

Working Groups at the BCDSS

Contemporary Asymmetrical Dependencies (CAD)

We define Contemporary Asymmetrical Dependencies (CAD) as all contemporary forms of exploitation, undesired dependency and/or structural inequalities that are either direct historical legacies of slavery or based on slavery-like power relations such as the deprivation of the right to move freely or receive decent compensation for work. These include a range of dependencies, starting from labor exploitation in sweatshops, call centers or other work environments, to various forms of migrant exploitation and human trafficking, down to aspects of the carceral system in the US.

Unlike "known" asymmetrical dependencies in history, i.e. between a patron and a client, contemporary asymmetrical dependencies are characterized by "unknown" relationships between individuals and institutions. These relationships are based on structural violence, which means that the system allows for the responsibility to be passed down to other actors such as supervisors, managers, other workers, etc. Various forms of disciplinary measures and the effects of dependency on the body (physically and mentally) from key aspects in structurally arisen dependencies.

In short, both small and large-scale institutionalized forms of (undesired) exclusion, based on specific features such as social inheritance (caste, slave descent), gender, race, ethnicity, or religious background are considered to be contemporary asymmetrical dependencies.

Why Contemporary Asymmetrical Dependencies (CAD)?

The working group was set up in January 2020 by Dr Lotte Pelckmans (BCDSS fellow 2019–2020) and Sarah Dusend (BCDSS research and study coordinator) in order to give more visibility to and underline the importance of asymmetrical dependencies in the contemporary world. Currently, the majority of researchers at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies cluster focus on past forms of asymmetrical dependencies, however, a minority of PhD students work on contemporary aspects. Hence the demand for a forum that allows to exchange ideas on contemporary asymmetrical dependencies, which are often connected to the past one way or another. Finally, we intend to contribute to the cluster's promise to generate a debate and public outreach on the topic of asymmetrical dependencies. We are committed to finding ways to do so when addressing ongoing societal issues.

Who is it for?

Everyone interested in contemporary relations of (asymmetrical) dependencies. Our working group consists of researchers covering a large range of subject areas and topics. These include modern slavery, (return) migration, forced labor, exploitation as well as global labor relations, but also spatial dependencies or theoretical discussions.

We are academics, practitioners, development organizations, journalists and welcome anyone with a special interest in contemporary asymmetrical dependencies.

How are we organized?

Our study group holds regular meetings (at least once a fortnight), aimed at intellectual exchange among our members, with a minimum level of administration for the time being. Our aim is to maintain and steadily grow our network.

Our activities include

- networking
- exchange of literature and readings
- offering a platform for discussion of both work and central readings
- offering a platform for knowledge exchange
- informal exchange of ideas and learning by doing (everyone should feel free to express themselves and argue openly, be open about intellectual struggles and share creative approaches)

Our long term goals

- joint collaboration leading to conferences and/or e.g. a mini seminar series
- sharing information on relevant activities, websites and publications in the field
- public outreach: docs and talks, filmed lectures

Readings

Please note that all BCDSS publications, including those related to the topics of CAD, can be accessed via the central library.

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