of the slaves. The primary research inquiries that this working paper seeks to address are as follows: What impact did religious conversion have on the agency of the slaves? What was the impact of conversion on their lives (as well as the lives of their slave owners) during and after being enslaved? Do the circumstances and effects of conversion differ between male and female slaves? This study aims to elucidate these inquiries in an endeavor to offer a new perspective on the relation between enslavement and conversion.



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# ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCIES AND INTERSECTIONALITY – DEBATES, PERSPECTIVES AND CASE STUDIES

Volume 3 in the BCDSS Discussion Paper Series

New volume by Kristina Großmann, Marion Gymnich, James M. Harland, Julia Hillner, Claudia Jarzebowski, Caroline Laske, Eva Lehner, Royce Mahawatte, Danitza Márquez Ramírez, Lisa Phongsavath, and Laurie Venters



Kristina Großmann, Marion Gymnich, James M. Harland, Julia Hillner, Claudia Jarzebowski, Caroline Laske, Eva Lehner, Royce Mahawatte, Danitza Márquez Ramírez, Lisa Phongsavath, and Laurie Venters, "Asymmetrical Dependencies and Intersectionality – Debates, Perspectives and Case Studies," *BCDSS Working Paper 3* (2024) ISSN 2751-1642

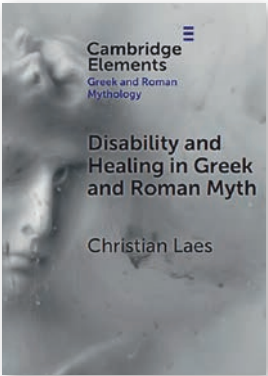
We describe new insights and future avenues for the exploration of strong asymmetrical dependencies when looking through the lens of intersectionality. With an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together expertise from a range of global epochs and different regions, we show that contextualizing and specifying how categories of difference structure social life enables scholars to better understand the ways in which hierarchies and strong asymmetries are (re)produced and enacted. In the study of asymmetrical dependency, the focus on the dynamic and multifaceted ways in which categories of difference engage with the formation of power has not been sufficiently applied. Thus, our intersectional outlook in terms of objects of analysis as well as academic practices, which is induced by our empirical work on asymmetrical dependencies, helps to correct this imbalance. Drawing on historical examples, we argue that intersectionality should not be seen as the application of a fixed set of ahistorical categories, but rather as an approach through which the dynamic interplay of various taxonomies in establishing dependency can be analyzed. Also, we emphasize the significance of a relational approach in order to grasp the mutual enforcement of different categories in producing asymmetries. We conclude that intersecting ways of looking into and arranging material make scholars see the formerly unseen and can reveal silenced voices of marginalized individuals. In this sense, including intersectionality in dependency studies helps to critically rethink paradigms and stereotypes that have been established in the study of strong asymmetrical dependencies and may even give rise to a paradigm shift.

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# DISABILITY AND HEALING IN GREEK AND ROMAN MYTH

New book by Christian Laes



Christian Laes ed., *Disability and Healing in Greek and Roman Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024) ISBN: 9781009335539

Disability and Healing in Greek and Roman Myth takes its readers to stories, in versions known and often unknown. Disabilities and diseases are dealt with from head to toe: from mental disorder, over impairment of vision, hearing and speaking, to mobility problems and wider issues that pertain to the whole body. This Element places the stories in context, with due attention to close reading, and pays careful attention to concepts and terminology regarding disability. It sets Graeco-Roman mythology in the wider context of the ancient world, including Christianity. One of the focuses is the people behind the stories and their 'lived' religion. It also encourages its readers to 'live' their ancient mythology.

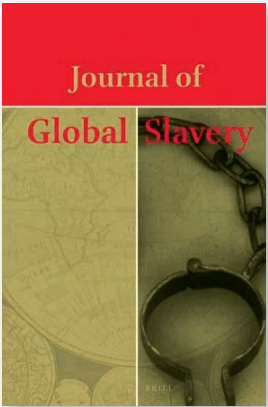
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# BEYOND SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

New special issue of the *Journal of Global Slavery*  
edited by Pia Wiegink and Jutta Wimmeler

with articles by Sinah Kloß, Ricardo Márquez García, Elena Smolarz, Julia Winnebeck, Mary A. Afolabi, Jutta Wimmeler and Pia Wiegink



Pia Wiegink and Jutta Wimmeler (eds.), "Beyond Slavery and Freedom," *Journal of Global Slavery* 9, no. 1-2 (2024) ISSN: 2405-836X

This introductory essay to the special issue *Beyond Slavery and Freedom?* makes concrete suggestions how we might move beyond this binary and why we should do so. The introduction argues that the conceptual pair slavery/freedom is deeply entwined with narratives of modernity and progress and has shaped scholarship in very diverse fields. On the basis of empirical research from the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (bcdss), we identify six possible pathways of thematically and methodologically moving *beyond* slavery/freedom that the contributions to the special issue address: 1) investigating forms of dependency that are not usually defined as slavery, 2) paying attention to semantic fields that are closely connected to this binary but not usually understood in relation to it, 3) highlighting the connection between (political, institutional) power and dependency, 4) engaging with post-slavery periods and experiences, 5) problematizing the challenges of identifying slavery in non-written records, and 6) underscoring the voice of actors.

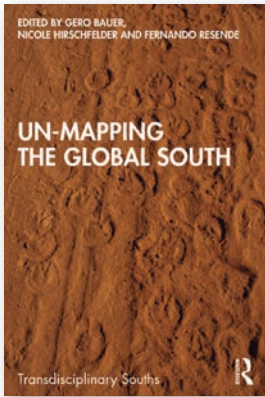
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# TALKING HISTORY: ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS, INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES, AND POWER NEGOTIATIONS IN RESEARCH ENCOUNTERS

Book chapter in edited volume  
by Sinah Kloß



Sinah Kloß,  
"Talking History: Ethnographic Interviews, Intersectional Identities, and Power Negotiations in Research Encounters," in *Un-Mapping the Global South*, ed. Gero Bauer, Nicole Hirschfelder, and Fernando Resende, *Transdisciplinary Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2024) ISBN: 9781032727462

The Global South/Global North can be a useful category for strategic essentialism, but an uncritical use of the term as a heuristic or analytical category contributes to the homogenization of perspectives and leads to less nuanced research analyses. It reproduces a focus on dualistic categorizations, such as the simplified opposition between the researcher and the researched. Instead, Kloß proposes that the Global South and Global North have to be understood as positionalities on a continuum of agency. From this perspective, the Global South may be considered as a 'degree of subalternity' (and the Global North a 'degree of dominance') which is defined by the intersectional identities of the social actors involved and which continues to be influenced, to some extent, by national identities and geographic imaginaries.

To illustrate this, the author discusses a particular ethnographic interview that she conducted in August 2019, which focused on Surinamese economic history and decolonization processes. She demonstrates that in specific contexts, national imaginaries remain relevant in identification processes, particularly but not exclusively in the context of bi- or multi-national research relationships. This interview can be considered as a moment in which Global South/Global North relations materialize and are performatively (re-)created in a situated social encounter. Reflecting on the interview's situatedness, Kloß illustrates how negotiations of power and social status influence and (re-)create historical narratives.



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# GEFANGENE DER STEPPENNOMADEN. ZENTRALASIEN, 18./19. JAHRHUNDERT

Book chapter in edited volume  
by Elena Smolarz



Elena Smolarz,  
"Gefangenen der Steppennomaden. Zentralasien, 18./19. Jahrhundert," in *Welten der Sklaverei*, Paulin Ismard (ed.), (Berlin: Jacoby & Stuart, 2023) ISBN: 9783964281722

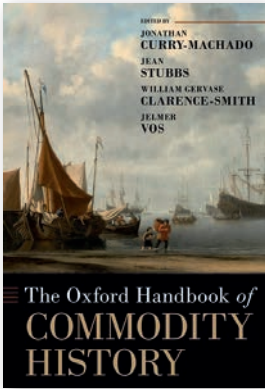
According to a general definition developed in the course of the 19th century and stemming from the transatlantic slave trade, we usually consider slaves as persons who are bought, sold, and owned—in short, as a form of property. However, examining slavery through the process of enslavement, rather than a fixed status, challenges this definition. The slave trade in the Emirate of Bukhara, the Khanate of Khiva (Khwarazm), and the Kazakh steppe in the 18th and 19th centuries illustrates this diversity. This intracontinental slave trade, based on captivity and human abduction, reveals different forms of dependency. To understand the lives of the enslaved, Persian chronicles such as the History of Khwarazm by Shir Muhammad Mirab Munis and Muhammad Riza Mirab Agahi, along with documents from the Orenburg Border Commission archives (1799-1859), are utilized. These sources highlight the complexity and varied experiences of slavery beyond the transatlantic model, offering new insights into historical forms of human dependency.



Link to publisher:

# MIGRATION, SLAVERY, AND COMMODIFICATION.

Book chapter in edited volume  
by Michael Zeuske



Michael Zeuske,  
"Migration, Slavery, and Commodification," in *The Oxford Handbook of Commodity History*, ed. Jonathan Curry-Machado et al., *Oxford Handbooks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2023) ISBN: 9780197502693

This chapter analyses migrations in global history using examples of slave trade/slavery as 'forced' or 'coerced' migration and their connections to commodification. Taking a longue-durée plateau approach to global history, from 10000 bnc to around 1960, Atlantic slavery (1400–1900), as well as the slaveries and colonial expansions of Europe (1800–1960), are given special consideration. In addition to referencing the commodities produced by and for enslaved people, here enslaved people in particular are treated as 'talking commodities', a relatively unaddressed topic. In summary, it is established that without slavery, diverse slavery regimes, slave trade, but above all without enslaved people, many commodities would not have existed. How this applies to commodification in 'Western' capitalism as a whole needs to be further researched and debated.



Link to publisher:



# EVENTS & PREVIEW



## SECOND HALF OF 2024

<p>11-13 July, 2024</p> <p><b>"THE ICONOGRAPHY OF DEPENDENCY, SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND 'OTHERNESS' IN PRE-MODERN VISUAL ART: A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH"</b></p> <p><b>CONFERENCE</b></p> <p>Organized by Martin Bentz (Professor, BCDSS) and Patrick Zeidler (Exhibition Publication Coordinator, BCDSS)</p>	<p>12-14 September, 2024</p> <p><b>"CHILDREN, DEPENDENCY, AND EMOTIONS IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD"</b></p> <p><b>CONFERENCE</b></p> <p>Organized by Joseph Biggerstaff (PhD Researcher, BCDSS), Claudia Jarzebowski (Professor, BCDSS) &amp; Lisa Phongsavath (PhD Researcher, BCDSS)</p>	<p>10-11 October, 2024</p> <p><b>INTERNATIONAL PHD SEMINAR ON SLAVERY, SERVITUDE AND EXTREME DEPENDENCY</b></p> <p><b>SEMINAR</b></p> <p>Organized by Leiden University</p> <p>Location: Leiden</p>
<p>23-25 October, 2024</p> <p><b>"DEPENDENCY THEORY AND INTER-SECTIONALITY"</b></p> <p><b>WORKSHOP</b></p> <p>(CLOSING EVENT OF RESEARCH AREA E THEMATIC YEAR)</p> <p>Organized by David B. Smith (PhD Researcher, BCDSS), Eva Lehner (Postdoctoral Researcher, BCDSS) &amp; Sara Eriksson (Guest Researcher, BCDSS)</p>	<p>November 5, 2024</p> <p><b>"RESOURCE EXTRACTIVISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL (IN)JUSTICE"</b></p> <p><b>ROUNDTABLE</b></p> <p>With Jennifer Leetsch (BCDSS), Marie Müller-Koné (BICC), Ulbe Bosma (IISG), Aline Pereira (ZEF)</p> <p>In cooperation with Volkshochschule Bonn</p> <p>Location: VHS Bonn, Mülheimer Platz 1, 53111 Bonn</p>	<p>November 14, 2024</p> <p><b>"DESIRE LINES" BY JULES ROSSKAM</b></p> <p><b>FILM SCREENING &amp; DISCUSSION</b></p> <p>Roskam explores transgender sexuality through the life of on an Iranian American transgender man.</p> <p>Location: Kino in der Brotfabrik, Kreuzstraße 16, 53225 Bonn (Beuel)</p>

## LECTURE SERIES JOSEPH C. MILLER MEMORIAL LECTURE

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The magazine **DEPENDENT** is published twice annually by the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) and contains information, descriptive articles and reports about its research projects and findings, as well as its publications and events. A feature article provides insights on research into areas related to strong asymmetrical dependency. The magazine is sent out by e-mail in PDF format or in print. Information on how to subscribe and future issues can be found at <http://ow.ly/BfsA50MfLGS>

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**OTHER SUBJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM THE BCDSS**  
Over the coming years, the BCDSS will continue to publish information about its current research projects on its website, and to provide background information on subjects related to the overall topic of dependency. BCDSS scholars will also comment on social developments from their own perspectives. In the "Interviews" section, they talk about the conditions of their work, new methods and the changing nature of research communication.

**THE BONN CENTER FOR DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES (BCDSS)**  
The Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) hosts the Cluster of Excellence "Beyond Slavery and Freedom", which aims to overcome the binary opposition of "slavery versus freedom". For that we approach the phenomenon of slavery and other types of strong asymmetrical dependencies (e.g. debt bondage, convict labor, tributary labor, servitude, serfdom, and domestic work as well as forms of wage labor and various types of patronage) from methodologically and theoretically distinct perspectives.

The research cluster is part of the framework of the Excellence Strategy of the Federal Government and the *Länder* and is free and independent in the selection and realization of its research projects.

Our Cluster of Excellence is a joint project of scholars from the fields of Anthropology, Archaeology, History, Law, Literary Studies, Area Studies (including The History of the Islamicate World, Japanese and Chinese Studies, Tibetan Studies), Sociology and Theology. We propose "strong asymmetrical dependency" as a new key concept that includes all forms of bondage across time and space.







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