

THE MAGAZINE OF THE BONN CENTER FOR DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES

DEPENDENT

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CHILD DEPENDENCY

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of our Cluster Magazine *DEPENDENT*, the first in our second funding phase. This issue is dedicated to the theme of *Child Dependency*.

In many of our previous issues, we have touched on aspects of child dependency. Here, Christian Laes, Joseph Biggerstaff, Christine Whyte, Kate Ekama and Eva Marie Lehner, Alice Toso, as well as Claudia Jarzebowski and Birgit Ulrike Münch place children at the centre, exploring how childhood was shaped by strong asymmetrical dependency across different societies and historical periods, together spanning more than two millennia.

Their contributions reveal children not simply as passive dependants but as individuals who navigated unequal relationships with resilience, agency, and creativity. Drawing on ancient letters, archaeological evidence, and visual and written archives, they demonstrate the many ways children's lives can be recovered despite the fragmentary nature of the historical record.

In our field research section, Issouf Dosso explores the aftermath of the abolition of slavery in northwestern Côte d'Ivoire, revealing how silence, stigma, and local remembrance continue to shape relationships between the descendants of former slaves and slave owners.

Meanwhile, Michael Zeuske reflects on archival and field research in Cuba amid political tensions and economic crisis, showing how the material legacies of slavery continue to shape societies far beyond the Atlantic world.

As always, this issue also features conference reports, news, recent publications, and upcoming events. Enjoy the read!

Cécile Jeblawei



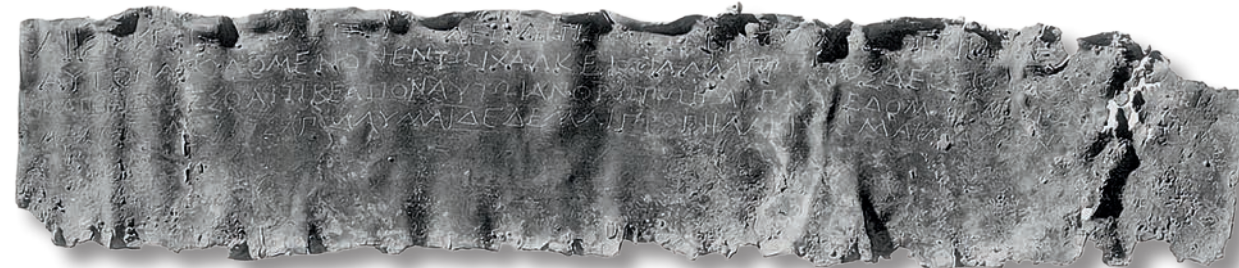
Roman mosaic of a slave boy, possibly named Junius, in a kitchen, Pompeii, first century CE. Now in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photograph by CM Dixon/Heritage Images, licensed through Alamy

HOW (IN)DEPENDENT WERE CHILDREN IN GRAECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY?

by Christian Laes

That children were dependent is, as it were, an engrained belief in scholarship on Graeco-Roman antiquity. In fact, the outsider status of children runs like a thread through the first modern monograph on childhood in the Roman world, which was published in 1989.

According to its author, Thomas Wiedemann, ancient authors consistently viewed free children as not yet belonging to the world of full adults. This sometimes granted special protection or status to young people, but it rarely allowed them to take on full responsibilities. In addition, Roman law famously emphasised the vulnerability and consequent helplessness of minors, who were sometimes viewed as on a par with women and slaves (Gaius, *Institutes* 1.55 and 1.138 about children and slaven *in mancipio*; Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.211). By putting more emphasis on the god-given innocence of the very youngest, early Christianity tended to place children



Letter inscribed on a lead tablet by Lesis, an enslaved boy in Athens, fourth century BCE. Ancient Agora Excavations, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Agora IL 1702. Digital image accessed via ASCSA.net. Public domain

at the centre. In this article, I will look at the practicalities of daily life, as we find them in families, work, and burial commemoration. I also want to honour the many children who, in a particularly young world where young people aged under 15 formed about one third of the total population, took their own decisions and tried to find their way in lives which were sometimes challenging, to say the least.

1. A CRY FOR HELP FROM THE ATHENIAN AGORA

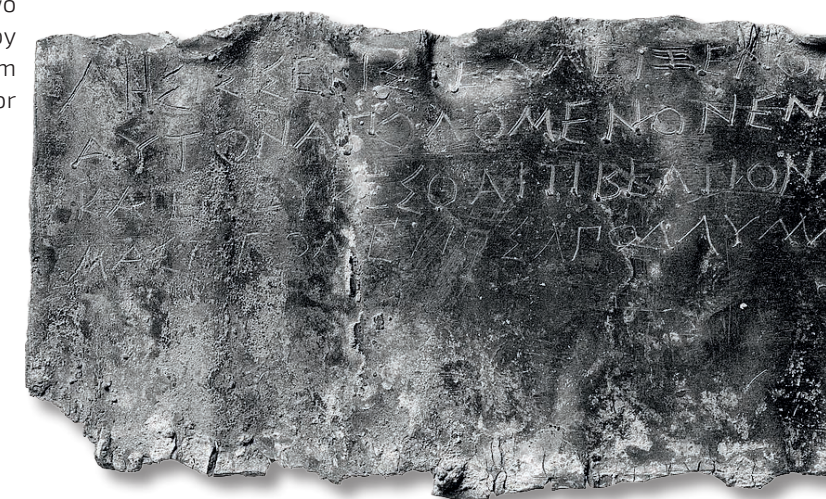
Our first case is described on a small and thin lead tablet, approximately thirteen centimetres long and five centimetres high, dated to the fourth century BCE. The words are engraved into it with a steady hand, in generally flawless ancient Greek. The letter was then rolled up, the inscribed side facing inwards. For some reason which we today cannot explain, it ended up in the Agora, the ancient market place of Athens. Was it never sent? Or was it lost en route? All we know is that it was found in 1972, among a pile of terracotta sherds and stamps in the Agora of Athens. After almost two and a half thousand years, its text still moves us by its directness. It is one of those rare testimonies from antiquity in which we can hear a teenager speaking for himself, as it were.

Lesis sends this to Xenocles and to his mother. Please do not ignore this message! I am being ruined in the foundry. Come to my masters, and find a better place for me! I am in the hands of a man who is thoroughly evil. I am being ruined. I am being flogged, bound and treated like dirt. It is getting worse and worse!

(*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 50.275)

As often with private letters, many details of the specific context escape us. But if we take a closer look, these five lines of text suggest a number of intriguing scenarios.

Lesis is not the name of a free-born Athenian citizen, but Xenocles is. It is highly likely that Lesis' father had already passed away at the time he wrote this letter, or at least was no longer involved in his son's life. This explains why Lesis calls out to his mother for help. And to Xenocles, who may well have been the owner of both the boy's mother and of Lesis himself. Although she was an enslaved woman, apparently the mother still had some say with her master, certainly when it came to her own son. Xenocles' household probably was not very large. As an investment for the future, he had sent Lesis to a metalworker, presumably as an apprentice. There the boy would learn a trade, in order to return later to Xenocles, who could then sell him as a skilled worker for a profitable price, or use him to start a business under his guidance. That he saw a future for the boy is also evident from the fact that Lesis was quite proficient in writing. Such training was certainly not available to the majority of the Athenian population, free or enslaved.



Detail of letter inscribed on a lead tablet by Lesis, see above. Digital image accessed via ASCSA.net. Public domain



Boeotian skyphos (drinking cup) depicting a potter's workshop, including the punishment of a bad potter, c. 430 BCE. From Exarchos, Locris. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. 442. Photograph by Zde, Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

Physical coercion and beatings were often part of educational practice in the ancient world. Things could get rough between masters and apprentices. They lived together in close proximity, as the apprentice was often given board and lodging in his master's workshop, for whom it was crucial to make his authority clear from the outset. In the second century CE, the author Lucian, who came from a family of craftsmen, describes how he was put to work for his uncle as a teenager. The uncle was a sculptor, and on his first day at work, young Lucian clumsily broke a piece of marble. This earned him a severe beating. He immediately chose to flee and pursue a life as a writer. Lucian was an exception, having chosen a path that had not been mapped out by his parents (Lucian, *Dream* 1-5). In Roman legal texts from the third century CE, we read about a master who had beaten his pupil so severely that the boy lost an eye. Had the master committed a criminal offence? No, according to the jurists, not if he had struck out solely to discipline the boy. Apparently this case concerned a free boy. For boys who had been enslaved, the treatment was in all likelihood harsher (*Digests* 9.2.5).

Indeed, at first sight, Lesis' prospects were bleak. Because he was born a slave, it was his master's will that had determined his path. Moreover, he was young, and therefore particularly vulnerable (we know from apprenticeship contracts found on papyri that apprentices were usually between twelve and fourteen years old). Yet he took the initiative in a precarious situation. He certainly had cards to play, for Xenocles stood to gain nothing if his slave boy



Sandstone relief from a funerary monument depicting two young men inspecting a length of cloth for weaving defects. After inspection, the cloth is folded and stacked, as shown in the background, before being sent to market. Source: Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, "St. W. VII 120: Relief mit Tuchprobe," last modified February 5, 2025, <https://rlp.museum-digital.de/object/5887>. CC BY-NC-SA. Photo: Thomas Zühmer

return from his apprenticeship with permanent scars. The financial investment had been too high for that. With his excessive physical punishment, Lesis's instructor had clearly crossed a line: his misconduct was unacceptable. And Lesis's mother was not just any enslaved woman, either. There was at least the hope that she too could intervene with the master – or even come in person to take her son away and find a better working environment for him.

Did Lesis succeed in his plan? Did he write his text in secret? In a rare moment of leisure, or by the dim light of an oil lamp in a dark night? To whom did he give the carefully rolled-up note? Did his cry for help reach its intended recipients, and did they help him? Was he given a say in the search for a new place of work? Was Lesis an exception? Or did other apprentices also seek help from their families? These are all questions which we unfortunately cannot answer. Yet the outlines of possibilities for taking the initiative are clear, even for those who, at first glance, found themselves in a situation of complete dependency.

2. ANGRY THEON

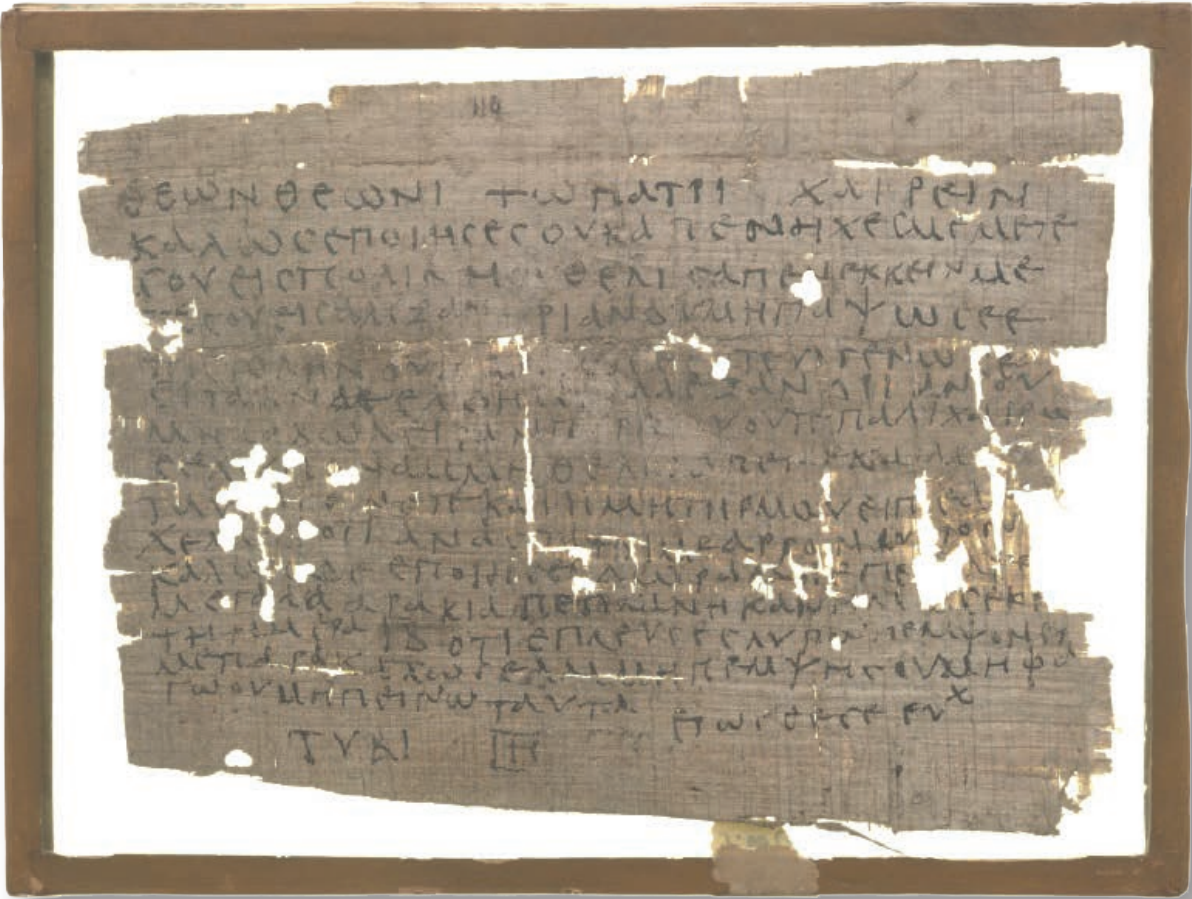
From the Egyptian town of Oxyrhynchus, modern Al-Bahnasa, it took about ten days – a 400-kilometre journey down the Nile – to reach the city of Alexandria. This was Theon's journey during the winter month of Tybi (roughly equivalent to our January). The fact that he had not taken his young son, also called Theon, was apparently not to the boy's liking. Preserved in the desert sand, young Theon's angry note to his father, written on papyrus, survived the passage of time. It is a rather unique source, as we know of only very few handwritten letters from children in antiquity.

Theon greets his father Theon. Well, it was certainly kind of you not to take me to the city. If you refuse to take me to Alexandria, I will not write another letter. I will not speak to you anymore or wish you good health. So, if you go to Alexandria, I will never again hold your hand or greet you. If you refuse to take me, this will happen. And mama said to Archelaos: "That boy is driving me completely crazy, take him with you!"

Really, it was so kind of you to send me those wonderful gifts. Pure rubbish! They pulled the wool over my eyes on the 12th, the day of your departure. Send me something, I beg of you. If you will not, I will not eat, I will not drink. There you go! I pray for your health. The 18th of the month Tybi.

Give this letter to Theon, on behalf of his son Theonas.
(Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1.119, 2nd-3rd century CE)

For a deeper understanding of this document, a translation from the Greek simply is not enough. There is Theon's handwriting: a rather coarse script, which proves that the boy was not yet a fluent writer. And there are errors in his Greek: both spelling and grammar sometimes deviate from what was considered standard at the time. Yet the letter achieves a certain standard. Theon knows the forms of address and concludes with a formally correct closing phrase. He is capable of formulating irony, even sarcasm ("so kind of you" and "wonderful gifts"). He combines this



Letter from the boy Theon to his father Theon complaining about being left behind when his father travelled to Alexandria, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1.119, 2nd-3rd century CE, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Gr. class. f. 66 (P): <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/27f88677-25da-458b-814a-ebd87682dc82/> Photo: Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, CC BY-NC 4.0

with childlike simple and straightforward talk: the threat of never speaking or saying goodbye again, setting an unambiguous condition, and the warning that he will stop eating and drinking. In the final line, he even uses his nickname, Theonas, instead of the official Theon. In the blunt exclamations "rubbish" and "there you go," we get to observe Theon's outburst of rage almost as though we were there. Moreover, he is repeating himself: his father's refusal to take him along clearly weighed heavily on him. We get a similar sense of direct contact when we read the weary mother's exclamations. Archelaos may have been the boy's tutor, who had instructed him to write a letter to his dad.

What do we know about the social and economic context of this source? Theon was the son of a relatively wealthy family. He probably was in his early teens. He lived at home and had no professional responsibilities other than his school activities. His father was a merchant, who regularly travelled to Alexandria and was able to send gifts from there.

In this letter, Theon's will is expressed emphatically. He is by no means completely despondent and dependent, although his outburst was caused precisely by the realisation of him being dependent on his father's decision to take (or not to take) him to Alexandria. He explicitly expresses the wish to travel to Alexandria. He makes his mother's life miserable and takes up the pen himself to voice his displeasure to his father. He reserves the right to speak or remain silent, to greet or ignore, to eat or fast – whereby it does not matter so much that these are empty and/or typically 'child-like' threats. Precisely because of this wording and rhetorical strategies, the letter is a unique testimony of a child who by no means remained stuck in helpless dependency.

3. CONCLUSION

These brief glimpses of children in the ancient world are not meant to reflect concerns of our own world, which grapples intensely with issues such as autonomy, agency, and individual freedom of choice. I certainly do not want to ignore the suffering of the many millions of children, men and women who were seized and sold as slaves throughout the ancient Mediterranean. Young people in the ancient world lived in conditions of de facto dependency in familial and educational contexts that do not often seem child-oriented from the modern point of view. But laws, fiction and ideological constructs only tell half the story. In reality, children took and sometimes were forced to take their own decisions: whether in serious conditions, such as the cry for help from the young enslaved apprentice in Athens, or lighter utterances of childish grief and disappointment such as the letter

by young Theon to his father. Indeed, the option of autonomy and independence was always there, even in the case of young people who were theoretically totally dependent on their parents.

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Prof. Dr. Christian Laes is professor of Ancient History at the University of Manchester (UK). At the BCDSS, he was a Heinz Heinen Senior Research Fellow, from February to September 2023. His research focuses on human life courses in antiquity. He has previously investigated children and youth in the ancient world. An edited volume on children at work in Late Antiquity is forthcoming with De Gruyter, Berlin.

“WHY AM I A SLAVE?”
CHILDHOOD,
TRAUMA, AND
THE PLANTATION
SYSTEM

by Joseph Biggerstaff



Portrait of Frederick Douglass, by unknown artist, around 1855. The MET Collection, public domain

When Frederick Douglass asked the central question of his young life, he was already articulating something psychiatry would not name for another century.

"I imbibed the determination to run away," Frederick Douglass, the great African American abolitionist and orator, wrote in 1848. "The very first mental effort that I now remember on my part was an attempt to solve the mystery — why am I a slave." He was six years old when two acts of violence crystallized that question. He had watched through the cracks of a floorboard as his master brutally beat a woman named Esther, and had witnessed the futility of a cousin's attempt to seek redress from a drunken overseer. The response to that second appeal haunted him as much as the violence itself: the master scolded the girl and sent her back. "This treatment," Douglass later reflected, "was a part of the system, rather than a part of the man."

What is striking, reading Douglass now, is how accurately his account maps onto our modern understanding of traumatic experience. Terrified, hushed, stunned, bewildered — the whole scene "revolting and shocking to the last degree," language failing to convey its full criminality. He was describing, without the vocabulary, what we now call psychological trauma: the way violence exceeds and overwhelms the capacity to process it.

That vocabulary, of course, came much later. The clinical concept of trauma emerged gradually from the medicalization of nervous shock in the nineteenth century — railway accidents, industrialized warfare — before finding fuller expression in the twentieth century through the moral reckoning forced by two world wars, and eventually, in 1980, in the formal inclusion of PTSD in psychiatric classification. Yet as the anthropologist Laurence Kirmayer has observed, trauma as a *phenomenon* — terrifying events, fear, injury, and their long aftermath — is as old as humanity. What has changed is the framework we bring to it, and what we allow ourselves to see.

CHILDREN IN THE MACHINE

Children entered the plantation labor force at around five years old. Before that, the struggle was simply to survive. A study of six plantations in Barbados and Jamaica between 1817 and 1834 found that thirty-six percent of enslaved children died before their fourth birthday. For those who reached five, the mortality risk decreased — but the historian's figure for death between ages five and nine, 9.2 percent, has been described as the highest recorded in documented human populations.

The children's gang, also called the "grass gang," was nominally the softest entry point into plantation labor. Children gathered grass for livestock and performed



Tobacco Factory, Virginia, 1870s. Men, women, and children working in a tobacco warehouse, probably in Lynchburg, Virginia. Scribner's Monthly 7 (April 1874): 652. Reproduced in *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora* (SI-OB-368).

supportive tasks under the supervision of an elderly enslaved woman or an older child. Plantation manuals from the period typically list these children as six to nine years old, though there are records of boys kept in the grass gang until fourteen. But “softest” is a relative term. Malnutrition, harsh conditions, and the grinding pace of plantation life made even this entry level brutal. As children aged into the adult gangs, skeletal evidence tells part of the story their voices could not: significant infection and activity-related damage in adolescent remains, including at least one case of a herniated disc — a condition almost unheard-of in someone so young.

Historian Justin Roberts, analyzing sick-house records from a late-eighteenth-century plantation, found something counterintuitive: it was not the oldest workers but the youngest members of the first gang, teenagers, who spent the most time seeking medical attention. Roberts suggests these adolescents “may have had difficulty adapting to the demands of work and to the pace of labor in the first gang. As they grew

stronger and more accustomed to first-gang work, and as they learned survival techniques to avoid exhaustion or being singled out by the overseer's whip, they spent fewer days in the sick house.” The phrasing is clinical, but it describes something devastating: children learning, through physical suffering, how to endure.

THE WEIGHT OF SEPARATION

The psychological violence of the plantation system was inseparable from its economic logic. Under a legal regime that made enslaved people inheritable property, a status formalized in Virginia's 1662 *partus sequitur ventrem* law, which declared that a child's status followed the mother's womb, children were assets. An enslaved woman's child increased the value of an estate not only as future labor but as collateral for the mortgages that financed plantation expansion.

Scattered across the probate records, wills, and court documents of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British Atlantic colonies are traces of enslaved women attempting, by whatever narrow means were available, to prevent the dissolution of their families. Some negotiated terms directly with their enslavers, often female colonists who were drawing up wills and dividing estates. Others appealed to the courts, or exploited the ambiguities of inheritance law in a colony where the legal framework of slavery was still being improvised in real time. These

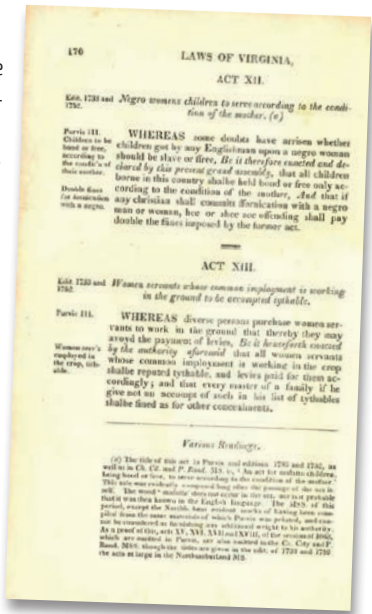


Photo of Virginia's 1662 *partus sequitur ventrem* law, which established that a child inherited the legal status of its mother, making the children of enslaved women enslaved at birth. Source: Encyclopedia Virginia



The Cotton Planter and His Pickers, West Point, Mississippi, 1908. Postcard depicting a white cotton planter with a shotgun and dog standing among African American men, women, and children working in a cotton field. Photograph by H. Tees. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed via Wikimedia Commons

were not acts of mass resistance, the plantation system was far too total for that, but they were acts of deliberate moral agency by people the law had classified as property. Their persistence in the record confirms that the threat of separation was not a background anxiety but a present, organizing terror around which enslaved women structured whatever room for maneuver they could find. The fact that they so rarely succeeded makes their efforts more, not less, significant as historical testimony. As Frederick Douglass wrote, “The liability to be separated from my grandmother, seldom or never to see her again, haunted me.” He had already been separated from his mother soon after he was born, and only saw her rarely.

LEGACIES

The questions raised by this history have not been resolved with the abolition of slavery. They are present in contemporary debates about reparations, in the long struggle to account for intergenerational trauma, and in the ethical dilemmas faced by historians who must represent violence against children without compounding it. Do we risk re-inscribing trauma by centering it? Can we quantify the psychological cost of centuries of bondage? These are not rhetorical questions. Families like the Drax's from Dorset in southern England, whose Barbadian plantation, Drax Hall, has been in continuous operation since 1654, with an estimated thirty thousand enslaved people dying within its population over two centuries, are now among those facing demands for reckoning.

What the historical record offers, alongside evidence of suffering, is evidence of resistance and creativity. The earliest known slave song recorded in the British Atlantic was transcribed on a Barbadian plantation in 1775. Sung in a call-and-response style ancestral to gospel and the blues, its lyrics describe a cruel master, the fear of being sold, the sorrow of bondage. It is one way of understanding how people converted collective trauma into cultural survival.

Douglass, at six years old, asked the right question. The task that remains, for historians and for society, is to keep asking it.

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African song or chant from Barbados, the earliest known slave song recorded in the British Atlantic. The song was first heard by Dr. William Dickson, the then Secretary to Edward Hay, who governed Barbados between 1772-1779. The song was transcribed in 1775 by Granville Sharpe, a founder of the antislavery movement in Great Britain. Photo courtesy of Gloucestershire Archives, D3549/13/3/27



Joseph Biggerstaff is a historian of dependency, slavery, capitalism, and the environment in the early modern global world. He successfully defended his PhD thesis in April 2026 at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies and was recently a visiting fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Center for Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University.



British Government School in Charlotte, Sierra Leone, c. 1870. Source: The National Archives, UK, CO 1069/88. Public domain (OGL)

“WHETHER OF FULL AGE OR NOT” CARE, EXPLOITATION AND DEPENDENCY OF LIBERATED AFRICAN CHILDREN

by Christine Whyte

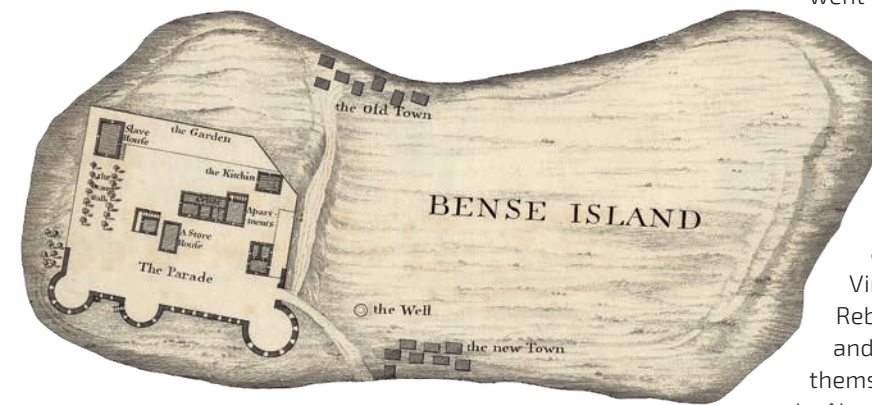
Since spending two months at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies in 2025, the concept of “dependency” has been central to my research. My project focuses on children who were enslaved in Africa in the nineteenth century and what happened to them after they were formally liberated. A central theme of this work is the web of dependencies in which these children were enmeshed, both before and after their liberation.

As scholars have noted, the “inherent dependency” of childhood complicates our understanding of enslaved children’s experiences. The coercive dependencies of enslavement often resembled, and intersected with, the dependencies that structure childhood more broadly. Language reflects these historical entanglements. English terms such as “boy,” “girl,” and “lad” emerged from hierarchies rooted in master-servant relations, underscoring how ideas of age, status, and subordination have long been intertwined. Reliance on others, the very condition that defines childhood, overlapped with, and was intensified by, the enforced dependencies of slavery. This overlap makes it difficult to disentangle what was specific to enslavement from what was intrinsic to childhood itself.

Strong asymmetrical dependency provides a framework to understand both children’s vulnerabilities and their capacities. It draws attention to the exploitation of children’s physical, mental, and emotional dependency. But strong asymmetrical dependency also created spaces for resistance, and the potential for care and affection. My research aims to explore interstices and overlaps between exploitation and

care in the experiences of enslaved and emancipated children. Dependency offers one way to trace the entanglements between these seemingly opposing ideas.

What does dependency mean in the context of child slavery and emancipation? Perhaps it goes without saying that “strong asymmetrical dependency” existed between enslavers and the children they held captive. Children, especially infants and very young children, were smaller, physically more fragile, and less likely to survive. Infants and young children were especially vulnerable: enslavers might abandon them during forced marches, separate them from their parents, or even kill them to avoid the burden of care. However, children also tended toward impulsive and defiant behaviours which might make it more likely for them to engage in “impactful protest” (as Julia Winnebeck et al. put it in their 2023 concept paper on Strong Asymmetrical Dependency). Despite this, enslavers often made assumptions about their helpless dependency, which led them to allow some children greater freedoms than enslaved adults.



One of many slave forts on the West African coast: Bense [Bunce] Island and Fort, Sierra Leone, ca. 1727, depicting living quarters inside the fort, including “Slave House”. Engraving reproduced in William Smith, *Thirty Different Drafts of Guinea* (London, 1727), plate 8. Source: *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora* (SI-08-95). Public domain

Surviving records from coastal trading forts in western Africa also indicate that slave traders were obliged to undertake basic forms of care, such as cutting children’s hair, removing lice, and finding ways to feed them. This coercive care was intended to keep children alive and minimally healthy for labour. Yet it also crudely mimicked the intimate, affective dimensions of caregiving. These practices demonstrate that intimate care work for dependent children, the washing, the feeding, and the carrying, did not cease under conditions of enslavement but instead became entangled with systems of exploitation. Orlando Patterson, the Jamaican/US-American historian and sociologist who coined the concept of enslavement as “social death,” noted that “ties of sentiment”

could develop between enslavers and children born into slavery in their household, especially where the children were in regular, domestic, or intimate contact with the enslaver and their family. These ties suggest that even coercive, cruel and violent asymmetrical dependencies could be inflected with emotive bonds.

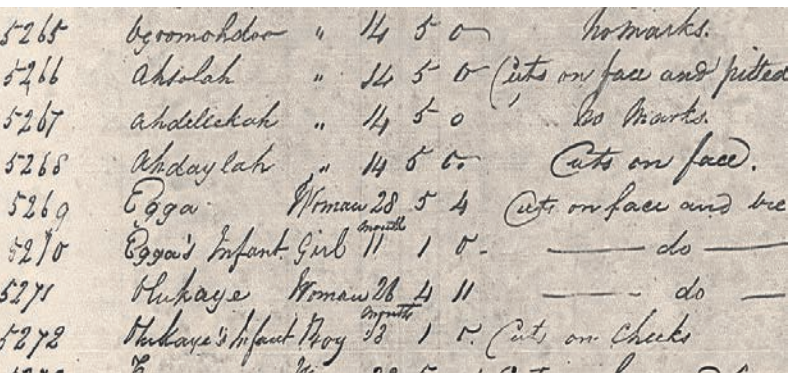
As well as caring for children, enslavers also relied on care work performed by children. By “care work,” I mean labour that meets the physical and emotional needs of others. It is most often associated with affection, concern, or a sense of responsibility, but can also be violently or coercively extracted. While very small children relied on more mature caregivers for help with tasks such as feeding, cleaning, carrying, and comforting, older children were often required to perform these same forms of labour. They were seen as less threatening, more easily trained, and more pliant, making them particularly suited, by the enslavers’ logic, to intimate forms of service.

Children could play upon this intimacy in order to gain access to greater freedom and privileges. Some even went as far as to seize opportunities to violently resist. Despite the evidence that children were active participants in rebellions and resistance, their defiance remained largely unrecorded and unrecognised. The US-American historian Vanessa Holden, who has studied the roles played by African American children and women in the Southampton slave insurrection in the US state of Virginia (perhaps better known as “Nat Turner’s Rebellion”), argues that children’s resistance, and their purposeful attempts to emancipate themselves, remained “unimaginable” for enslavers. In November 1831, Nathan, Tom, Davy, and Moses were tried for having participated in the Southampton slave insurrection even though the boys were only teenagers: “It appeared that the oldest was not more than 15 years,” the trial record noted. They were found guilty and sentenced to death, a harsh penalty that perhaps reflected the sense of outrage felt by their enslavers at this act of resistance. Children literally embodied slavery’s future, and so their rejection of dependence represented an existential threat to slavery itself.

Caring for dependent enslaved children was taken on by enslaved adults on-board slave ships. Contemporary observers noted the importance of “shipmate” bonds to enslaved people all over the Atlantic world. Walter Hawthorne, a historian of Atlantic slavery, has written about those lasting emotional bonds people formed while they were being taken across the ocean, and argues that “the most intimate of human relationships were recreated” on-board slave ships

as people attempted to rebuild social connections. Caring for infants and children was one vital, intimate, and dependent relationship needed to ensure their survival. Slave ship surgeon journals record that enslaved people sometimes fed infants on home-made milk substitutes made of mixtures of flour, water and oil. Even these perfunctory records, evoke acts of care work which reaffirmed and strengthened affective bonds between adults and children.

But children were not only defiant towards enslavers. Slave ship surgeons giving evidence about the slave trade reported that enslaved adults were also the target of teasing. It is not difficult to imagine that the stress and trauma of enslavement heightened violent outbursts and tensions between dependent children and adults. Strong asymmetrical dependency could generate strong oppositional defiance from the most powerless.



This register lists two mothers with their infant children. The National Archives, UK, FO 315/31, Excerpt from the Register of Liberated Africans of the *Bella Eliza*, 1825.

Liberation from slavery did not mark the end of strong asymmetrical dependencies, especially for children. Historians of childhood agree that, even in the 19th century, children continued to be conceived of more as property than people. Liberated people, too, continued to be regarded as under the guardianship or partial ownership of the state. Colonial governments assumed a paternalistic attitude towards the newly-free, adults and children alike. Officials and missionaries presumed that they could take on a fatherly role, having a say in who liberated people married, where they lived, and the form of their education and training. Strong asymmetrical dependency was assumed to be the default relationship between abolitionist authorities and emancipated people. Liberated children were doubly affected by these ongoing paternalistic claims, as both emancipated people and children.

Children had to negotiate these transitions between different forms of supportive and coercive “fictive kin.” A Yoruba boy named Ajayi was enslaved as a young teen-

ager in March 1821 in what is now Nigeria, and sold to Portuguese slave traders. Their ship, the *Esperanza Felix*, was stopped and the slaves liberated by the British, who renamed the boy Samuel Crowther. He later described his shipmates as having become “one family” on their journey from Lagos in 1822. Once captured and brought to the Colony of Sierra Leone for adjudication, this family was scattered to different settlements and placements. Samuel Crowther was placed “under the care of the Church Missionary Society.” BCDSS researcher Mary Aderonke Afolabi-Adeolu (2025) argues that “Crowther’s narrative shows implicit ways asymmetrical dependencies manifest even after he is set free.” Crowther moved through different forms of dependency, from his birth family to the strong asymmetrical and violent dependency of enslavement, to the mutual network of dependencies forged on the ship, into another form of dependency on the philanthropy of the missionary organisation. Crowther grew up as a ward of the mission, eventually taking on the role of missionary and spiritual leader. He was only one of tens of thousands of children “liberated” and “disposed” of by the British Empire.

African children were liberated from slavery through a variety of mechanisms, most notably the militarised interventions of the nineteenth century. After Britain outlawed the slave trade, British naval patrols captured ships suspected of illegal slave trading and brought them before courts for adjudication. These interventions were themselves frequently violent or coercive. The Africans on board, including large numbers of children and infants, while nominally “liberated,” were subsequently resettled in European-controlled colonies. In these colonial settings, newly liberated adults, missionaries, officials, and local communities struggled to accommodate an influx of children, many of whom had complex medical and emotional needs.

The British Slave Trade Abolition Act of 1807, which outlawed the transatlantic slave trade from Africa (though not slavery within British colonies), made only rudimentary provisions for the “future disposal



Portrait of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, 1867, a Yoruba who was enslaved as a young teenager in March 1821 in what is now Nigeria and who eventually became the first African Anglican bishop of West Africa in 1864. Source: *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora* (SI-0B-1274). Public domain

and support” of “liberated,” although in effect “recaptured” Africans taken from slave ships. Crucially, it made little meaningful distinction between adults and children. It stipulated that Africans, “whether of full Age or not,” could be bound as apprentices for terms of up to fourteen years. Boys aged fourteen to eighteen could also be enlisted into naval or military service, continuing a longer history of coerced African military labour in the British Empire. Little consideration was given to the specific needs of traumatised, often unaccompanied children.

Mortality rates were high: US American historian Yuko Miki described the registers of recaptured Africans as both “a memorial of liberation and a death record.” Martine Jean emphasises that the liberated people’s “statelessness” enabled the alienation of their rights. In the case of children, this stateless status extended to much broader exclusion from politics. Their perceived rootless and dependent status made it possible to treat them as moveable objects.

Children were assigned to planned settlements, to apprenticeships, and to missionary schools. Apprenticeships for Liberated Africans could result in cruel exploitation and abuse. Apprentices were forced to depend on those who exploited them. The same individuals who inflicted violence might also provide food, shelter, or rudimentary care. In other cases, apprenticeship resulted in both social mobility for the apprentice child and, apparently, the forming of deep affective bonds. Care, exploitation and dependency interacted in mutually reinforcing ways.

My research project aims to analyse these changing relationships between care, exploitation and dependency. I argue that the experiences of freed African children cannot be understood without examining how care operated within, and was shaped by, unequal structures of power. Care is a complex and, at times, contradictory concept. It may refer to the emotional dimension of responsibility for another, but it also encompasses the practical provision of physical and material support required to keep children alive in order to exploit their labour.

Examining dependency allows us to better understand the complex and often contradictory experiences of enslaved and liberated African children. It reveals how care could be both coercive and sustaining, how vulnerability and agency were intertwined, and how children navigated and reshaped the unequal relationships that structured their lives. From these histories, we gain not only deeper insight but also a renewed appreciation for the resilience and resourcefulness of children in the face of profound adversity.

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Dr. Christine Whyte is Senior Lecturer in Global History at the University of Glasgow and was a BCDSS Fellow in 2025. She is currently writing a book on the end of slavery in Sierra Leone and working on a research project exploring the lives and experiences of children liberated from the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade.



Unknown artist. Captain Hendrik Storm with His Son, Daughter, and Servants, c. 1760. Oil on canvas. Stellenbosch Museum, Bletterman Huis, Stellenbosch, South Africa. Licenced through Alamy.

DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY AT THE CAPE COLONY

WHAT DID THIS MEAN FOR CHILDREN?

by Kate Ekama and
Eva Marie Lehner

In July 2024, we met at a conference about “Histories of Childhood and Youth in Southern Africa” at the University of Free State, Bloemfontein Campus in South Africa, where scholars from around the world gathered to discuss the histories of childhood and youth in southern Africa. It was a chance for both of us to reconnect over a shared focus: the lives of children in the Cape Colony, a society shaped by slavery since its introduction by the Dutch East India Company in 1652. What does it mean to study childhood in a system built on unfreedom?

That question is not easy to answer. Children are rarely clearly identifiable in the historical record. They left few written traces of their own, and when they do appear, their words are most often mediated by the adults who created the records. Adults wrote about children in official documents like court records, church registers, slave registers, or ship logs that often reduced them to age, gender, and market value. Writing histories of and through children requires reading these diverse sources carefully, both to understand their original purpose and to read against it.

Yet children were not on the margins of slavery at the Cape. They were at its core. Many were transported across the Indian Ocean, separated from their families, sold, or born into slavery through laws that tied their status to that of their mothers. By looking across different periods and sources, we explore how systems of slavery and dependency shaped childhood, and how children and their families lived within, pushed against, and sometimes resisted those constraints.

Kate Ekama: In my recent work on slavery and emancipation in the Cape Colony I have paid close attention to the experiences of children and to age in the creation of written records. Manumission records for the final decade of slavery at the Cape, 1825-1834, show that many enslaved children were manumitted, including infants. According to the manumission registers for Cape Town, nearly one third of all people manumitted were children 10 years old and younger and most of those children were young girls. Ten was an especially important age because new regulations from 1823 and 1826 prohibited separating enslaved mothers and their children by sale before that age. Those regulations and other changes in record keeping practices made age all the more important to enslaved people. Slave Registers, introduced by the British across colonial slave societies, were first drawn up at the Cape in 1816. They included an approximate age for each enslaved person registered. In this record, age was in the eye of the slaveholder, who reported details to be entered for each person. A new element included in the records was an exact date of birth for each child born to an enslaved woman after registration began. There was a lot at stake in recording age, as both slaveholders and enslaved people knew: infants not registered in time were considered free born. My work probes the connection between freedom, work and age in the Cape Colony showing how work obligations shaped children's lives during and after slavery.

Eva Marie Lehner: Using colonial archives (including travelogues, ship journals, and court records), I explore how childhood was not understood as a short phase of growth and learning. Instead, it became a condition of enforced dependency. Enslaved children were treated as commodities, with their value tied to their physical development and future labor. At the same time, the legal system stripped parents of authority and recognition, making it difficult for families to exist as stable social units.

In a recent article I co-authored with Claudia Jarzebowski, we explored family portraits from a colonial context, focusing on how visual depictions of children allow for including different viewpoints and stories.



Dutch Reformed Church Archives, Stellenbosch: Baptismal records include entries for enslaved children born at the Cape by an enslaved mother, who inherited her unfree legal status. Dutch Reformed Church Records, Cape Town: Baptisms of Christian Children, 1665-1695 (G1/1/1), first page. Photo courtesy of Dutch Reformed Church in SA.

One of the pictures we explore is this family portrait, painted in the 1760s and now exhibited at the Stellenbosch Village Museum. It shows Hendrik Storm, a Dutch soldier who later became a captain in the VOC (the Dutch East India Company), standing with his two surviving children: his daughter Maria Magdalena and his son Henricus Jacobus. His wife is not in the painting. She died years earlier during childbirth, and her absence quietly shapes the scene.

At first glance, it looks like a fairly typical family portrait of the time. But if you look more closely, there's more going on. Behind the three central figures stand an enslaved woman and two children. They're dressed in red, echoing Storm's own clothing, which visually links them to the household. At the same time, the differences are clear. They are barefoot, placed in the background, and lack the markers of status seen in the foreground figures, such as wigs, shoes, accessories, and weapons.

Portraits like this were carefully composed to show status and hierarchy. Clothing, posture, and placement all carried meaning. This painting offers a rare glimpse into how colonial households presented themselves. Enslaved children are included in the image, suggesting their role within the household. They are present yet set apart.

Kate Ekama and Eva Marie Lehner: During a recent visit to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, we spent time in the reading room working with the notebooks and sketches of the Dutch preacher and artist Jan Brandes from his travels in the eighteenth century, including to the Cape and parts of Indonesia. Among his drawings are several depictions of children, who are often shown in everyday settings that rarely appear in written records.



Eva Lehner looks closely at Brandes' panoramic sketch of indigenous Khoekhoe people and colonists on the Cape flats, 1786. Original: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (NG-2027-14). Photo supplied by authors



Brandes' sketch of his son Jantje and Bietja, an enslaved girl, in his home in Batavia, 1784. The children sit on the floor and look up at the artist. Original: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (NG-1985-7-2-2). Photo supplied by authors

These images offer small but valuable clues. They show how children were dressed, where they stood in relation to adults, and sometimes what kinds of work or roles they were expected to take on. When we read these visual traces alongside sources like baptismal registers, court cases, slave and manumission records, a fuller picture begins to emerge.

Visual sources like Brandes' sketches help us to get the written sources into perspective and ask different questions, also for administrative sources. Read together, they make it possible to see childhood not as a fixed or universal stage, but as something shaped

by social structures such as slavery and dependency, conditions that defined the lives of many children in the past and still shape lives today.

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Fig. 1 Mandible of a juvenile individual from the village of Vilvenich (site 216_A, 10th–12th century) showing linear enamel hypoplasia (highlighted). The defect marks a disruption to tooth development between approximately 2.8 and 4 years of age, reflecting an episode of physiological stress during early childhood. Data and image courtesy of Leonie Pathé

DEPENDENT LIVES A CHILD, A TOOTH, AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CARE

by Alice Toso



Dr. Kate Ekama

is a senior researcher at the Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past (LEAP), Stellenbosch University. Her work focuses on slavery at the Cape under the Dutch East India Company and in the British Empire. Kate's publications include articles on slavery and emancipation in South Africa and Sri Lanka. She is also leading Project 1834 at Stellenbosch University which combines credible historical research, public history and visual redress.



Dr. Eva Marie Lehner

is a research associate and lecturer at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, University of Bonn. Her work focuses on slavery studies, Dutch colonial history, early modern record-keeping, and gender history. She currently researches slavery and resistance in the Dutch Cape Colony (1652–1795), emphasizing intersecting dependencies. She is also co-organiser of the Body History Working Group associated with RA Power, Violence and Trauma at the BCDSS.

The first time you notice it, it is easy to miss. A faint line, running across the surface of a skeleton's tooth. Thin, almost delicate. It does not look like much—just a slight interruption in the smooth white enamel. But under a trained eye, it becomes something else entirely: a pause in growth. A moment when the body, briefly, could not keep up.

In bioarchaeology, such lines on the surface of teeth (Figure 1)—enamel hypoplasias—are interpreted as markers of physiological stress during childhood, often associated with episodes of disease, malnutrition, or developmental disruption. They do not reveal a specific cause. But they do show that, at some point, the balance between need and provision was disrupted. For those studying childhood in the past, this is one of the clearest points at which dependency becomes visible. One individual makes this particularly tangible. From a medieval burial in the abandoned village of Vilvenich in a former mining region in North Rhine-Westphalia, analysed as part of Leonie Pathé's ongoing doctoral project, we identified a probable female aged between 12 and 14 years at death.



Fig. 2 Skeletal remains of a juvenile individual (site 216_A, 10th–12th century; probable female, 12–14 years at death). The skeleton shows multiple indicators of physiological stress, including signs consistent with malnutrition and developmental disturbance. Image courtesy of Leonie Pathé

Her stature was reduced, at approximately 143 cm, and her skeleton preserves multiple indicators of physiological stress. Among these are signs consistent with malnutrition, including scurvy, as well as sinusitis, developmental anomalies of the spine (atlas hypoplasia), cranial misalignment, and bilateral knock-knee. (Figure 2) Her teeth provide a more detailed timeline of these experiences. Linear enamel hypoplasia is visible on one of the anterior teeth, indicating a disruption to growth between approximately 2.8 and 4 years of age. Across the dentition, several such episodes can be identified, suggesting that physiological stress was not isolated, but recurrent during early childhood. What this record captures is not a single event, but a pattern. Periods of disruption—malnutrition or hunger—were followed by recovery, allowing the child's development to resume. This girl survived multiple episodes of physiological stress over several years, reaching adolescence despite persistent challenges to her health. Rather than indicating a simple absence of care, this pattern points to fluctuating conditions: poverty perhaps, or recurring bad harvests that simply did not produce enough nutritious food for everybody. The body records both constraint and resilience. It reflects a context in which dependency was repeatedly tested, but not entirely unsupported.

Children are, by definition, dependent. Their survival requires sustained access to food, protection, and care. Yet archaeological evidence shows that this dependency was not experienced uniformly. Even within the same burial population, children can display markedly different developmental patterns: some show relatively uninterrupted growth, while others exhibit repeated indicators of physiological stress. These differences are not simply biological. They reflect variation in access to resources, exposure to disease, and the capacity of caregivers to provide consistent support. In this sense, dependency is not only a universal condition of childhood—it is also structured by social and economic factors. At the same time, research in the archaeology of childhood has emphasised that children should not be treated as marginal or incomplete individuals, but as central to the reconstruction of past societies.

TRACING DEPENDENCY IN THE BODY

One of the challenges of studying children in the past is their relative absence from written records. When they do appear, it is often indirectly, within households or demographic summaries. Bioarchaeology offers a different kind of archive. Teeth and bones preserve aspects of early life that were never formally recorded. Because tooth enamel does not remodel, it retains a chronological record of development. Interruptions to growth are permanently inscribed. Skeletal indicators, including growth delay or pathological changes, provide complementary evidence of health and stress during childhood.

Approaches such as these have contributed to a broader shift within archaeology, in which children are no longer viewed as peripheral, but as essential to understanding social organisation and lived experience. In recent decades, biomolecular methods have extended these insights. Stable isotope analysis has made it possible to reconstruct infant feeding practices, including breastfeeding duration and the timing of weaning. These transitions are particularly significant, as they mark a shift from a protected nutritional source (i.e., secure, regular feeding with something that contains all the necessary nutrients—breast milk) to broader environmental exposure (i.e., an insecure and unreliable food supply).

Feeding practices, however, are not determined by biology alone. They are shaped by labour demands, household structure, cultural norms, and the availability of resources. As such, they provide a direct link between physiological development and social organisation.

CHILDHOOD DIET AND THE ORGANISATION OF CARE

This connection becomes especially clear when dietary change is reconstructed at the level of individual life histories. One of the main methods used to do this is stable isotope analysis. Simply put, the food we eat leaves a chemical signature in our bodies. As bones and teeth form, they incorporate elements from that diet, preserving a record of what a person consumed. Different tissues form at different stages of life. Teeth, in particular, develop during childhood and do not change afterwards, meaning they retain a chronological record of early diet. By analysing carbon and nitrogen isotopes in these tissues, it is possible to identify shifts in food intake over time, including the transition from breastfeeding to solid foods.

In a recent study of medieval individuals from Portugal, my colleagues and I applied Bayesian modelling to carbon and nitrogen isotope data from bone and dentine collagen to track dietary changes across childhood. Bones and teeth were sampled from hundreds of individuals spanning from the late Roman to the late Medieval period in Central and Southern Portugal (Figure 3). Rather than producing a single average value for childhood diet, this approach allowed us to identify trajectories over time within individuals.

The results showed considerable variation. Some individuals exhibited patterns consistent with prolonged breastfeeding followed by gradual dietary diversification. Others showed more abrupt transitions, suggesting earlier or less buffered shifts in food intake. These differences are significant because they reflect variation in how dependency was managed. Infant feeding is one of the most direct expressions of care. A child's diet depends entirely on others, and changes in feeding practices often correspond to broader household dynamics. Prolonged breastfeeding may function as a protective strategy in environments with high disease risk or unstable food supply. Earlier weaning may reflect different constraints, including maternal workload, the presence of additional children, or limited resources. As exclusive breastfeeding can delay the resumption of fertility, earlier weaning may also indicate a need to conceive again sooner. The timing of weaning and the inferred birth rates can provide insight into the type of investment and care that families adopted for their children. For example, while periods of high fertility are often associated with higher mortality, prolonged weaning and delayed return to fertility may indicate a greater investment in existing children rather than in potential future offspring. In this way, isotopic data provide more than dietary information. They offer insight into how care was structured and how unevenly it could be sustained.



Fig. 3 Sampling teeth and bones to reconstruct childhood diet in Portuguese historical populations. Each layer preserves a chemical trace of what was eaten, allowing changes in feeding practices to be followed over time. Images courtesy of Alice Toso

At the same time, approaches that reconstruct change of these practices through time align with a growing emphasis on life-course perspectives in bioarchaeology, where childhood and adolescence are understood as dynamic stages shaped by the interaction between biological development and social conditions.

UNEQUAL DEPENDENCY

Archaeological evidence consistently shows that childhood experiences were not uniform. Within a single population, some individuals display repeated markers of stress, while others do not. These patterns are often interpreted in relation to differences in status, household conditions, or access to resources. Dependency, therefore, can be understood as a lens through which inequality becomes visible. All children require care, but not all receive the same level or quality of support.

Importantly, this does not imply that children were passive recipients of care. Archaeological research increasingly recognises children as active participants within social and economic systems, even while they remain dependent. Their experiences reflect not only vulnerability, but also their position within networks of labour, kinship, and social interaction.

It is important, however, not to interpret all evidence of stress as an absence of care. Many individuals who experienced physiological disruption during childhood survived long enough for these events to be recorded in their teeth or bones.

This suggests that, even in challenging conditions, some degree of recovery was possible. Episodes of stress were not always terminal, and their presence may reflect fluctuating rather than consistently adverse conditions. In some cases, individuals with evidence of chronic conditions or long-term impairment survived for extended periods, implying sustained support: they were cared for as much as possible, whenever possible. The fact that it was periodically not possible to feed children shows up the effects of inequality. Such findings complicate assumptions that past societies responded uniformly to vulnerability. Instead, they point to variability in how dependency was managed, and to the presence of care even under constraint.

FROM DEPENDENCY TO INTERDEPENDENCE

While children are often described as dependent, this relationship is not one-directional. Caregiving involves significant investments of time, energy, and resources, and it affects the health and well-being of caregivers themselves.

Pregnancy, lactation, and childcare are physiologically demanding, and they are embedded within broader systems of labour and social organisation. As a result, childhood dependency is best understood within a wider framework of interdependence, where the well-being of children and caregivers is closely linked. Life-course approaches have increasingly emphasised these connections, highlighting how early-life conditions shape later outcomes and how different stages of life are interconnected.

CONCLUSION

Children are often difficult to identify in the historical record, but they are central to understanding how societies functioned.

Their skeletal and biomolecular remains provide direct evidence of how dependency was experienced and managed. Small-scale features—such as a line in a tooth or a shift in isotopic values—capture moments where the balance between need and provision changed.

Taken together, these traces allow us to move beyond viewing dependency as a simple or uniform condition. Instead, they show it as historically variable, shaped by inequality, caregiving practices, and broader social structures.

In this sense, children's remains are not only evidence of biological development. They are records of how societies supported—or struggled to support—those who depended on others most. More broadly, they reinforce a central insight of the archaeology of childhood: that children are not peripheral to archaeological interpretation, but fundamental to it.

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Albrecht Dürer: *Self-portrait at the age of thirteen*. Written in the top right-hand corner is the sentence, 'I drew this from myself in a mirror in the year 1484, when I was still a child. Abrecht Dürer' ('Dz hab Ich aws eim spigell nach mir selbs kunterfet Im 1484 Jar Do ich noch ein kint was. Abrecht Dürer'). Silverpoint on white paper, 275 mm by 196 mm, Vienna, Albertina.

CHILDREN'S TESTIMONIES
UNLOCKING
HISTORICAL AND
ART-HISTORICAL
ARCHIVES

by Claudia Jarzebowski &
Birgit Ulrike Münch

translated by Imogen Herrad

Children are the adults of the future. This is how a recent 'turn' within history, art history and cultural studies regards children. As a result, scholars in these disciplines place children at the centre of their research. Rather than regarding them as the proverbial 'small adults', they seek to incorporate the wealth of the experiences and distinct perspectives of young people from past eras into the historical discourse. This is an exciting and promising, and sometimes also a challenging endeavour.

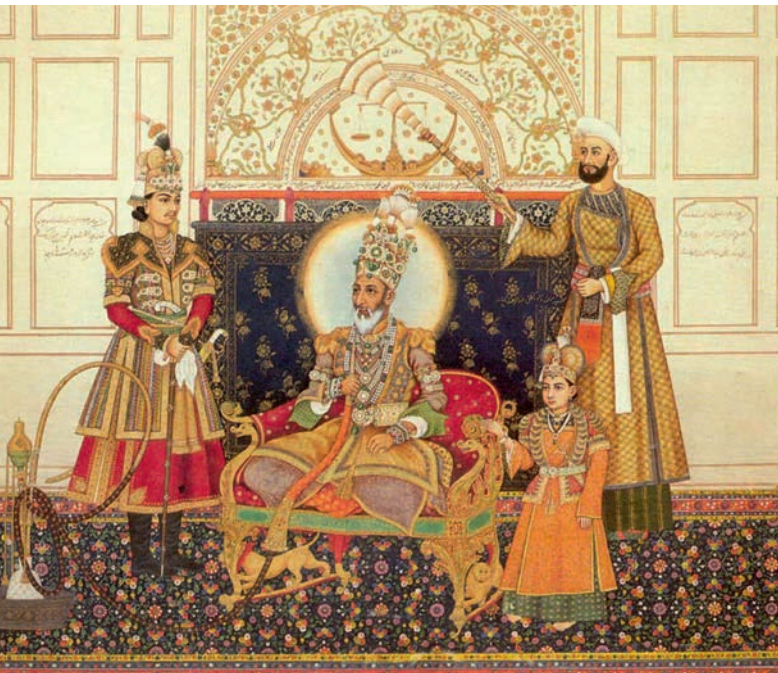
One of the central challenges lies in the question of what sources we have with which to establish a child-centred historiography. The negative interpretation of this question – i.e. saying that there simply are too few sources, that essentially we just don't know and can't know – led historians over the last two or three generations to exclude children from historical perception on the grounds that they had not left behind any records of their own, or that a comprehensive analysis was impossible because the sources are so few and patchy.

Then again, the vast majority of historical societies before 1900 left no records of their own; the testimonies they did leave were not deemed sufficiently important or valuable to be preserved and archived. Children are just one group of many: poor people, illiterate people, nomads, migrants, enslaved men and women – we could continue and expand the list for every epoch and every historical space. And yet: does this mean that they should be excluded from historiography? In the light of our current understanding, we answer this question with a resounding No. Because children, to return to them, left behind many different traces: in written documents penned by others, in pictorial records and in material culture. In addition, there are the memories that adults have of their own childhood, from their own



Jun. Prof. Dr. Alice Toso
is Professor of Bioarchaeology at the University of Bonn. She studies how childhood, diet, and inequality shaped past lives, using skeletal and biomolecular evidence to trace individual life histories. Her research focuses on how dependency and care are experienced and embodied across the life course. By combining scientific analysis with broader social theory, she aims to understand how people lived, grew, and coped with vulnerability in past societies.

childhood and of themselves as children. Because just as children are the adults of the future, so too is every adult a former child.



Children as 'small adults': Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II with His Children, miniature painting, May 1838. India. Collection of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA. Source: DeAgostini/Alamy

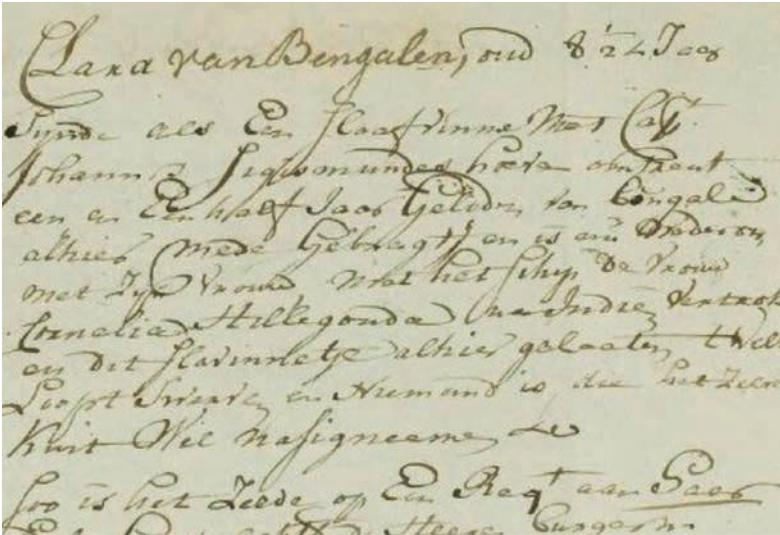
When we combine this broad range of different, source-based approaches, we can write a social history of childhood that focuses on children and their experiences. This type of interdisciplinary historiography could make an enormous and significant contribution: one that would go far beyond a history of children, whilst remaining empirically grounded. We will take up two particularly important theoretical impulses: the concept of *bricolage* created by Michel Foucault, and the concept of the *trace* by the Martinican philosopher and poet Edouard Glissant, and put both to fruitful use for historical and art historical research. The French word *bricoler* means 'to throw or to cobble something together', and *bricolage* refers to the practice of creating something by using a variety of elements or materials not usually associated with each other. Edouard Glissant repeatedly grappled with the im/possibility of writing the history of his home, the Caribbean island of Martinique, whose plantation society was characterised by the loss of the personal identities of the enslaved: nevertheless, Glissant maintained, *traces* remained: of African languages, cultures,

Entry in the admissions register of the Aalmoezeniersweeshuis ('Poorhouse Orphanage') in Amsterdam, dated 28 December 1786, about eight-year-old Clara van Bengalen: 'She was brought here about a year and a half ago from Bengal as an enslaved person by Captain Sigismundus Heve. He has now sailed back to the Indies with his wife, leaving the little slave girl behind. She wanders about, having no one who knows her or is willing to take her in.' Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

songs and histories. Both Foucault and Glissant saw themselves as part of an *histoire totale* – a view of historiography that seeks to analyse the long- and medium-term evolution of economies, societies and civilisations –, which aims to generate historical plausibilities about a field of study or a subject area for which we have only fragmentary testimonies, by including, as comprehensively as possible, all available sources for a given context. We will complement these impulses by incorporating Saidiya V. Hartman's literary concept of *critical fabulation*, which proposes filling in perceived gaps with fictionalised source fragments that are closely linked in both time and space, in order to capture the child's perspective – especially by including children's drawings, caricatures, etc. Traces left by events and experiences in material and immaterial, visual or textual culture – a canon of tradition often referred to as a 'cultural archive' – can frequently lead us to children in history. Children were – and are – signifiers, symbols, but also actors within the social and societal fabric. The adults around them attempted



The artist's son Jantje with Bietja, an enslaved girl, in the bedroom; drawing, Jan Brandes, around 1784, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, detail.



– and attempt – to impose discipline and conformity on them, but children are and were resistant, headstrong, not yet fully conditioned and socialised. They eluded and continue to elude complete control, although not as a conscious act, and thereby express themselves in a language which psychologists understand and interpret as the language of action.

This dimension of the language of action, which leaves traces, unites the types of sources we mentioned above – texts, pictorial records and material culture –, and it will be the focus of the launch event for one of the BCDSS's new Research Areas, 'Power, Violence, Trauma'.

Studying the evidence left by children therefore does much more than merely add a previously neglected perspective. By asking fresh questions of existing archives, sources and interpretative frameworks, we can open new windows on historical societies overall. Children's testimony – by which we mean traces, fragments and imprints of childhood experiences – call for a broader conception of historical evidence and a critical reflection on the limits of what can be archived.

At the inaugural event of the Research Area 'Power, Violence, Trauma', one of the five new Research Areas at the BCDSS, we will take up this challenge and explore how children can be made visible as historical actors within cultural archives. We will focus on the question of which methodological and theoretical approaches are necessary – not only to reconstruct children's experiences, but to utilise these experiences as specific knowledge stores on which historians and art historians can draw for our work.

We are especially honoured to host a panel discussion on the childhood letters of Edgar Feuchtwanger (1924–2025), who as an adult was a notable German-British historian. Feuchtwanger – a nephew of the novelist and playwright Lion Feuchtwanger – was forced to leave his home in Germany and migrate to England as a boy, expecting his parents to follow. The editor of the letters, Anja Tuckermann, Feuchtwanger's daughter, Antonia Cox, and we hope also Ulrich Kießling, a child psychoanalyst, will engage in a conversation on how children's letters can be read and understood as testimonies of violent experiences, such as separation, fear, and perhaps desperation. This panel discussion will be our inaugural attempt to bring historical, contemporary and psychological perspectives into dialogue and, not least, to honour a fellow historian. (In Edgar's case, his parents were eventually able to secure permission to leave Germany and emigrated before the country's borders effectively closed in September 1939.)

PANEL DISCUSSION

CHILDREN'S LETTERS AS TESTIMONIES OF DISRUPTION, HOPE, AND LIVED HISTORY?

An interdisciplinary discussion on Edgar Feuchtwanger's childhood letters, with his daughter Antonia Cox and publisher Anja Tuckermann

Part of the conference: Children's Testimonies: Unlocking Historical and Art-Historical Archives (28–30 October 2026).

Launch event: 28 October, 6:00 PM
Panel discussion: 29 October, 6:00 PM
Location: IMPULSE – House for Intellectual Innovation and Creativity
Adenauerallee 131
53113 Bonn

SAVE THE DATE
28 – 30
OCTOBER
2026



Prof. Dr. Claudia Jarzebowski
Is Professor for Early Modern History and Dependency Studies at the BCDSS. As part of the Research Area 'Power, Violence, Trauma' she works on a project on children's testimonies in early modern history.



Prof. Dr. Birgit Ulrike Münch
Is Professor of Art History with a focus on Dutch art and Vice Rector for International Affairs. As Principal Investigator at the BCDSS and part of the Research Area 'Power, Violence, Trauma' she is working on a project on sex work in European metropolises and colonial settings (17th–19e century). She is currently also involved in collaborative projects with museums in Antwerp, Kassel, and Bonn, including initiatives on children's materials and the untold histories of prostitution.



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.

FIELD RESEARCHERS' REPORTS



On the way to meet the Chief of Samatiguila, one of the three principal centers of the former Kabadugu Kingdom. Researching memories of slavery in these communities remains challenging, as descendants of both former masters and slaves are often reluctant to speak. Photo: Dosso, 2025

OLD MEN AND NEW DIRECTIONS

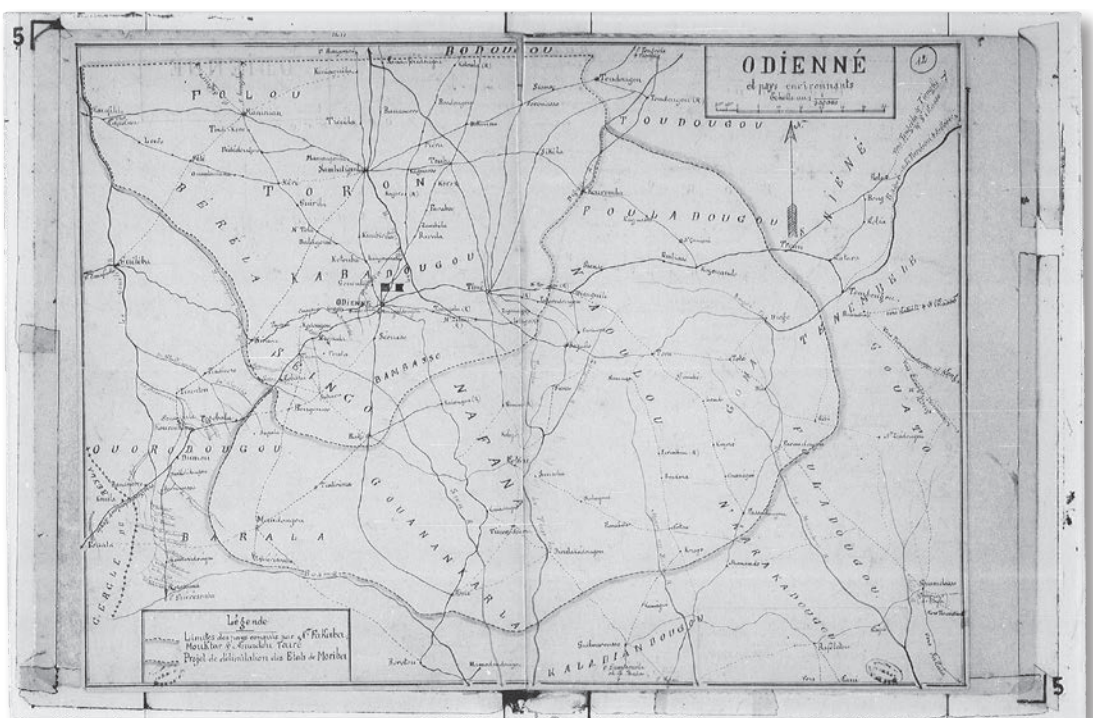
RETRACING THE ITINERARIES OF MANUMITTED SLAVES IN NORTHWESTERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

by Issouf Dosso

The abolition of slavery in French West Africa occurred against a backdrop of vast imperial political upheavals, which led to profound transformations in the political economy of many African societies. One of these were large slave exoduses. In 1903, France made slavery illegal in its courts and tribunals. In 1905, they abolished the slave trade and slavery. These events marked a turning point in France's ambivalent policy on slavery, thereby depriving masters of their legal entitlement to exercise their slave ownership. More and more slaves now began to leave their former masters, and generally no one stepped in to stop or reclaim them. The ubiquity of slave exoduses meant that slavery as a legal institution had collapsed. Departures were recorded in the French Sudan, Senegal and Guinea. It has been estimated that over a million slaves left their former owners throughout French West Africa.

TRACING THOSE WHO RELOCATED FROM KABADUGU

In Kabadugu in northwestern Côte d'Ivoire, where I recently carried out exploratory field research as part of my PhD project on the aftermath of the abolition of slavery at the beginning of the twentieth century, colonial sources reported that more than eight or even nine thousand slaves had walked away from their owners in just a few months after the abolition of slavery in May 1907. While 1905 officially marked the end of slavery in French West Africa, the imple-



Kabadugu Kingdom and neighboring states in 1897. Courtesy of Archives Nationales d'Outres Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France

Noms des Villages	Population totale des Colonies (1911)	Côte d'Ivoire					Guinée		Haute Volta et Niger				Mali	Sénégal	Sièges des Colonies
		Abidjan	Cocody	Débo	Yamoussoukro	Other	Conakry	Guinea	Bobo	Diourbel	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other
TOKALA	123	42	72	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
OTASSOMPOLAGBO	78														
WAKANDIANA	756														
BOUBOUZENI	110														
OTELLS	287														
GOLO	16														
BOYA	57														
ZAMBALA	51														
OUANIRE	152														
SENE	113														

Statistics on the Liberation of Captives, Le Campion, 1914. The vertical columns with red text name the locations where former slaves had been enslaved. The letter "H" designates a male former slave (homme). The letter "F" stands for a female former slave (femme). The number in brackets following each letter indicates the number of years that had elapsed between a former slave's return to their village and the production of the document in 1914. Thus, F (3) denotes a formerly enslaved woman who had returned to her village three years earlier. Courtesy of Archives Nationales Outre-Mer (1AFF-POL 982), Aix-en-Provence, France

mentation of this policy was a complex and gradual process, resulting in varying dates for implementing it across the societies involved. In the Kabadugu Kingdom, the exodus led to a decline in the population formerly dominated by slaves, who had lived in 96 of the 104 villages comprising the kingdom. Not included in these figures were those who, for a myriad reasons, escaped the control of colonial agents by using strategies and routes the latter were unacquainted with. It has been argued that the colonial administration often misinterpreted the movements of former slaves. One consequence of the exodus was a temporary shortage of labor, which undermined the masters' authority and wealth.

My aim was to retrace the itineraries of those manumitted slaves who left Kabadugu in order to historicize their movements across the country. Particularly important to me was the impact of the abolition of slavery on the cultural landscape in certain Ivorian urban communities. I was interested in the interplay between the migration patterns of freed slaves and the formation of heterogenous ethnic communities in southwestern Côte d'Ivoire, where diasporic ethnicities from Kabadugu have long been prominent. Since I was confronted with a lack of relevant primary sources required for planning my project, the BCDSS funded archival and exploratory research, which I was able to conduct in May 2025.

THE FIRST CHALLENGE:

FINDING PEOPLE WILLING TO TALK ABOUT SLAVERY

Because Kabadugu Kingdom historically spanned a vast territory with over a hundred towns and villages, my investigations focused on its three most prominent centers, where historically almost the entire population had lived. These are Odienné, the capital, as well as the towns of Samatiguila and Tiémé. Researching the memories of slavery in these communities remains a challenging and sensitive task, because both descendants of former masters and those of slaves seem too often uncomfortable to speak. The reluctance of the descendants of former owners often points to their tendency to avoid disinterring lingering tensions with the descendants of former slaves that could undermine cohesion and the relationships from which they draw a great benefit. Analogously, embracing one's inherited slave status is just painful, as it means reopening the trauma of slavery. Above all, it brings shame and disrepute, mostly resulting in social stigma. Unfortunately, these collective efforts aimed at confining the history of this divisive past has led to its disappearance. Colonial administrations and post-independence African governments alike championed these politics of erasure for the sake of so-called nation-building. In both urban and rural areas, this silencing of slavery often manifests as a "public secret," which is especially visible among the descendants of those who experienced slavery. Since insecurity and kidnappings were common just after the abolition of slavery, former slaves took on a non-slave identity and hid their past to avoid being taken captive and re-enslaved. Today, this culture of silence has led to a tradition of safety and a site of collective oblivion for many. Two of my informants remarked that many people of slave descent are not even aware that their ancestors were slaves. But for those who know about their slave past, the mere idea of accepting and discussing it, continues to manifest as a source of social stigma and emotional strain. Given the sensitive nature of these issues related to the legacy of slavery, the main methodological challenges for me were where to start and who to talk to. Elsewhere in West Africa, historians of African slavery have often been able to locate villages settled by former slaves and conduct research there. In my case, I was unaware of any community established by freed slaves from the Kabadugu kingdom.

Before I went to the town of Odienné, I contacted an acquaintance who has family there. They kindly volunteered to arrange a meeting for me with the chief of the canton of Kabadugu. Unfortunately, when I arrived in Odienné in May 2025, the chief was away, but I was still able to meet with some elderly members of his entourage, including his official emissary. I initially intended to conduct a one-on-one interview with the

chief, but I found myself in the midst of a gathering of old noblemen, doing a focus group. Problematic with group interviews at this stage was that some participants hesitated to contribute to the conversation. The emissary of the chief was the main interlocutor who answered most of my questions. He would lead the conversation and keep asking rhetorical questions of others, which complicated my work. Three of the men, including the emissary, were active in the discussion. Another man distrustfully explained that he barely knew anything about the things I wished to enquire about. A fifth old man sat apart and listened, and a young clerk took notes.



The regional headquarter of the "Chambre National des Rois et Chefs Traditionnels de Côte d'Ivoire" ("National Chamber of Kings and Traditional Leaders of Côte d'Ivoire"), where the office of the chief of the canton of Kabadugu "Djamanantiguissou du Kabadugu" in Odienné is located. Photo: Dosso, 2025



The office of the chief of the canton of Kabadugu in Odienné. These photos showcase prominent figures of the royal family and other local personalities including clergymen, politicians and traditional notables. Photo: Dosso, 2025

The discussion focused on ordinary matters to avoid bringing up the word "slavery" early. I asked broad questions regarding everyday sociocultural and economic life before and during the French rule. Inevitably, at some point in the conversation, the issue of slavery came up. My main interlocutor seemed less disposed to answer questions fully. Was this change in mood due to embarrassment, a lack of interest or the presence of other notables? His body language and statements seemed to indicate suspicion and reservation. He was, however, kind enough to continue the conversation. They told me that when the abolition of slavery occurred in 1907, Ibrahima Ture, their ancestor and then king of Kabadugu, toured all the slave settlements to persuade the enslaved to stay. "If you choose to stay, we will be brothers," he said. After the dust of the abolition had settled, they found out that not all the former slaves had left. "You are our brothers, those who left were our real slaves," the ancestor told those who had opted to stay. My informants used this latter statement as a turning point in their memories of the slaves who – in their thinking – had abandoned their ancestors at the end of slavery. By contrast, they acknowledged their relationships with those former slaves who had chosen to remain, whom they referred to not as "former slaves" but rather as "nos gens – collaborateurs" literally translated in English as "our people – partners."

Afterwards, one of the noblemen offered to put me in touch with some potential informants. Disappointingly, though, the interviews did not yield enough relevant data, while I had little time left. I spent one month in Côte d'Ivoire but my time was divided between the archives and the fieldwork. I immediately realized that sporadic interviews would not suffice to build a relationship of trust with the informants that is necessary to overcome sociocultural obstacles and access their voices on a topic as sensitive as slavery. I should have stayed longer with them, observed and interacted with them, and also participated in their daily routines. I intend to follow this approach when I return to the field next time.

WHEN FIELD OBSERVATIONS SUGGEST A CHANGE IN THE PROJECT DIRECTION

Interestingly, although interviews generated little data relevant to my initial inquiry, some minor details from our conversations began catching my attention. Some informants maintained that the exodus that followed the abolition of slavery was not that significant. They insisted that Odienné had not been greatly affected by the abolition of slavery and that the vast majority of slaves in the town had not left. In fact, archival sources corroborate this point, indicating that Odienné was less affected than Samatiguila and Tiémé. Unfortunately, I never managed to find any

contacts in Tiémé. But one of my informants from Odienné agreed to connect me with the chief of Samatiguila. "My ancestors had countless slaves – they farmed our fields. After liberation, some left but some also stayed," the old man declared.



On the way to Samatiguila. Photo: Dosso, 2025

Furthermore, another point that particularly drew my attention was insistence on the existence of 18 so-called "Sofa" communities of the formerly enslaved on the outskirts of Odienné. People pointed to them as visual evidence of the massive presence of freed slaves after abolition. Similar "Sofa" villages are also found near other important towns, formerly inhabited by freeborn people such as Tiémé and Samatiguila. The term "Sofa" is a contested Malinké word, but it broadly referred to slave soldiers employed in agricultural labor and warfare. According to colonial sources, the ranks of those slaves who stayed in Kabadugu were also swelled by freed slaves from Senegal, Guinea and Haut-Senegal et Niger, who returned to their homes in Kabadugu. I wondered why the former slaves had returned or stayed in "Sofa" settlements after abolition. Were they all "woloso" slaves, i.e. those who had been born in the master's house, who generally did not leave? What were their relationships with their

former owners after abolition? What of their descendants today? One of my informants from Odienné said to me: "If I go to one of these [Sofa] villages today, regardless of my age, as long as I am a son or member of the family of Vakaba [the ruling family], I will be held in high regard." On another occasion, he added: "If an urgent matter arises now and I summoned the "Sofas", the room will be full immediately – everyone will show up." This unexpected information stirred my curiosity. I wanted to find out more about the materialization and reappropriation of the memories of slavery; how slavery was remembered, even though this would require a redirection of my project. As a result, I began looking at the interactions between the descendants of former owners and of former slaves who had remained or returned, rather than retracing the stories of those who had left. Field research had given my project a new direction.

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Issouf Dosso is a junior fellow at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies at the University of Bonn, where he received an MA in Dependency and Slavery Studies. He is interested in slavery and abolition, labor studies and French colonialism, African women's history and gender studies. His research specifically examines the abolition of slavery in northwestern Côte d'Ivoire and its lingering legacies on relations between descendants of former owners and slaves.



Bay of Havana with the famous riverside boulevard Malecón near the harbor entrance. This photo and all following (unless stated otherwise): Michael Zeuske, 2026

DESPITE THE OIL BLOCKADE
AND TRUMP'S THREATS –
ARCHIVE RESEARCH
AND A CONFERENCE
IN CUBA

by Michael Zeuske

translated by Imogen Herrad

This was a trip undertaken at a significant moment in world history: Following the attack on Venezuela in January 2026, everybody feared or expected the Trump administration to militarily attack Cuba. I went for purposes of field and archive research, as well as to attend a conference with our partners in Cienfuegos and a small workshop in Havana. It was a complicated and exciting experience.

The general austerity measures in Cuba and the Trump administration's aggressive policies toward Venezuela, Cuba und Mexico made preparing this trip unusually challenging. In February, when I set out, there were two completely different discourse blocks regarding Cuba: The one in the western media said the "regime" in Cuba faced imminent collapse, and warned against going – especially flying – to Cuba as there was no gasoline or kerosine. The other discourse was that of people who have to live in Cuba – i.e., Cubans – or those who want to (i.e. many foreigners); they said it's not so bad, it's been like that for years, only now there are more power outages and some extra hours of closures. Cuba already has a four-day workweek, so that Friday is effectively no longer a workday in government offices, archives, and state institutions.

I have had ties in Cuba since 1963: I went to a Cuban school and celebrated my eleventh and twelfth birthdays in Havana; I learnt Cuban Spanish in the streets, playing pelota (baseball) with our neighbors' children, Carlito and Luisito. In 1986 and 1987 I returned to Havana as a young postdoc to work there in the National Library and the National Archives. Since 1993, I have been active in several DFG projects (funded by the German Research Foundation) in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Santa Clara and Matanzas, all of which centered around my main research topic at that time, "Voices of slaves."

My long-time (state-employed) taxi driver canceled two days before my departure, because of the fuel shortage. However, a (private) start-up in Cuba, run by a young woman, arranges a private, chauffeured car to meet me at the airport – at thrice the price. Because of the frequent power outages (*apagones*), even in Havana, I book myself into an apartment in the city's touristic center, La Habana Vieja ("Old Havana"), because my local contacts have told me that *apagones* are extremely rare there. My contacts were right. Havana's tourist center is paradise for me during the first few days of my stay; especially during the day, when the usually congested streets are empty.

I work every day except Fridays in the National Archive, the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, which has shortened its opening hours because of the crisis. (It used to be open from 8.00 AM to 4.00 PM, but now already



Archivo Nacional de Cuba, of residence permit (*carta de domicilio*) of a German bowl maker

closes at noon.) In addition to notarial records, which I have been studying for decades, I systematically research two types of sources: first, actions brought by enslaved people against their owners (*quejas*), and second, residence permits (*cartas de domicilio*) for foreigners in Cuba, especially Havana. Among the applicants are many Germans, US Americans, Frenchmen and Scots, but also men from Italy and Switzerland. There are even Poles; and some women, who as widows are legal agents.

The National Archive is only a ten minutes' walk from the house of Francisco de Arango y Parreño (1775-1837), a Cuban intellectual, humanist, economist, orator, and plantation owner.

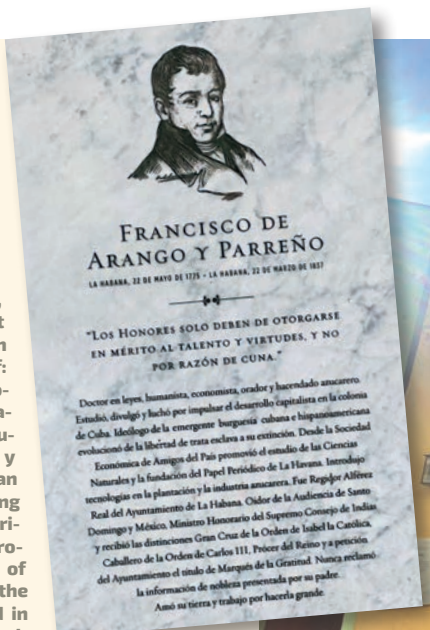


I also lead a program called "La Habana. Lugares de la Esclavitud" ("Havana. Places of Slavery"), and together with students of CASA (the Consortium for Advanced Studies Abroad) from Brown, Harvard, Duke and other US universities, we go on excursions to the places where slaves arrived at Havana's port, where they had to spend time in quarantine, and to the barracks (*barracones*) where they were taken – quasi-labor prisons, where slaves were also sold.

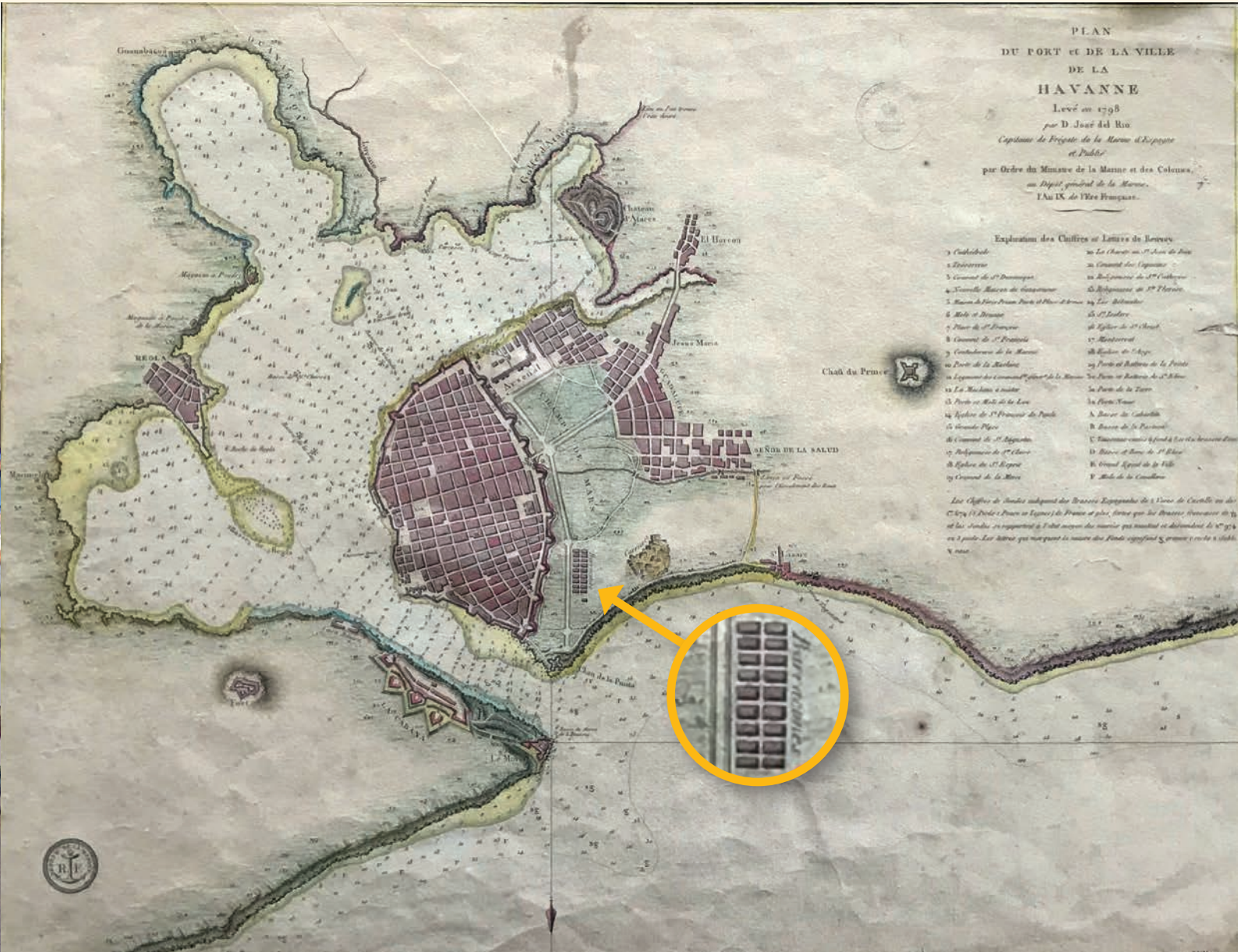


Guided tour of Havana: "Lugares de la Esclavitud" ('Places of Slavery')

Plaque on the house of Francisco de Arango y Parreño (1775-1837), a Cuban intellectual, humanist, economist, orator, and plantation owner. It opens with a quotation from the man himself: "Honors should be bestowed only on the basis of talent and virtues, not because of one's birth." Arango y Parreño is described as "an ideologue of the emerging Cuban and Spanish-American bourgeoisie" and a proponent of abolition and of science, who supported the first periodical published in Havana, *Papel Periódico de La Habana*, which ran from 1790 to 1805 and disseminated economic, scientific, and cultural ideas in the Spanish colony. He also held various posts in the colonial administration. The plaque closes with emphatic words of praise (strikingly resonant with sentiments still heard today): "He loved his land and worked to make it great."



The house of Francisco de Arango, slavery economist, in calle Amargura in "Old Havana".



Map of Havana by José del Río, 1798, showing slave barracks

We also come across the restaurant "Paladar Los Mercaderes." The building, which dates to c.1800, used to be the luxury textile store of the German trader Christian Wilhelm Jamm in the 1850s.



The restaurant "Paladar Los Mercaderes." The building, which dates to c.1800, used to be the luxury textile store of the German trader Christian Wilhelm Jamm in the 1850s.

How did the son of a locksmith from a small tranquil city in southern Germany's Black Forest region come to live in Cuba, and what ties did he have to slavery and the trade in enslaved people?



Portrait of Christian Wilhelm Jamm in Cuba, nineteenth century. Reproduced in Walter Caroli, "Der einsame Kaufmann aus Lahr, der der Stadt den Stadtpark vermachte," *Badische Zeitung*, March 31, 2025. ©Stadtmuseum Lahr

Importantly, Jamm was no slave trader himself. Just as importantly, his is not an isolated case. Like many other German businessmen, Jamm benefited directly from the wealth of slave society. In the nineteenth century, Cuba was not a poor and far-away country: It was a booming economy of second-wave globalization, plantation slavery-capitalism, and a very serious competitor to European economies. Havana was inhabited by a financially powerful upper class whose members had made their wealth from plantation labour and slave trade. They were Jamm's customers, and so he and his contemporaries were not slave traders or plantation owners, but benefited directly from the wealth of slave society – as does, indirectly, the small city of Lahr, whose inhabitants still enjoy the beautiful public park paid for with Jamm's wealth from Cuba.

As a young man in the 1830s, Christian Jamm went abroad to seek his fortune. After many travels he eventually set up as a merchant in Havana, where he traded luxury textiles and fabrics as well as linen fabrics for plantation slaves. He grew rich on this trade (especially through the slave fabric trade), and in the 1850s he returned to Germany, where he lived on his wealth. In his will, he left generous sums of money for the church, cultural institutions, and the poor, and donated his splendid villa and its gardens to his home city of Lahr as a public park.



Symptoms of the long crisis: trash in the streets of Havana

During my tour, I encounter the first disturbing symptom of the long crisis: Chikungunya (not mentioned as a potential threat in the western discourse on Cuba). Chikungunya is a viral disease similar to dengue and yellow fever, but with more severe consequences. The symptoms include fever and joint pain. The fever usually passes after a couple of weeks, but the pain persists, and can intensify months or even years after infection. The manager of my building, a man of perhaps sixty, can barely walk due to the pain in his hip joint. Chikungunya is widespread in Cuba. Under Fidel Castro, power sprayers that ran on diesel or gasoline would spray insecticide solutions up to the height of houses to combat mosquitoes, but those times are long over. Another very unsettling problem in Havana (and indeed all of Cuba, as I found out) are the large heaps of trash in the streets beyond the tourist center. Sometimes, for fear of vermin, they are even set on fire.

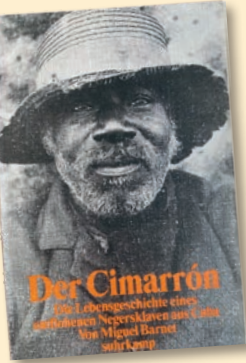
After a week, I move on to Santa Clara. In the provincial archives, I consult notarial records bound in thick leather volumes. There are hundreds. For the last seven years or so, I have been looking for the purchase record of Dionisia Conga. She was the mother of Esteban Montejo, known as *El Cimarrón*, and she was bought by the Catalan slave owner Tomás Ribalta. The provincial archive, a treasure trove of excellent sources, is only open on two days a week now from 8.00 AM – 1.00 PM.



The provincial archive in Santa Clara (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Villa Clara, AHPVC)

**ESTEBAN MONTEJO,
KNOWN AS EL CIMARRÓN
(C. 1868-1973)**

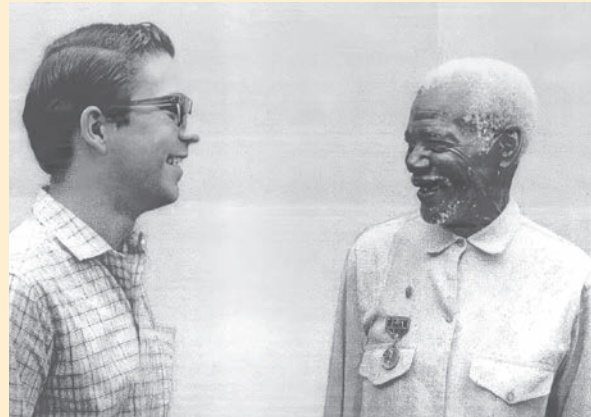
Cimarrón is the Spanish word for a runaway slave (the English equivalent is “maroon”). Today, Esteban Montejo is perhaps known as the runaway slave. During his extraordinary – and extraordinarily long – life, Esteban was born into slavery, escaped from it before the institution was abolished in Cuba in 1886 (when he was perhaps in his early twenties) and lived as a single maroon. He fought for independence in the Cuban War of Independence against Spain (1895-1898), and witnessed the Cuban Revolution in 1959. He worked on farms and plantations, and spent his last years living at a home for war veterans.



Esteban Montejo, known as *El Cimarrón* ('The Runaway Slave'), whose life-story was famously published by Miguel Barnet in 1966.

At the age of around 104, Esteban was interviewed by the Cuban ethnologist Miguel Barnet about his life. After three years of collaboration, Barnet and Montejo published *Biografía de un cimarrón* in 1966. It was written in the first person, in the voice of Montejo, and recounted the bleak living and working conditions of the enslaved

workers; but also Montejo's escape and his – free but precarious – life in the mountains, hiding in caves and underbrush; and his discovery that slavery had been abolished. The book created an international stir; numerous translations swiftly followed (including into English in 1966 as *The Biography of a Runaway Slave*) and even an opera by the German composer Hans Werner Henze (*El Cimarrón*).



Photograph of Esteban Montejo (*El Cimarrón*) with his interviewer and co-author, Miguel Barnet. Photo courtesy of National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), 1963.

The “provinces” – as Cubans say when they mean anywhere outside of Havana – at first glance present a completely different picture from the capital's tourist center. The general mood is extremely low due to the frequent power outages: Often, there is no electricity for 8–10 hours a day, sometimes even multiple times a

day, usually at times when meals need to be prepared. Freezers are often affected. Most people are resigned, or even depressed. There is anger against “those at the top,” the central government or the provincial authorities. Almost everyone is struggling with the consequences of the Chikungunya epidemic. I even find

that there are not a few Cubans who pin their hopes on Donald Trump, believing that any change at all must be better than what they have now.



A poster for the conference in Cienfuegos

In Cienfuegos, our partners Orlando García, Olga Sosa, and Anabel García have done excellent work to prepare our conference, “Estudios sobre Esclavitudes. Cuba y sus Conexiones con el Mundo Atlántico” (“Studying Slavery. Cuba and Its Connections with the Atlantic World”). It will take place in Palacio Leblanc, the town house of one of the major sugar mill owners and enslavers. Our colleagues from UNEAC and the University of Cienfuegos are glad that at least one of the international guests has arrived.

I use the occasion of the conference to talk to our partners about a major new project that I am preparing: I want to look at the elites who owned the major sugar mills (*centrales*), including Edwin Atkins, a major benefactor of Harvard University at the time as well as a slave and mill owner in Cuba; I also want to look at the lifestyles of those elites (e.g., their lavish mansions such as Atkins's Central Soledad who made Cienfuegos the most important global center of world sugar production during the transition from slavery to post-slavery (1870–1920). A parallel dimension will explore

the life histories and living conditions of enslaved men and women who from 1886 onward transitioned from enslaved to “freed” in the sugar mills – which meant, of course, that they were subject to new forms of strong asymmetrical dependencies. (One of them was Esteban Montejo).

On March 5, I fly to Panamá, and on March 6, I land in Frankfurt. The following weekend, I'll be in Vienna, where I've been invited to the Bruno Kreisky Forum, KONAK Vienna (Caribbean and Latin American Center), Austrian Television, Radio, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to speak about Cuba.



Prof. Dr. Michael Zeuske

was Professor of Iberian and Latin American History at the University of Cologne (1993–2018), Professor of History (University of Havana, 2018–2019) and is Senior Investigator at the BCDSS. He is a corresponding member of the Academia de la Historia, Havana, Cuba.

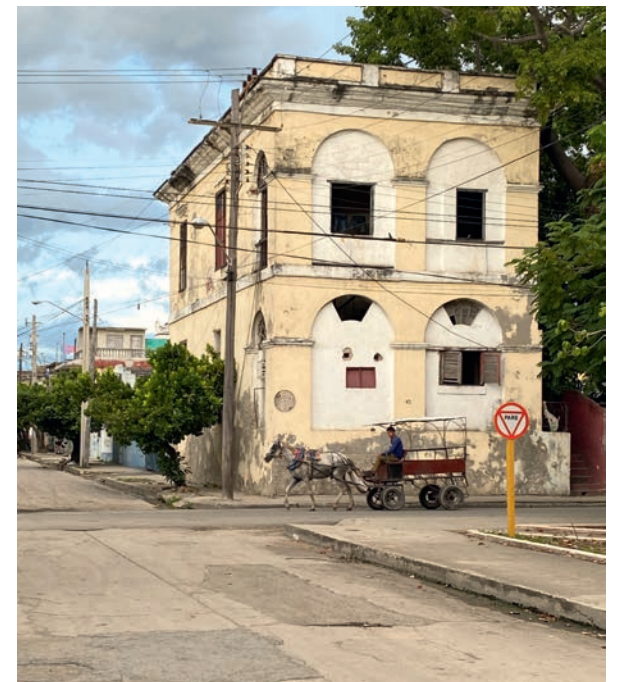
He focuses on different forms of dependency in the Atlantic slavery (1400–1900), in the global history of slavery and in different local slaveries and slave trades on a micro-historical level as well as on life histories of enslaved people and slave traders.



Palacio Leblanc in the center of Cienfuegos



Central Soledad, mansion of Edwin Atkins, a major benefactor of Harvard University at the time as well as a slave and mill owner in Cuba.



Trading office of Tomás Terry (1808-1886), a Cuban business magnate whose fortune grew to be among the largest in the world in his day.

CONFERENCES & WORKSHOPS



We aim to showcase the wide thematic range covered by our conferences and workshops. Researchers from various disciplines approach the topic of strong asymmetrical dependency through a variety of questions and perspectives across different epochs. 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.

Participants of the collaborative hybrid workshop "From Field to Findings: Cutting-Edge Approaches in Peace and Conflict Methodology" at the University of Port Harcourt (UniPort), Nigeria. Photo: courtesy of UniPort



Organizers of the collaborative hybrid workshop “From Field to Findings: Cutting-Edge Approaches in Peace and Conflict Methodology” at the University of Port Harcourt (UniPort), Nigeria. Photo: courtesy of UniPort

INNOVATIVE METHODS AT THE
INTERSECTION OF TWO FIELDS:

PEACE AND CONFLICT
STUDIES, AND
DEPENDENCY AND
SLAVERY STUDIES

by Benjamin Etzold

AN INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

Which methods can allow us to innovatively connect Peace and Conflict Studies with Dependency and Slavery Studies? How can reflexive, safe and ethically responsible research be implemented at all in contexts of everyday violence and armed conflict? These were just two of the many questions that scholars and experts discussed at the two-day hybrid training seminar “From Field to Findings: Cutting-Edge Approaches in Peace and Conflict Methodology” at the University of Port Harcourt (UniPort), Nigeria, on 3 and 4 March 2026. The workshop was organised by the Centre for Peace and Security Studies (CPSS) at UniPort and supported by the BCDSS and bicc, the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies. More than 90 people participated in the training altogether. The 40 participants on site were professors, lecturers, PhD and Master’s students from the University of Port Harcourt, while more than 50 experts and students from other places in Nigeria and Europe participated online.

In his keynote lecture, Martin I. Ifeanacho, professor of Sociology at UniPort, emphasised the need to analyse the drivers and dynamics of conflicts along multiple dimensions. For example, empirical studies on violence in the Niger Delta, in which Port Harcourt is the biggest



Prof. Owunari Georgewill 2nd, Vice Chancellor, University of Port Harcourt, opening the workshop. Photo: courtesy of UniPort

city, must not only focus on the local level, but need to demonstrate how conflicts are being fuelled or can be mitigated by regional and global forces: in this case the extraction of oil for global markets, which has caused devastating environmental damage, social fragmentation and political violence in the local communities of the Niger Delta for decades. Professor Ifeanacho also described the fundamental ethical dilemmas of empirical research in conflict-affected communities, pointing out that the protection of study participants must have precedence over the quick ‘extraction’ of research data and the academic publication of findings without benefits for local respondents.

Professor Chioma Daisy Onyige, criminologist and director of the CPSS, as well as a former BCDSS fellow, led the workshop and gave a lecture on qualitative



Left to right: Conference hosts Prof. Chioma Daisy Onyige, Prof. Owunari Georgewill 2nd, Dr. Benjamin Etzold, and keynote speaker Prof. Ifeanacho. Photo: courtesy of UniPort

research methods in Peace Studies. She highlighted that in-depth empirical research studies should not only be guided by social theories but must also be historically grounded. Current conflicts in the Niger Delta, for instance revolving around oil extraction and environmental deprivation or youth militancy, crime and human trafficking, must be analysed considering the longer periods over which they unfolded. Accordingly, some contemporary conflict dimensions can be clearly traced back to historical patterns of slavery or colonial power relations that persist into the present.

Together with colleagues from Nigeria and other countries, Dr. Oyewole Oginni, researcher at bicc, is studying vigilante groups, armed conflicts and everyday lives in Northern Nigeria, most notably in the borderlands of the Lake Chad Basin. At the workshop, he shared very valuable reflections about his recent research. He argued for the meticulous application of high ethical principles with the aim to protect both researchers and study participants. However, as he also pointed out, research designs and the application of methods must be highly flexible, as security conditions, but also the relations between participants and conflict parties can shift rapidly. Local populations in Northern Nigerian villages have, for instance, formed alliances with militant groups from Boko Haram or the Islamic State of West Africa – some voluntarily, some out of sheer necessity – which in turn exposes them to retaliation from the Nigerian military as they regain control of remote regions. When researchers investigate such conflict dynamics, they must thus be able to navigate uncertainty. He also made a strong plea for reflexivity as an ethical stance that must guide the research process under volatile conditions, and with people who have been affected by conflict. Accordingly, researchers must continuously self-examine their positionality, the power relations within which they operate, their own assumptions and biases, as well as the wider effects of their own presence and inquiries, with potentially far-reaching and long-lasting repercussions for the people they engage with in their work, be it research assistants, facilitators, key informants or study participants.

In my own lecture on ‘The continuity of violence in refugees’ journeys’, I drew on research findings from a study with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh (see: Dependent 24/2, pp. 42-46), to demonstrate the potential of theory-driven research to challenge conventional interpretations that see a linear relation between violent conflict and displacement. One of my key arguments was that a more differentiated understanding of embodied forms of violence needs to go hand in hand with more nuanced research methods that can account for the diversity of people’s experiences of violence along the course of their displacement. While studies often



Dr. Benjamin Etzold (BCDSS/bicc) talking about "The continuity of violence in refugees' journeys". Photo: courtesy of UniPort

focus on the immediate and direct effects of violence, the slowly accumulating effects of experiencing a continuity of violence and protracted marginalisation in the lives of refugees must not be overlooked. However, accounting for how personal trauma unfolds is not only a methodological challenge, but also raises the fundamental ethical question on how far a researcher can or should be allowed to probe into people's lives and memories.

Further contributions by scholars from UniPort highlighted the potentials as well as the pitfalls of qualitative and participatory research methods, such as when investigating the strong asymmetrical dependencies that fundamentally shape the everyday lives of people, which constitute both drivers and effects of contemporary conflict dynamics in the Niger Delta. Participants greatly appreciated the informative presentations and the opportunities for intensive dialogue on methodological innovations and ethical standards for research under conditions of violence and conflict. An interactive session on theory-driven field research and ethical responsibilities, however, also showed up the difficulties of consistently applying scholarly standards of methodological rigour, reflexivity and independent critical research. A research environment shaped by insecurity and mistrust, on the one hand, and political patronage and corruption, on the other, does self-evidently impact the options of safely conducting research and critically writing about it – bearing in mind multiple negative repercussions. In addition, the limited access to research funding faced by most of the Nigerian researchers I met restricts both the scope of the empirical studies they are able to conduct and the depth of their historical analyses. I gained the impression that for this reason some highly interesting scholarship by colleagues at the University of Port Harcourt perforce remained somewhat below its actual potential – not

due to a lack of ideas or theoretical innovation, but due to security considerations and a lack of means, and thus also time, to dig a bit deeper or to expand their studies beyond single cases.

In this sense, my short stay at the University of Port Harcourt and the encounters at our workshop made me aware once more of my privileges, as a (German, white, male, experienced) scholar working at the University of Bonn – a University of Excellence – and the BCDSS – a Cluster of Excellence. The BCDSS not only grants its affiliated academics the time and resources to pursue in-depth research, but also fosters international scholarly exchange. Scholars investigating the causes and consequences of contemporary conflicts, including experiences of violence, (im)mobilities, labour exploitation, social memories and personal trauma, thus navigate not only turbulent political arenas – globally and locally –, but also a highly unequal academic playing field.

This may not be a very novel revelation for many who apply a decolonial lens to the global production of academic knowledge. Yet it raises the question of what the consequences of this realisation are – or could be. For me, joint training programmes like these two days during which we learned from and with each other, are one important step ahead. Such initiatives to teach, mentor and exchange thoughts and insights about our various practices of conducting critical, reflexive and ethical research on an equal footing will continue with the support of the BCDSS and should – in my opinion – be scaled up further. Even so, this would still not be enough. Together with colleagues from the University of Port Harcourt and of course other academic institutions around the globe we must seek opportunities for funding and then actually jointly conduct innovative research at the multiple intersections of Peace and Conflict Studies and Dependency and Slavery Studies.



Dr. Benjamin Etzold

is a senior researcher at bicc – Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies – and member of the BCDSS. He holds a PhD in Geography from the University of Bonn and works on people's vulnerability, livelihoods and experiences of violence and labour exploitation as well as trajectories of migration, protracted displacement and translocal networks. At the BCDSS, he leads the interdisciplinary research group 'Lived Experiences of Violence and Coerced Livelihoods in Translocal Spaces of Conflict' (VIOLET).



Prof. Dr. Carla Jaimes Betancourt (BCDSS, standing) addressing Prof. Dr. Juliana Salles Machado in a packed workshop room. Photo: Niniane Waldmann, BCDSS

BEYOND PARTICIPATION: COLLABORATIVE AND INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

by Carla Jaimes Betancourt
and Taynã Tagliati

WORKSHOP, BONN, 19 FEBRUARY 2026

On 19 February 2026, the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) hosted the workshop *Collaborative and Intercultural Methodological Approaches*, organized by Carla Jaimes Betancourt (Department for the Anthropology of the Americas, University of Bonn) and BCDSS doctoral researcher Taynã Tagliati. Bringing together more than twenty participants from anthropology, archaeology, history, heritage studies, and related disciplines, the workshop explored a question that resonates deeply with contemporary debates on dependency, inequality, and knowledge production: how can research be conducted in contexts shaped by historical and ongoing asymmetrical relations?

The workshop was led by Prof. Dr. Juliana Salles Machado (Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil), an anthropologist, historian, and archaeologist whose research focuses on Indigenous histories, historical ecology, and collaborative and intercultural approaches to knowledge production in Amazonia. Her recent work has explored anti-colonial methodological perspectives developed through long-term collaborations with Indigenous researchers and communities. Drawing on more than two decades of research conducted with Indigenous communities in Brazil, Machado invited participants to critically examine not only the end products of research, but also how knowledge is produced, by whom, and under what conditions.





Prof. Dr. Juliana Salles Machado (Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil), leading the conference. Photo: Niniane Waldmann, BCDSS

BEYOND PARTICIPATION

One of the central contributions of the workshop was its invitation to critically examine the increasingly prevalent language of participatory, collaborative, and intercultural research. Rather than treating these terms as interchangeable or proposing fixed definitions, Machado encouraged participants to reflect on what changes when research is conducted across different social positions, experiences, and knowledge traditions. The discussions began with a series of deceptively simple questions: What is research for, and for whom? Who is involved in a research process? What interests, expectations, and responsibilities do they bring to it? Participants reflected on the fact that research collectives are rarely homogeneous. Communities, researchers, institutions, students, and local organizations often occupy different positions and pursue different goals. Understanding these differences, rather than assuming consensus, was presented as a necessary starting point for collaborative work.

A recurring theme throughout the workshop was the importance of making explicit what is at stake in a research project. This includes not only shared objectives, but also tensions, disagreements, limitations, and unequal access to resources and decision-making. In this sense, collaboration was not discussed as a harmonious or conflict-free process. On the contrary, participants explored how difference itself can become a productive site of reflection and negotiation.

The workshop also emphasized the need to acknowledge the asymmetries that continue to shape research relationships. Drawing on experiences from Indigenous and intercultural research contexts in Brazil, Machado highlighted how questions of gender, generation, polit-

ical positioning, language, and institutional authority influence both the production of knowledge and the possibilities for dialogue. Rather than assuming that collaborative approaches automatically overcome such inequalities, discussions focused on how researchers might recognize and navigate them more consciously and ethically.

Particular attention was given to practices of listening, reciprocity, and accountability. Collaborative and intercultural research were presented not simply as methodological choices, but as ongoing processes of relationship building that require openness to different perspectives, forms of expertise, and ways of knowing. This involves recognizing both the chances and the limits of one's own position, while remaining attentive to the diverse voices, interests, and experiences that shape any research encounter.

SITUATED KNOWLEDGE AND THE POLITICS OF RESEARCH

A second major theme concerned the conditions under which knowledge is produced. Throughout the workshop, Machado encouraged participants to reflect on their own positionality as researchers: How do we situate ourselves within the production of knowledge? How do others situate us? What social, political, and institutional conditions shape our research practices?

These questions challenged assumptions that research can be detached from the historical and social contexts in which it is produced. Discussions emphasized that knowledge emerges through specific relationships, institutions, languages, and experiences rather than from a neutral or universal standpoint. Participants reflected on how universities continue to privilege certain forms of knowledge production, including writing over orality, abstraction over lived experience, and disciplinary specialization over more relational forms of learning.

Particular attention was given to the growing presence of Indigenous researchers within academic institutions. Their participation as researchers, authors, and intellectual interlocutors challenges conventional assumptions about expertise and authority, while raising broader questions about how knowledge is produced, validated, and shared.

FORESTS, RELATIONS, AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The afternoon discussions built upon ideas introduced during Machado's opening lecture, *Anti-Colonial Praxis: Intercultural Alliances and Indigenous Forest Knowledges*. Drawing on the interdisciplinary project *Histories from the Margins*, she presented examples of collaborative research conducted with Indigenous



Bertholletia excelsa (Brazil nut tree), composite image showing the tree, fruit, seeds, and commercial Brazil nuts. Montage by RoRo, 2015. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

researchers from several peoples of southwestern Amazonia.

At the center of many of these examples was the Brazil nut tree (*Bertholletia excelsa*), a species of immense ecological, economic, and cultural importance across Amazonia. Yet the significance of the Brazil nut extends far beyond its role as a resource. Through Indigenous narratives, historical accounts, ecological data, and archaeological evidence, the project explores how relationships between people, plants, animals, territories, and other-than-human beings have shaped both collective memory and the materiality of Amazonian landscapes over long periods of time.

The Brazil nut tree thus became an entry point into broader discussions about relational histories. Throughout the lecture, Machado emphasized that Indigenous narratives often understand forests not as passive environments, but as living worlds constituted through networks of kinship, reciprocity, exchange, and sociality. From this perspective, trees, animals, rivers, spirits, and humans participate in interconnected histories that challenge conventional distinctions between nature and culture.

These perspectives informed one of the most innovative parts of the workshop: the session entitled *Floresta* ("To Forest"). Participants explored how research

methodologies could engage more seriously with Indigenous understandings of territory, learning, and knowledge production. Rather than approaching knowledge as something detached from places and relationships, discussions focused on how it emerges through interactions among people, communities, plants, animals, and landscapes.

The examples presented by Machado highlighted conversation circles, Indigenous schools, intergenerational exchanges, and locally developed methodologies. Together, they illustrated how knowledge emerges through relationships among people, communities, territories, and other-than-human beings, inviting participants to rethink research as a relational process of learning.

ANTI-COLONIAL PRAXIS AS METHOD

The final roundtable focused on emerging anti-colonial methodological perspectives. Importantly, anti-coloniality was not presented as

a fixed theoretical framework or a ready-made methodological solution. Rather, it was discussed as an ongoing practice of confronting the asymmetries that continue to shape research relationships, academic institutions, and the production of knowledge.

Participants reflected on concepts such as sensitive listening, ethical responsibility, affective alliances, and reciprocity. Rather than assuming consensus, these discussions emphasized that collaborative and intercultural research often involves divergent interests, unequal resources, and different expectations. Building relationships across such differences requires sustained dialogue, mutual commitment, and an openness to learning from others.

Throughout the workshop, Machado highlighted that collaboration is not simply a matter of producing research together. It also shapes how research questions are formulated, how knowledge is generated, and how relationships are built among those involved in the research process. In this sense, methodological choices are inseparable from ethical and political commitments.

This emphasis on relationality was particularly evident in discussions concerning what Machado described as "affective alliances." Such alliances do not seek to eliminate difference or disagreement. Instead, they create

possibilities for working across asymmetries while respecting plurality and heterogeneity. Anti-colonial practice thus emerged not only as a critique of unequal structures, but also as an effort to cultivate more dialogical, reciprocal, and responsible forms of knowledge production.



The conference organisers (from left to right): Taynã Tagliati, Prof. Dr. Juliana Salles Machado, Prof. Dr. Carla Jaimes Betancourt. Photo: Niniane Waldmann, BCDSS

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR DEPENDENCY STUDIES

For scholars working within the BCDSS, the workshop offered more than a discussion of research experiences from Amazonia. It opened a space to reflect on how asymmetrical relations shape not only the societies we study, but also the ways knowledge about those societies is produced.

Many of the questions raised throughout the day resonate closely with the Cluster's broader interests: Who has the authority to define research agendas? How are different forms of expertise recognized or marginalized? What institutional, linguistic, and historical conditions shape access to knowledge production? By approaching these questions through collaborative and intercultural research experiences, the workshop encouraged participants to consider dependency not only as an object of analysis, but also as a dimension of academic practice itself.

Rather than offering methodological prescriptions, the discussions highlighted the importance of dialogue, reciprocity, and critical self-reflection when conducting research across unequal contexts. In doing so, the workshop demonstrated how methodological debates can contribute to broader conversations about power, authority, and the production of knowledge – questions that remain central to the work of the BCDSS.

FURTHER READING

Readers interested in these discussions may consult Machado's work on collaborative research, Indigenous histories, and historical ecology, including a paper she co-wrote: *Stones, Clay and People Among the Laktlãñō Xokleng Indigenous People in Southern Brazil* (2020) (DOI:10.1007/s11759-020-09405-8) and the forthcoming chapter *The Castanheira and the Standing Forest: (Re)Making Meaningfulness through Indigenous Historical Narratives in Southwest Amazon*.

EVENT RECOMMENDATION

Join the renowned Bolivian theatre company *Teatro de los Andes* during their guest appearances in Bonn in October and November 2026.

Through a theatre performance, a concert, and a workshop, the company invites audiences to engage with questions of cultural heritage, memory, Indigenous knowledge systems, artistic expression, as well as the relationships between past, present, and future.

Teatro de los Andes



<https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en/outreach/news-bcdss/visit-by-teatro-de-los-andes>



Prof. Dr. Carla Jaimes Betancourt

is Professor of Cultural Heritage of the Americas at the University of Bonn, Principal Investigator at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), and Co-Director of the Bonn Collection of the Americas (BASA). Her research focuses on Amazonian archaeology, Indigenous heritage, collaborative methodologies, and the intersections of archaeology, territoriality, and biocultural heritage. Her current work explores how archaeological research can contribute to Indigenous heritage governance, environmental stewardship, and sustainable futures in Amazonia.



Taynã Tagliati

is an anthropologist and research associate at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo (MAE-USP) and a former PhD candidate at the BCDSS. She is currently focusing on the museological documentation of Indigenous languages and cultures, along with the implementation and management of an audiovisual data repository. Since 2021, she has been working with the Mebengokré-Kayapó in Brazil, focusing particularly on multispecies ethnography, relations with other-than-humans, and their representation in museum collections, especially Psittacidae birds.

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



Left to right: Dr. Bogdan Pavlish, Dr. Vitali Byl, Turkana Allahverdyeva, Prof. Dr. Christoph Witzernath, PD Dr. Iryna Klymenko, Dr. Veruschka Wagner, Stanislav Mohylnyi, Prof. Dr. Stephan Conermann at a workshop at Bilgi Üniversitesi, Istanbul, one of our strategic partners.



Left to right: Prof. Dr. Daniel Heider, Prof. Dr. Michal Opatrný (Dean of the Faculty of Theology), Prof. Dr. Stephan Conermann und Prof. Dr. Rudolf Svoboda (Vice-Rector for International Affairs) in front of the entrance to Hluboká Castle. Photo: Stephan Conermann

EXPANDING THE NETWORK
IN EASTERN EUROPE:

AN EXPLORATORY
VISIT TO ČESKÉ
BUDĚJOVICE

by Stephan Conermann
translated by Imogen Herrad

This fact-finding mission came about rather by chance during my most recent visit to our partner university in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), in November 2025. My colleague, Roberto Hofmeister-Pich, had invited Daniel Heider from the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (Budweis) at the same time as myself. Both Roberto and Daniel study medieval and early modern scholasticism. It became clear very quickly that slavery and other types of strong asymmetrical dependencies could again form the basis for shared research interests and link Budweis and the BCDSS.

As part of the BCDSS' internationalization strategy, we had already planned to expand our as yet somewhat sporadic contacts with academic institutions in Eastern Europe during the second funding phase. So we now decided that I should travel to Budweis in the spring in order to explore the possibility of a strategic partnership with Daniel Heider and the Faculty of Theology.

The University of South Bohemia is a medium-sized public institution with some 9,000 students, 200 study programmes and eight faculties (Economics, Fisheries and Protection of Waters, Arts, Education, Science, Theology, Health and Social Sciences, and Agriculture



Faculty of Theology at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. Photo: Czeva – Vlastní dílo, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

and Technology), which makes it very well suited for cooperation with the BCDSS and with Bonn's Faculty of Arts. Daniel very kindly put great effort into preparing my visit on 30 April 2026. With the support of the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Michal Opatrný, he was able to enlist numerous of his colleagues there to join me in exploring opportunities for cooperation on the general topic of dependency.

The Faculty of Theology at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice was founded in 1991, but it builds on traditions of culture and educational policy in theological and philosophical learning in the city that go back to the early nineteenth century. In its research and teaching work, it concentrates not only on questions concerning theology and philosophy, but also includes social work and education.

In my presentation and the subsequent lively discussion with our colleagues, I showcased the work of our Cluster of Excellence on persistent dependencies across all social orders, highlighting the many potential connecting factors in terms of content. In fact, there was so much interest that, in the course of further discussions with representatives of the International Office and, above all, with the Vice-Rector for International Affairs, Rudolf Svoboda, and the former Rector

of the University, Tomáš Machula (who was Rector from 2016 to 2020), it was decided to draw up a Letter of Intent between the BCDSS and the Faculty of Theology. The University of South Bohemia also set up a working group which is to develop concrete projects for our planned collaboration by the end of the summer semester. The next meeting in Budweis will include the local Faculty of Arts, so that archaeologists, historians and literary scholars will also be involved.



Dr. Chen Jo-shui, Professor of Medieval Chinese History at National Taiwan University, welcoming Prof. Dr. Conermann (right) and Prof. Dr. Schwermann (left). Photo: Stephan Conermann

PARTNERSHIP-BUILDING IN TAIWAN:

WORKSHOP ON SLAVERY AND DEPENDENCY AT ACADEMIA SINICA IN TAIPEI

by Stephan Conermann and
Christian Schwermann

In search of new strategic partners in East Asia, Stephan Conermann and Christian Schwermann visited Taiwan from March 23 to 27, 2026. They presented papers and held discussions at Academia Sinica, one of the most important academic institutions in East Asia, and at two Taiwanese universities: National Taiwan University (NTU) and Tamkang University.

The highlight of the five-day trip was a workshop on the topic of "Slavery and Dependency," organized on March 24, 2026, by the renowned Institute of History and Philosophy (IHP) on the main campus of Academia Sinica in Taipei. Following welcome addresses by Wang Fan-sen, the Academy's former acting president and current president of the Taiwan Comprehensive University System, Chen Jeng-guo, director of the IHP, and associate research fellow Kevin Chang, Stephan Conermann presented the Bonn Center for Dependency



BCDSS-Academia-Sinica workshop programme. Photo: Stephan Conermann

and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), its areas of research and the key concept of strong asymmetrical dependency.

After an initial round of discussion about opportunities for cooperation, this was followed by presentations by Tsai Wei-Chieh (National Chung Cheng University) on "Slavery in Qing Mongolia," Christian Schwermann on "Metaphors of Strong Asymmetrical Dependency in Chinese Economic and Political Thought," Chen-Huan Kao (Academia Sinica) on "Slaves in the Han Dynasty," and Man-Chu Wu (Academia Sinica) on "Manchu Slaves (Baoyi) in Qing China."

The subsequent discussions were so productive that, following the workshop, concrete plans for further collaboration were agreed upon. These will include, amongst other things, a conference on "Forms of Strong Asymmetrical Dependency in East and Central Asian Societies" to be held at Academia Sinica in Taipei in March 2027. It is intended to attract a total of about twelve to 14 participants from both sides for the event. A round-table discussion is planned for the fourth day of the conference on the related topic of "Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies, Interdependencies, and Power Relations in East Asian and European Normative Thought." The aim is to broaden the scope of collaboration in order to attract further colleagues to this project and to hold a follow-up conference on this topic in Bonn in 2028.

In the medium term, these conferences and their proceedings are intended to evolve into a joint research project involving members of Academia Sinica and the Cluster of Excellence on "Power Relations in East Asian and European Normative Thought." It was agreed to draw up a corresponding Letter of Intent (LoI) between

Academia Sinica and the BCDSS at the University of Bonn, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Academia Sinica and the Faculty of East Asian Studies of Ruhr University Bochum.

Academia Sinica was founded in Nanjing in 1928 as the National Academy of the Republic of China and relocated to Taiwan in 1949 after the end of the Chinese Civil War. Taiwan's Academy of Sciences currently comprises 24 institutes and nine research centers, organized into three research areas: Mathematics and Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, and Humanities and Social Sciences. It employs over 8,000 research fellows, research technicians, assistants and administrative staff.

The fact-finding mission was rounded off with visits to Tamkang University, a leading private university located in New Taipei, and NTU, Taiwan's most prestigious public research university. During these visits, it was agreed to further explore opportunities for cooperation with the Centre for European Union Studies at Tamkang University and with the Faculty of History at NTU.



Prof. Dr. Li-Jiuan Chen-Rabich (left), Director of the Center for European Union Studies at Tamkang University, hosting talks with Prof. Dr. Schwermann (middle) and Prof. Dr. Conermann (right). Photo: Stephan Conermann

NEWS

NEW AT THE CLUSTER

COLLABORATION WITH MAX WEBER FOUNDATION'S "RESEARCH CENTRE UKRAINE" IN ISTANBUL

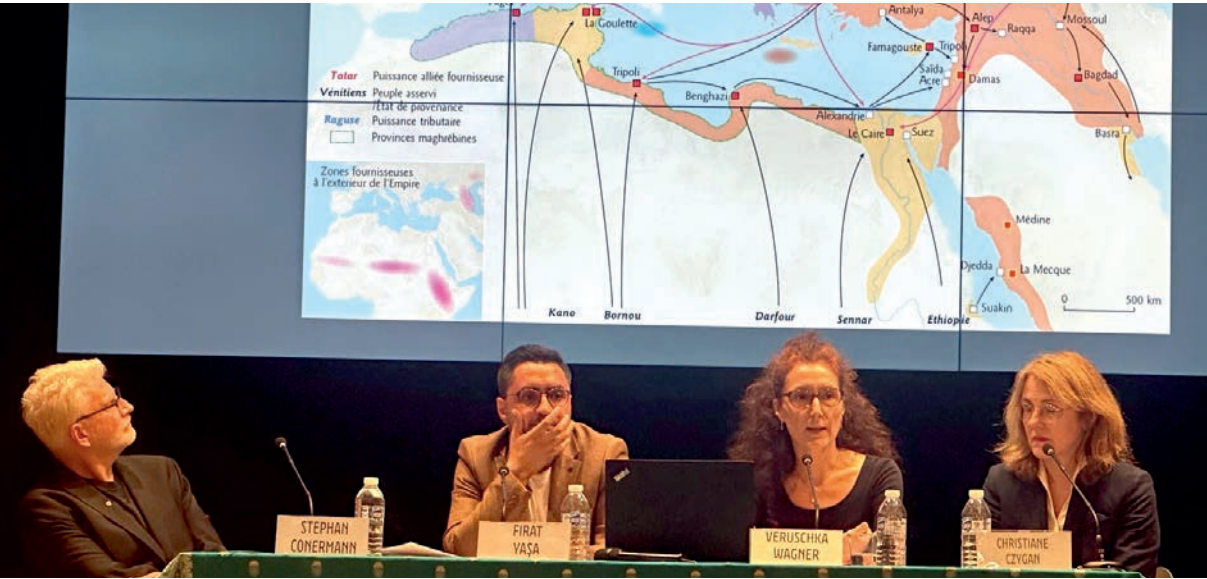
by Stephan Conermann
translated by Imogen Herrad

The Faculty of Arts of the University of Bonn is currently drawing up a cooperation agreement with the Max Weber Foundation (MWF) – Humanities around the Globe. As part of this privileged partnership, the BCDSS would be ideally placed to further expand our global institutional network. We already have good contacts with the MWF's Orient-Institut in Istanbul. On 13 May, Stephan Conermann, Veruschka Wagner and Firat Yaşa gave a well-attended evening lecture there, speaking on *Rethinking Ottoman and Crimean Slavery: Property, Legal Status, and the Paradoxes of Unfreedom*.

Above all, however, we also continued to develop the close collaboration we established last year with the Research Centre Ukraine, which had been set up in Lviv by the Max Weber Foundation in November 2024. The Research Centre's mission will be to examine the transnational history of the region defined by the political borders of present-day Ukraine, focusing on the

communication processes through which this area has been interconnected with western and central European actors and institutions since the early modern period. Its director is Iryna Klymenko, a historian trained at the Department of History at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. She was awarded the Max Weber Prize of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences in December 2025 for her outstanding academic achievements and her exceptional commitment to international and interdisciplinary collaboration. Our association with the Research Centre kicked off last year with a series of online meetings and a joint discussion in Bonn. As it is currently not possible – or at least inadvisable – to meet in Ukraine, we decided to hold our next workshop in Istanbul, where Bilgi Üniversitesi, one of our strategic partners, had kindly offered us space. During the two-day workshop, Stephan Conermann, Veruschka Wagner, Christoph Witzentrath, Stanislav Mohylnyi, Turkana Allahverdyeva, Vitali Byl (all with the BCDSS), Bogdan Pavlish und Iryna Klymenko (both with the MWF's Research Centre Ukraine) presented selected sources on the history of the interconnected Transintermarium region and discussed them in depth.

The Transintermarium region is an area enclosed by the Black and the Baltic Seas (hence the Latin name Transintermarium: "the region between the oceans") and by the Urals and the Carpathian Mountains. It is a vast expanse of eastern Europe and western Russia, commonly associated with the East European Plain. Its openness has historically encouraged migration, trade, invasion, and cultural exchange across the region. We agreed that we will collaborate in exploring the movements of people, objects and goods, as well as ideas and concepts, across this communication space going forward.



Lecture at the Orient-Institute in Istanbul – from left to right: Prof. Dr. Stephan Conermann, Dr. Firat Yaşa, Dr. Veruschka Wagner, Dr. Christiane Czygan

Investigators

Dr. Helen Boëßenecker
Institute of Art History

Visual Arts of the early modern period, particularly Italian sculpture and painting, art and denomination/iconology, art theory of the early modern period, materiality and mediality, performativity and theatricality, transculturality/postcolonial Art History and Gender Studies



© Michaela Douth

Dr. Michaela Douth
Department of Southeast Asian Studies

labour and labour agency within global production and logistics networks; approaches to social reproduction and reproductive labour; women, gender, and feminism in development; multi-scalar labour struggles and movements

regional focus: mainland Southeast Asia, particularly Cambodia, as well as Ghana and Brazil



© Rosario Figari Layus

Jun.-Prof. Dr. Rosario Figari Layus
Institute of Sociology
& Center for Reconciliation Studies

reconciliation, peace and conflict studies, transitional justice, conflict transformation, human rights protection and activism and consequences of political violence



© Gateway House India @ Munich Security Conference, 2026

Prof. Dr. Anna-Katharina Hornidge
German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)

international cooperation architecture in a multipolar world, the role of different types of knowledge in and for processes of change, questions of natural resources governance in agricultural and marine contexts.

regional focus: Southeast and Central Asia, West and East Africa



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Prof. Dr. Jan B. Meister
Department of Ancient History

social inequalities and conflicts in ancient Greece, historical anthropology in ancient Greece and Roma (esp. history of the body and gender studies), political communication in ancient societies History of classical reception



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Prof. Dr. Michael Rohrschneider
Department of Early Modern History and Rhenish Regional History

regional history, Holy Roman Empire in the early modern period, imperial diet, Historical Peace Studies, Thirty Years' War and Peace of Westphalia, international relations in the early modern period, editions (print and digital)



© Georg Hübl

Prof. Dr. Laury Sarti
Department of Medieval History

Frankish world, France, (Holy) Roman Empire, Italy, England and the Byzantine Empire; mobility and travel in the Middle Ages; contacts and interconnections between the Byzantine and Franconian worlds; military and warrior culture; identities and affiliations in antiquity and the Middle Ages, incl. gender history; the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages; history of mentality, imagination, ideas and semantics; digital humanities, archaeology, manuscripts

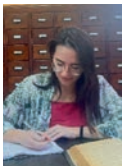
Investigators



Prof. Dr. Conrad Schetter
Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (bicc)
politics of interventions, spaces of violence (e.g. ungoverned spaces, frontiers), development, humanitarian aid and conflict, Jihadi movements (e.g. Taliban) and forced migration

Dr. Ute Wallenböck
Department of Mongolian and Tibetan Studies
migration, identity, foodways, and state-mediated border regimes in Sinophone and Tibetophone settings

Postdoctoral Researchers



Dr. Elena Barattini
"Brokering Dependency: Diplomacy, Labour, and Empire-by-Proxy in the Post- Abolition Caribbean (1865–1885)"



Ayesha Hussain
"Afterlives of Slavery: Cultural Heritage, Memory, and Marginalization of the Sheedi Community in South Asia"



Dr. Javan Zaumambo Mokebo
"Imaging Economic Dependencies in Colonial Plantation Economies of Africa and the Caribbean through Credit, Labour and Control, 1890–1960"

Predocctoral Fellows



Ankit Chowdhury
01/2026 – 09/2026
"Conscripted Water: Riverine Systems and Asymmetrical Dependency in Industrial India"



Reza Halomoan
01/2026 – 09/2026
"Reconfigurations of SADs and Agrarian Transformation in Sumatra, Indonesia"



Jakob D. Jung
01/2026 – 09/2026
"SAD to Go – Everyday Mobility of Asymmetrically Dependant Romans"



Neema C. Munisi
01/2026 – 09/2026
"Archaeology, Material Culture and Slavery in the 19th Century Eastern Africa"



Anita K. Pobi
01/2026 – 09/2026
"Beyond the Colonial Archive: Women's Voices and the Abolition of Slavery in the Gold Coast, 1874–1940s"

Guest Researchers



Prof. Dr. Ludolf Pelizaeus
University of Picardy, Amiens, France
04/2026 – 05/2026
"A History of Human Trafficking in the Early Modern Period in the Holy Roman Empire"



Musa Kazim Azimli
University of Virginia, USA
04/2026 – 06/2026
"The Imperial Slave Market in Istanbul"



The team (from left): Jasmine Togo-Brisby, Artist in Residence; Partner Investigator (PI) Prof. Pia Wiegink, BCDSS; PI Dr Margaret Mishra, University of the South Pacific; PI Dr Oliver Lueb, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne; Prof. Penny Edmonds, Lead Chief Investigator (CI), Flinders University; Dr Kirsten McGavin, Post Doctoral Fellow, Flinders University; CI Prof. Deirdre Coleman, Melbourne University; PI Imelda Miller, Queensland Museum, Kurilpa

'UNFREEDOM, VOICES, REDRESS: PLANTATION CULTURES OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC'- ONE YEAR ON

Project Reflections by Penny Edmonds and Imelda Miller

The Australian Research Council-funded project *Unfreedom, Voices, Redress: Plantation Cultures of the Western Pacific*, developed in partnership with the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) and Partner Investigator Prof. Dr Pia Wiegink, has now completed its first year. Bringing together an international team, the project is already reshaping how scholars, curators, and communities engage with the histories and legacies of Pacific labour, slavery, and unfreedom.

This interdisciplinary team of scholars, artists, and curators hope to mobilise cultural, material, and creative approaches to examine the often-overlooked histories of slavery and unfreedom across Anglo and

German plantation systems. These histories span Queensland, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Sāmoa, regions deeply entangled in nineteenth-century labour trafficking networks and imperial expansion. By linking archives in English and German and foregrounding Pacific voices, particularly those of women, the team seeks to create new knowledge about plantation lives, the unfreedom of the Pacific labour trade, and their enduring legacies. Drawing together rich and understudied archival materials, testimony, material culture, and artistic practice, the project pioneers innovative forms of research that aim not only to uncover the past but also to reflect on and redress historical harm of the Pacific labour trade.



Penny Edmonds
Lead Chief Investigator, Matthew Flinders Professor of History at Flinders University, Adelaide



Imelda Miller
Partner Investigator and Curator of First Nations Cultures at Queensland Museum, Kurilpa

The collaboration between Penny Edmonds and Imelda Miller lies at the heart of this initiative. Having first met several years ago, they shared a vision of working together to connect archival research with community knowledge and museum collections, particularly in collaboration with Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) communities.

Penny Edmonds, Matthew Flinders Professor of History at Flinders University and Lead Chief Investigator on the project, brings extensive expertise in nineteenth-century British empire and colonialism in Australia and the Western Pacific. Her work addresses themes of colonisation, humanitarianism, slavery, unfreedom, and processes of public reconciliation and redress.

"Much of my work has been to place Australia and the Western Pacific back into the big global debates on empire, colonisation, race, unfreedom and slavery, human rights, reconciliation and matters of redress," she explains.

Edmonds' career also spans the arts and cultural heritage sectors. She has held roles at Museums Victoria in Melbourne and the Australian Museum in Sydney, as well as serving as an Andrew Mellon Fellow in Heritage at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. This breadth of experience informs her commitment to interdisciplinary and creative work, and to place the Western Pacific in the world.

"Bringing archives, museum collections, creative practice and communities together in this way is incredibly powerful," she notes. "It's the kind of interdisciplinary work I am most passionate about."

Imelda Miller is Partner Investigator and Curator of First Nations Cultures at Queensland Museum. A museum curator with South Sea Islander heritage, Miller works closely with material culture and archival collections to improve access for communities of origin. Her work is grounded in cultural practice, sustained engagement, and community-led research.

At least 65,000 Western Pacific peoples were brought to the colony of Queensland, voluntarily or by force, to work in the sugar cane fields, farms, or as domestic servants in the nineteenth century. The descendants of these people refer to themselves as Australian South Sea Islanders.

Miller's recent and highly successful exhibition at Queensland Museum, called *Say Our Name*:



In the collection store looking at the Kastom Collection, Queensland Museum. From left: Jasmine Togo-Brisby, Kirsten McGavin, Deirdre Coleman, Melbourne University; PI Imelda Miller. The collection consists of over 700 objects, primarily focusing on items from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. It represents the lived experiences and cultural heritage of the descendants of South Sea Islanders who were brought to Queensland to work in the sugar industry. Photo: Penny Edmonds

Australian South Sea Islanders (2024), marked a significant milestone: the 30th anniversary of official recognition of Australian South Sea Islanders (ASSI) as a distinct cultural group by the Australian Government in 1994.

The exhibition brought together community stories, museum collections, archival documentation, photographs, and contemporary artworks. It offered a powerful reflection on the history, identity, and ongoing experiences of descendants of Pacific Islanders whose labour—both free and unfree—was central to the development of the Australian sugar industry. The exhibition showcased community voices and emphasised the importance of representation and recognition. Miller hopes to travel this groundbreaking exhibit to the Pacific Islands, where origin communities are based.

Edmonds, Miller and the team have a shared commitment to collaboration, innovation, and social

impact so that Australian South Sea Islander and Western Pacific communities benefit from this research. Their work asks pressing questions: What does it mean to live in the wake of Pacific slavery and unfreedom? What strategies of resilience and redress can be found through creative arts practice, archives, and museums? And how might new pathways of connection be forged between artists, researchers, museums, and communities?

Over the past year, the team has convened several workshops in Australia, bringing together Australian and German partners, including Pia Wiegink and Oliver Lueb, Deputy Director, Curator Oceania, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum – Cultures of the World. These gatherings have provided opportunities to share research, develop methodologies, and engage directly with collections and community perspectives.

An addition to the workshop in Brisbane was a day with interested ASSI community members. A day of sharing about our project, community projects and to hear their perspective on their own work as researchers and knowledge holders.

International collaboration has also been a key component of the project. Meetings and research activities in Bonn and Cologne have strengthened ties between partner institutions and facilitated the integration of German-language archives into the project's broader framework. This transnational approach is essential for understanding the interconnected histories of plantation economies and labour mobility in the Western Pacific.

In late 2025, the team presented their research at the Pacific History Association conference in Apia, Sāmoa—an important moment for sharing findings with regional scholars and communities. This year the team met in Bonn at BCDSS for the 'Queen Emma's networks' symposium, led by Pia Wiegink and Oliver Lueb. Next year, we will hold a conference in Fiji hosted by Partner Investigator Margaret Mishra, and the University of South Pacific.

Unfreedom, Voices, Redress hopes to reframe how histories of slavery, unfreedom, gender and memory in the Pacific are studied and represented. By combining archival research with creative practice and community collaboration, the team is opening new pathways for understanding the past and its impact in the present.

PROJECT TEAM

Prof. Penny Edmonds, Lead Chief Investigator (CI), Flinders University
Prof. Deirdre Coleman, Chief Investigator, Melbourne University

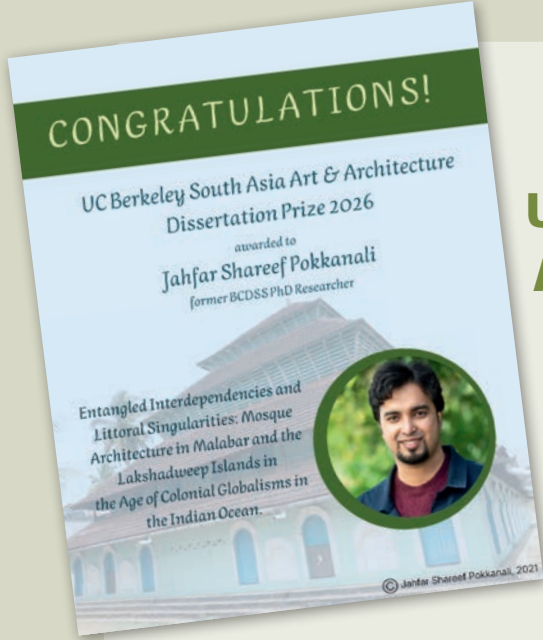
Prof. Pia Wiegink, Partner Investigator, BCDSS, University of Bonn, Germany
Imelda Miller, Partner Investigator, Queensland Museum

Associate Prof. Margaret Mishra, Chief Investigator, University of the South Pacific
Jasmine Togo-Brisby, Artist in Residence

Dr. Oliver Lueb, Partner Investigator, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne
Dr. Kirsten McGavin, Post Doctoral Fellow, Flinders University



The team at the 26th Pacific History Association conference at University of Sāmoa. The theme of the conference was 'Le Solosolou: Resilience in the Face of Adversity'. From left, Deirdre Coleman, Kirsten McGavin, Jasmine Togo-Brisby, Imelda Miller, and Penny Edmonds



**UC BERKELEY SOUTH ASIA
ART & ARCHITECTURE
DISSERTATION PRIZE
2026 FOR JAHFAR
SHAREEF POKKANALI**

Jahfar Shareef Pokkanali, who completed his PhD at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies in 2025 and was a member of the “Embodied Dependencies” research group, has been awarded the UC Berkeley South Asia Art & Architecture Dissertation Prize for 2026. The prize is awarded by the South Asia Art Initiative at the Institute for South Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

The award recognises his doctoral dissertation, completed at the Department of Asian and Islamic Art History at the University of Bonn in 2025: *Entangled Interdependencies and Littoral Singularities: Mosque Architecture in Malabar and the Lakshadweep Islands in the Age of Colonial Globalisms in the Indian Ocean.*

Drawing on fieldwork at sixty-one sites, the dissertation examines mosque architecture in the drāvi a-kerala mode across the southwestern coast of the Indian subcontinent, spanning the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. It proposes the concept of translittorality to account for the material practices and collaborative exchange that shaped these architectural traditions, challenging prevailing accounts within Islamic art history that have marginalised communities lacking a dynastic anchoring in conventional historiography.



Mishkal Mosque, Calicut
©Jahfar Shareef Pokkanali, 2021



Ornately carved and inscribed ceiling of porch, Kuttichira Jumuath Palli ©Jahfar Shareef Pokkanali, 2021

**NEW
PUBLICATIONS**

**COMPETING MEMORIES OF ENSLAVEMENT,
EMANCIPATION AND INDENTURESHIP: THE POLITICS OF
REMEMBERING IN THE CARIBBEAN**

**Volume 27 in the BCDSS series “Dependency and Slavery Studies” (DSS)
Edited by Sinah T. Kloß, Andrea Gremels and Ulrike Schmieder
With an article by Sinah Theres Kloß**



Sinah Theres Kloß,
Andrea Gremels and Ulrike
Schmieder, eds.,
*Competing Memories of
Enslavement, Emancipation and
Indentureship – The Politics of
Remembering in the Caribbean*
(Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2026)
ISBN: 9783112224939

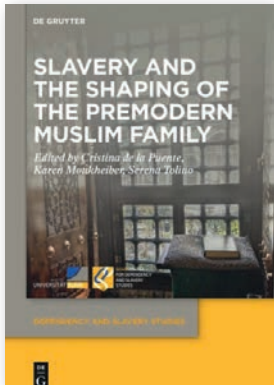
Competing Memories focuses on the politics of remembering enslavement, emancipation and indentureship in Caribbean contexts. The contributions explore constructions and representations of plural and divergent memories across academic disciplines. As understandings of ‘history’ and ‘memory’ may vary, the volume addresses the different and strategic ways these concepts are used within and in relation to the Caribbean. It highlights how historical narratives and cultures of memory are implemented, removed, contested and remodeled in monuments, art, historical archives, literature, film and other kinds of representation all over the Caribbean, its diasporas and in former colonizing countries. With its focus on cultural memory studies, it provides new impulses to slavery and dependency studies. It also contributes to a global debate aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of memory formation in the context of colonial violence and trauma. It invites readers to reflect on the power dynamics involved in the processes of remembering, forgetting, memorizing, recollecting and commemorating.



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SLAVERY AND THE SHAPING OF THE PREMODERN MUSLIM FAMILY

Volume 28 in the BCDSS series “Dependency and Slavery Studies” (DSS)
Edited by Cristina de la Puente, Karen Moukheiber and Serena Tolino
With an article by Turkana Allahverdiyeva



Cristina de la Puente, Karen Moukheiber and Serena Tolino, eds., *Slavery and the Shaping of the Premodern Muslim Family* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2026) ISBN: 9783112231227

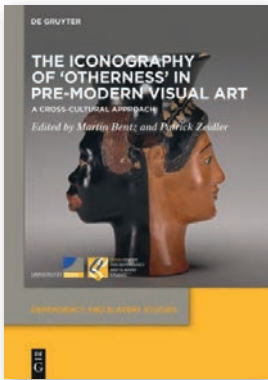
Slavery and the Shaping of the Muslim Family delves into the wide-ranging and complex subject of slavery within the familial sphere of Islamic societies. For too long, secondary literature has treated the family and slavery as separate domains, overlooking the ways in which enslaved individuals were deeply embedded in domestic life. Contemporary research increasingly recognises that the presence and participation of slaves within households were crucial to the formation of both family structures and broader social frameworks in the Islamic world. Bringing together the work of distinguished historian-philologists specialising in diverse regions of the Islamic world, the book examines this theme through a variety of genres – including Islamic jurisprudence, literature, and mysticism. What unites these contributions is a shared commitment to primary sources and a rigorous approach to historical inquiry. While the majority of the chapters address the pre-modern era, the volume also includes work that extends into the eighteenth century, enriching the discussion with a wider chronological perspective. This volume underscores the value of approaching social history from an intersectional perspective – one that resists viewing the individual as a monolithic whole, and instead attends to the multiple dimensions of identity that inform and mediate social relations across varied contexts, both spatial and temporal.

Download via open access:



THE ICONOGRAPHY OF ‘OTHERNESS’ IN PRE-MODERN VISUAL ART – A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH

Volume 31 in the BCDSS series “Dependency and Slavery Studies” (DSS)
Edited by Martin Bentz and Patrick Zeidler
With articles by Birgit Münch and Julia A.B. Hegewald



Martin Bentz and Patrick Zeidler, eds., *The Iconography of 'Otherness' in Pre-Modern Visual Art – A Cross-Cultural Approach* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2026) ISBN: 9783112251010

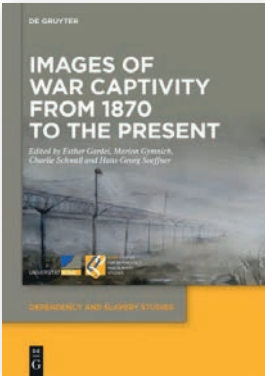
The concept of ‘otherness’ or ‘othering’ has been a prominent topic in sociology and anthropology in the last decades. It has also recently been examined in historical disciplines, particularly with regard to pre-modern times, and taken from philological, historical, and visual studies perspectives. In the past, however, most of these studies on ‘otherness’ and similar phenomena, such as (social) inequality, dependency, and inclusion/exclusion, focused on specific regions, cultures, and periods. In contrast, the methodological approach used in this volume, is based on transcultural and diachronic comparisons. This allows us to look at a broad range of images of ‘others’ stemming from different pre-modern societies (prior to 1800 CE) around the globe and to compare the role of ‘otherness’ and the use of ‘othering’ as a pictorial strategy in various historical contexts. The volume includes case studies from Bronze and Iron Age Near East and Egypt, Late Bronze Age and Archaic-Classical Greece, pre-Roman Italy, Medieval and Early Modern Europe as well as pre-modern South Asia.

Download via open access:



IMAGES OF WAR CAPTIVITY FROM 1870 TO THE PRESENT

Volume 29 in the BCDSS series “Dependency and Slavery Studies” (DSS)
Edited by Esther Gardei, Marion Gymnich, Charlie Schwall and Hans-Georg Soeffner
With an article by Marion Gymnich



Esther Gardei, Marion Gymnich, Charlie Schwall and Hans-Georg Soeffner, eds., *Images of War Captivity from 1870 to the Present* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2026) ISBN: 9783112243589

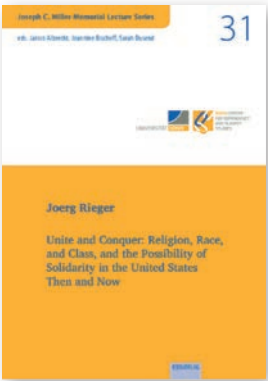
War captivity is a prolific field of research for studies on strong asymmetrical dependency. The contributions in the present volume examine how POWs and civilian internees in different military conflicts, including the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, the two world wars, and the war in Bosnia, have been represented in visual sources. The images of war captivity addressed in the contributions are as heterogeneous as the contexts in which they were produced; they include allegorical representations and official press photographs, amateurish snapshots and propagandistic film recordings, self-drawn camp albums and comics commemorating war. What they have in common, however, is that they not only offer information about POWs and civilian internees but also interpret and emotionalise their experience. Visual sources may, for instance, document how POWs were treated in a particular camp, but they may also stress a certain amount of agency of the POWs; in addition, they may come to play a vital role in how the detaining power is remembered. Images provide evidence of atrocities and comparatively humane treatment alike – and thus may be relevant to the question whether reconciliation might seem possible in the long run.

Download via open access:



UNITE AND CONQUER: RELIGION, RACE, AND CLASS, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF SOLIDARITY IN THE UNITED STATES THEN AND NOW

Volume 31 in the Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series
By Joerg Rieger



Joerg Rieger, *Unite and Conquer: Religion, Race, and Class, and the Possibility of Solidarity in the United States Then and Now* (Berlin: EBVERLAG, 2026) ISBN: 9783868934588

How did racism come to be? And how does the relation of race and class figure in this history? What role does religion play? Just as race is not a biological reality, racism is not inherent to human nature. It was invented and sustained through historical encounters, economies, politics, and religious traditions. This article compares the history of racism in the United States to current developments, highlighting not just divide-and-conquer tactics but also “unite-and-conquer” strategies that reveal deeper complexities as well as potential solutions.

Download via open access:



JAINISM UNDER THREAT: EXTREME FORMS OF DEPENDENCY IN MEDIEVAL KARNATAKA, SOUTH INDIA

Volume 32 in the Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series
By Julia A.B. Hegewald



Julia A.B. Hegewald,
*Jainism Under Threat: Extreme
Forms of Dependency in
Medieval Karnataka, South
India*
(Berlin: EBVERLAG, 2026)
ISBN: 9783868935363

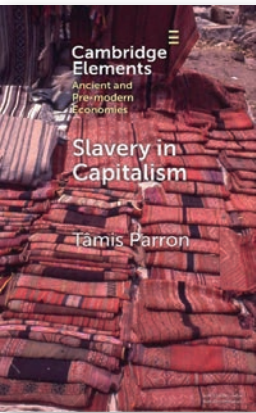
This study examines the rise and decline of Jaina influence in the South Indian state of Karnataka. From roughly the second century CE, Jaina authority rose steadily, so that between around the eight and the early twelfth centuries CE, the Jainas clearly dominated in the fields of politics, religion, philosophy and the arts. This gain in influence led the Jainas to undertake a number of changes to their own religious self-understanding and ritual practice. Some ascetic groups started to settle down in monasteries. The receipt of donations turned the community into a dominant landowning class, which diversified into a number of ascetic subgroups and lay castes. The Tantric and *bhakti* movements at the time also had a marked effect on Jaina sacred practices. From the twelfth century, a withdrawal of royal support, the fragmentation of the community and the arrival of rival religious groups in the area led to a sudden decline. In this publication, the process of the ascent and weakening of this major religious faith is examined through the lens of its religious art and architecture. In these areas, it becomes apparent that despite a clear loss in political and economic power, Jainism and many of its pilgrimage sites survived and are still flourishing in Karnataka today.



Download via open access:

SLAVERY IN CAPITALISM

New book
By Tâmis Parron

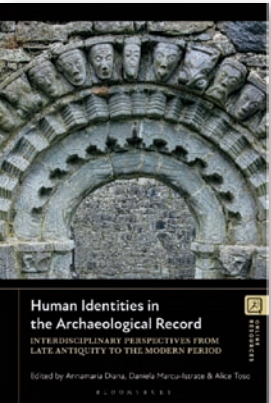


Tâmis Parron,
Slavery in Capitalism
(Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2026)
ISBN: 9781009465069

The enslavement of Africans in the Americas profoundly shaped the continent's demography, cultures, languages, and legal systems, playing a decisive role in modern economic growth and the rise of industrial capitalism. Yet, its historical interpretation remains contested. One view sees modern slavery as beginning with the transatlantic slave trade, disconnecting it from earlier traditions in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Another claims slavery is a universal institution, unchanged across millennia. Moving beyond this dichotomy, the book offers a new framework for the study of Black slavery in the Americas. It situates slavery within a broader and older human geography: a world region of enslavement that dates back to the deep historical formation of the Mediterranean basin. By tracing the emergence of modern slavery from within this ancient system, the book sheds new light on its conditions of existence, collapse, and reconfiguration up to the present day.

HUMAN IDENTITIES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE MODERN PERIOD

Edited volume
By Annamaria Diana, Daniela Marcu-Istrate and Alice Toso



Annamaria Diana, Daniela
Marcu-Istrate and Alice Toso,
eds., *Human Identities in
the Archaeological Record:
Interdisciplinary Perspectives
from Late Antiquity to the
Modern Period*
(New York: Bloomsbury
Publishing, 2026)
ISBN: 9781350536241

Retracing the origin, development and survival of individual and collective identities in past human societies, this volume features a global and interdisciplinary range of case studies from Late Antiquity to the modern period covering a diversity of geographical and historical regions. The contributors delve into the archaeological record to detect not only biological and cultural affinity, but also evidence of diversity and 'otherness'. Through the lens of burial customs, dietary habits, biocultural changes, paleopathological evidence, everyday objects, built remains and belief systems, this book highlights archaeology's crucial role in unearthing, reconstructing and protecting long-established as well as forgotten – or even obliterated – identities, while also unveiling the recurrence of human values transcending space and time. Organised by broad thematic sections, this collective body of work draws together perspectives from archaeology, bioarchaeology, zooarchaeology, forensic anthropology, archaeosciences, anthropology, historical archaeology and other disciplines. As a result, this book elucidates the importance of holistic approaches to the analysis of material culture and skeletal remains – often the only indisputable remnants of human survival and resilience.

PREKÄRE ARBEIT UND WIDERSTÄNDIGE AGENCY IM KONTEXT LANGANHALTENDER VERTREIBUNG

[PRECARIOUS WORK AND RESISTANT AGENCY
IN THE CONTEXT OF PROLONGED DISPLACEMENT]

Book chapter of edited volume
By Benjamin Etzold



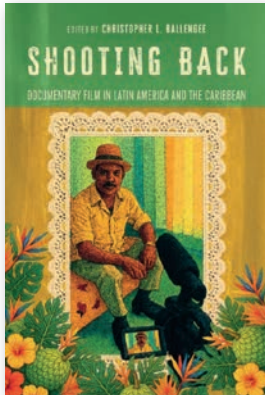
Benjamin Etzold,
"Prekäre Arbeit und wider-
ständige Agency im Kontext
langanhaltender Vertreibung
[Precarious Work and Resistant
Agency in the Context of
Prolonged Displacement]" in
*Arbeitswelten: Neue Pers-
pektiven aus Räumen der Re/
Produktion*, ed. Michaela Douth,
Anne Engelhardt, Tatiana
López, Saumya Premchander
and Miriam Wenner (Berlin,
Heidelberg: Springer Spektrum,
2026): 121–138.
ISBN: 9783662709559

Millions of refugees are denied access to work in the countries where they have sought refuge, or encounter significant challenges in securing employment that aligns with their skill sets and qualifications. Legal barriers impede refugees from obtaining stable employment, perpetuate their social exclusion, and impede their integration. This chapter is based on empirical research from the 'Transnational Figurations of Displacement' (TRAFIG) project. It focuses on the livelihoods strategies and working conditions of refugees in protracted displacement situations in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Jordan, Pakistan, Greece and Italy. From the perspective of labour geography, the chapter highlights the constrained agency of refugees and the disparities in livelihood security between refugee camps and cities. The chapter puts forth the argument that restrictive mobility regimes and 'territorialised labour markets'; have a negative impact on the life prospects of refugees, thereby contributing to the perpetuation and consolidation of protracted displacement. In numerous instances, refugees are only able to ensure their survival through informal practices and by circumventing the formal rules of reception and asylum, that is to say, through resistive modes of agency.



Download via open access:

FILMING MOTHER:
PERFORMING RESPECTABILITY THROUGH ETHNOGRAPHIC
DOCUMENTARIES ON GUYANESE KALI-MAI PUJA



Sinah Theres Kloß,
"Filming Mother: Performing
Respectability through
Ethnographic Documentaries
on Guyanese Kali-Mai Puja"
in *Shooting Back: Documentary
Film in Latin America and the
Caribbean*,
ed. Christopher L. Ballengee
(Mississippi: University Press of
Mississippi, 2026): 219–235
ISBN: 9781496861788

Book chapter in edited volume
By Sinah Theres Kloß

In this chapter, Sinah Kloß analyzes how the Madras tradition in Guyana navigates asymmetrical dependencies by using ethnographic documentaries to contest its historical marginalization and stigmatization by mainstream religious and colonial authorities. Practitioners strategically utilize the "foreign gaze" of researchers and filmmakers to claim respectability and "outside status," which allows them to negotiate their subalternized position within the broader social hierarchy. This process of documentation facilitates the guruization of spiritual leaders, enabling them to challenge the dominance of orthodox Brahman pandits while simultaneously establishing new internal power dynamics and leadership claims within the tradition itself.

ETNOHISTORIA ANDINA:
HOMENAJE A CATHERINE JULIEN
[ANDEAN ETHNOHISTORY: HOMAGE TO CATHERINE JULIEN]



Danitza Márquez Ramírez, Sergio
Bebin Cúneo, Joaquín J. A. Molina
M., Carlos Zegarra Moretti and
Karoline Noack, eds.,
*Etnohistoria andina: Homenaje
a Catherine Julien* [Andean Eth-
nohistory: Homage to Catherine
Julien] = *Notas de Antropología de
las Américas* 4 (2025)
ISSN: 27502902

Journal issue
Edited by Danitza Márquez Ramírez, Sergio Bebin Cúneo,
Joaquín J. A. Molina M., Carlos Zegarra Moretti and
Karoline Noack

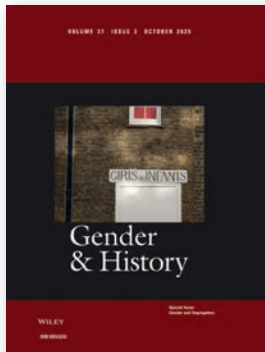
The dossier "Andean Ethnohistory: Homage to Catherine Julien," corresponding to the fourth issue of the journal *Notas de Antropología de las Américas*, focuses on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Reading Inca History*. We begin with Julien's contribution to the debate on the reliability of colonial chronicles, understood as vehicles of Hispanic interests, but also as spaces of negotiation in which Inca factions sought to legitimize their authority and preserve their past through dynastic genealogies, oral histories, quipus, and other media. We highlight her proposal for an "antithetical reading" of the chronicles and her articulation of narratives, material records, and memory practices.



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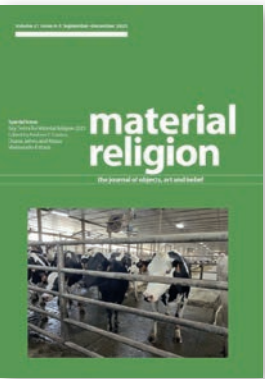
Lisa Hellman, Julia Hillner,
Daniel J.R. Grey and Rachel
Jean-Baptiste, eds.,
Gender & Segregation,
Special Issue of *Gender &
History* 37, no. 3 (2025)
ISSN: 14680424



Download via open access:

SKIN

Journal article
By Sinah Theres Kloß



Sinah Theres Kloß,
"Skin"
Material Religion 21, no. 4–5
(2025): 409–416.
ISSN: 23778784

This article argues that skin is a material site of religious expression with spiritual, social, and political significance. It shows that skin functions not only as a physical boundary but also as a dynamic interface through which religious experience, social identity, and relations to the sacred are embodied and negotiated. Drawing on scholarship in material religion and skin studies, the article examines how bodily boundaries are reshaped through sensory, ritual, and social interactions. It also shows how skin serves as a politicized surface shaped by colonial histories, racialized identities, and cultural practices. As one illustrative example, the article analyzes the godna tattooing traditions of Hindu women in Guyana and Suriname, demonstrating how tattooing materializes rites of passage, purification, and devotion while recreating religious identity.



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DROUGHT, CONFLICT AND THE USE OF HISTORICAL DATA AND
METHODOLOGIES IN INTERDISCIPLINARY PALAEOCLIMATIC RESEARCH



James M. Harland, Helen Foxhall Forbes, Mateusz Fafinski, Guy Halsall, Dan Lawrence, Kelly Clarke-Neish, Lin Foxhall, Michele Abballe, Massimiliano Borroni, Ismini Lypiridou, Vicky Manolopoulou, Anastasia Nikulina, Jakub Sypiański and Dominik Fleitmann, "Drought, Conflict and the Use of Historical Data and Methodologies in Interdisciplinary Palaeoclimatic Research" Climatic Change 179, no.73 (2026).

Journal article

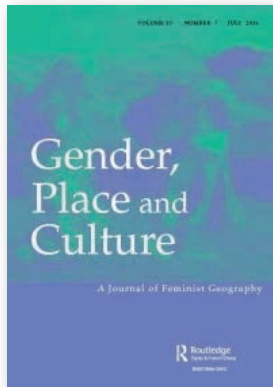
By James M. Harland, Helen Foxhall Forbes, Mateusz Fafinski, Guy Halsall, Dan Lawrence, Kelly Clarke-Neish, Lin Foxhall, Michele Abballe, Massimiliano Borroni, Ismini Lypiridou, Vicky Manolopoulou, Anastasia Nikulina, Jakub Sypiański and Dominik Fleitmann

A major challenge in the interdisciplinary study of past climates is ensuring that evidence and data relating to different disciplines are analysed effectively using appropriate methodologies. In 'Droughts and conflict during the late Roman period', Clim. Chang 178, 2025, Norman et al. argue that historical sources support their conclusions that drought contributed causally to the 'barbarian conspiracy' of 367CE and to other late Roman conflicts. Although historians have developed rigorous methodologies for effective analysis and interpretation of surviving texts, the authors outline no methodologies for dealing with the textual evidence. Further, there are issues with the historical 'conflict' and numismatic datasets and with their interpretation. We focus on four major evidential points: 1) the 'barbarian conspiracy', 2) the agricultural economy; 3) the 'conflict' dataset and 4) the coin dataset. Historical evidence relating to drought and famine in the late Roman Empire does exist: future interdisciplinary research may indeed offer interesting observations on the relationships between drought and conflict, but the textual evidence discussed by Norman et al. does not, and cannot, support the authors' assertions. Effective interdisciplinary research must allow all disciplines to engage on their own terms and with their own accepted standards of rigour.



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GENDERED VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT IN THE BANGLADESH–MYANMAR
BORDERLANDS: (TRANS)LOCAL EXPERIENCES AND RESPONSES



Benjamin Etzold, Syeda R. Rashid and Anas Ansar, "Gendered Violence and Conflict in the Bangladesh–Myanmar Borderlands: (Trans)Local Experiences and Responses" Gender, Place and Culture (2026): 1–20.

Journal article

Benjamin Etzold, Syeda R. Rashid and Anas Ansar

A protracted refugee crisis has unfolded in the Bangladesh–Myanmar borderlands over the past few decades. Within this context, our paper examines the translocal dynamics of gendered violence that Rohingya refugees are subjected to and compelled to navigate. Drawing on a 'nested understanding' of gendered violence that incorporates insights from feminist scholarship, peace and conflict studies and human geography, we undertake three analytical steps. First, we examine how violent conflict, displacement, containment and marginalisation, as well as growing insecurity driven by the rising influence of armed groups, have created conditions conducive to gendered violence. Second, we demonstrate how Rohingya women have persistently been subjected to diverse forms of gender-based violence throughout their lives and displacement trajectories, and how they cope with such traumatic experiences and which strategies they employ to protect themselves. Third, we identify new forms of gendered violence that Rohingya men are confronted with, particularly forced recruitment into armed groups, which has significant repercussions for both men and women, and the wider Rohingya community. In light of these findings, we contend that an explanation of gendered violence in Bangladesh's refugee camps cannot be limited to an analysis of local conditions alone. Rather, it must also account for the disruptive 'cascades of violence' across borders as well as the contestations of power relations and gender roles. This necessitates a translocal perspective that recognises displaced people's agency while acknowledging the violent orders of borderlands.



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CO-RESPONDING WITH A PARROT IN AMAZONIA:
COSMOPOLITICAL ENGAGEMENTS AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Journal article

By Taynã Tagliati

Taynã Tagliati, "Co-Responding with a Parrot in Amazonia: Cosmopolitical Engagements and Ethnography" Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society 50, no.1 (2026): 20–42.

More-than-human beings consistently challenge ethnographic practices. However, ethnographic training has not consistently adopted such actors as irrefutable subjects of field research. In this article, I describe how the relationship between a parrot, a Kayapó shaman, and myself as a researcher impacted my ethnographic practice and research data. I aim to establish a framework to make more-than-humans' accountability evident in ethnography. I argue for creative ways of engaging with more-than-humans, suggesting "parrolitics" as a specific kind of cosmopolitics done with and by parrots. I demonstrate how being available and empathetic to more-than-humans was crucial to developing attentive patience as a skill, allowing me to engage with a parrot interlocutor, directly influencing my relationship with the animal's companion, a human shaman. Combining multispecies ethnography and autoethnography, I contribute to both theories by using embodied affection to establish a solid connection between them. Finally, this study demonstrates that moving beyond established approaches that reduce animals to symbolic resources can offer new and refreshing perspectives for ethnographic work.

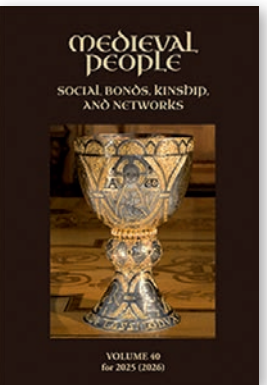


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PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF NAMELESSNESS
IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Journal article

By Jamie Wood, Hope Williard, Máirín MacCarron, Julia Hillner and James R. Burns



Jamie Wood, Hope Williard, Máirín MacCarron, Julia Hillner and James R. Burns, "Problems and Possibilities of Namelessness in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages" Medieval People 40, no. 1 (2026): Article 6.

This article proposes new methodological and theoretical perspectives for the study of nameless individuals and groups in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Despite the quantitative predominance of the nameless in our late antique and early medieval sources, they have received only minimal attention in scholarship, a lacuna which had a distorting effect on our understanding of late antique and early medieval society on a systemic level. Drawing on the extensive empirical, methodological, and ethical reflections on the phenomenon of nameless historical actors by historians of early modern and modern slavery, the article first examines the processes that led to the un-naming of late antique and early medieval enslaved and other marginalised people and then discusses the methodological and interpretive implications of their namelessness for prosopographical and quantitative research in the age of Digital Humanities.



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2ND HALF OF 2026

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LABOUR GEOGRAPHY IN CONVERSATION WITH DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES

BOOK LAUNCH & DISCUSSION

Organized by Michaela Douth and Benjamin Etzold – in collaboration with the Department for South East Asian Studies, Uni Bonn, and bicc (Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies)

02 September

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND NAMIBIAN LIBERATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC BIOGRAPHY OF SALATIEL AILONGA

GUEST LECTURE AND CONVERSATION

with Christian A. Williams as part of the Life Writing Working Group

Organized by Pia Wiegink and Lewis Doney. Introduction by David B. Smith

17–18 September

NAMELESSNESS IN HISTORY: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

WORKSHOP

Organized by Julia Hillner and Pia Wiegink

28–30 October

CHILDREN'S TESTIMONIES: UNLOCKING HISTORICAL AND ART-HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

CONFERENCE

Organized by Claudia Jarzebowski and Birigt Münch

October or November

ASYMMETRISCHE ABHÄNGIGKEITEN IN DER ELITENLITERATUR UND DER BILDWELT DES ALTEN ORIENTS EINSCHLIESSLICH ÄGYPTENS: METHODISCHE FRAGEN UND KONKRETE REKONSTRUKTIONEN

WORKSHOP

Organized by Ludwig Morenz

09 November

EVA GENGLER: FEMINISTISCHE KI

READING AND DISCUSSION

Organized by Cécile Jeblawei, in cooperation with Volkshochschule Bonn

12 November

BLACK FACES IN WHITE? SPACE" - DOCUMENTARY BY THABO THINDI

FILM SCREENING & DISCUSSION

Organized by Cécile Jeblawei, in collaboration with Kino in der Brotfabrik

02–03 December

BEYOND CHAINS AND CHOICES: LEGACIES OF STRONG ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCIES IN AFRICA

CONFERENCE

In Collaboration with Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt. Organized by Chioma Daiys Onyige

10–11 December

TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE

WORKSHOP

Organized by Eva Lehner

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ANANYA JAHANARA KABIR
(King's College London, UK)

September

(hybrid) *

SEPTEMBER 7, 2026

CHILD LABOUR OPPONENTS AND THEIR
CAMPAIGNS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE,
1880S-1930S

NINA SCHNEIDER
(Catholic University
Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany)

October

(hybrid) *

OCTOBER 19, 2026

DENATURALIZING THE MITA:
INDIGENOUS LABOR, LOCAL POWER, AND
THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

ROSSANA BARRAGÁN
(CIDES-UMSA, Bolivia)

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The **DEPENDENT** magazine is published bi-annually by the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS). It is aimed at laypeople with an interest in dependency and slavery related topics, as well as students and scholars of related disciplines. Contributions are drawn from BCDSS professors, principal investigators, fellows, PhD and postdoctoral researchers, Masters students, as well as guest contributors from partner organizations. Together, they provide insights into current research projects while proposing 'Strong Asymmetrical Dependency' as a new concept to explore all shades of human bondage between 'free' and 'unfree' across time and space.

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53113 Bonn
www.dependency.uni-bonn.de
dependency@uni-bonn.de

EDITORS

Cécile Jeblawei
Laura Hartmann
Niniane Waldmann

TRANSLATOR AND ACADEMIC EDITOR

Imogen Herrard

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THE BONN CENTER FOR DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES (BCDSS)

The Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) is a research cluster funded within the framework of the Excellence Strategy of the German federal and state governments. In May 2025, the cluster was awarded a further seven years of funding by the German Research Foundation.

Since 2019, the Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies has been developing a new approach to slavery and dependency research, centred on the key concept of 'Strong Asymmetrical Dependency'. Based on historically sound research, all forms of strong social dependencies from different periods and regions of the world are examined – from Han China and Tsarist Russia to early modern Germany and colonial Cameroon to the Maya Empire. The focus is on all shades between 'free' and 'unfree'. The project analyses both well-known forms of dependency – such as Roman, transatlantic and Mamluk slavery, forced labor and debt bondage – and more hidden forms such as human trafficking and serfdom. The participating researchers from 43 departments and five faculties at the University of Bonn work in a transdisciplinary manner and in close cooperation with 24 international partner institutions in Europe, the Anglo-American world, Africa, Latin America and Asia. The concept of strong asymmetrical dependency provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how power relations have historically shaped societies worldwide and continue to influence them. Against the backdrop of current global challenges such as forced migration, socio-economic inequality and environmental exploitation, this research provides important insights into persistent dependencies.



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Niebuhrstraße 5
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Tel. 0228 73-62442
dependency@uni-bonn.de
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