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ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCIES AND INTERSECTIONALITY: DEBATES, PERSPECTIVES AND CASE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÄT BONN

BONN CENTER FOR DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES

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Abstract

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

Table of Contents

I. Introduction[*]

Originally developed by scholars focusing on gender and race,[1] intersectionality has since been productively applied to various forms of social hierarchization, discrimination and stigmatization.[2] Kimberlé Crenshaw, who is credited with coining the term 'intersectionality', argues in her groundbreaking article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" that "the intersectional experience" of Black women in the United States is more than "the sum of racism and sexism."[3] In other words, the ways Black women are affected by racism differs from how Black men experience racism, just as Black women and white women experience sexism in distinct ways. The concept of intersectionality states that social formulations do not exist in isolation, but are instead linked by complex and interwoven relationships. Intersectionality is thus based on the assumption that all factors informing the identity and the social position of a person are inextricably connected. Intersectional approaches maintain that paying attention to these relationships is essential for understanding the workings of power in social relations.

Given that "intersectionality's raison d'être lies in its attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities",[4] it almost seems to be a foregone conclusion that intersectional approaches are also bound to be extremely useful for the analysis of strong asymmetrical dependencies. We understand asymmetrical dependencies, following Winnebeck at al., as a dynamic and relational process.[5] Thereby, the social orders which stabilize relations of asymmetrical dependency have to be continually and actively shaped and are embedded in a wider web of dependency.

Certainly, studies of enslavement and dependency have tried to challenge broad frameworks to help "overcome the dominance of the conceptual matrix of the modern West in the humanities" and allow "for a long-term and transculturally comparative and connected perspective […] to fully address the complexity of societies."[6] Nevertheless, a focus on the dynamic and multifaceted ways in which assumed, experienced and perceived categories of difference engage with the formation of power has not yet sufficiently informed how we think about dependency.[7]

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[*] We thank David B. Smith for his support in copy editing.
[1] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1: 139–67.
[2] Vera Kallenberg, Jennifer Meyer and Johanna M. Müller, *Intersectionality und Kritik. Neue Perspektiven für alte Fragen* (Wiesbaden: Springer 2013); Matthias Bähr and Florian Kühnel, "Plädoyer für eine Historische Intersektionsanalyse," in *Verschränkte Ungleichheit. Praktiken der Intersektionalität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Matthias Bähr and Florian Kühnel (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2018): 9–38.
[3] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex": 140.
[4] Patricia Hill Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemma," *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015): 1–20, 3.
[5] Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler, and Stephan Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency," *Journal of Global Slavery* 8, no. 1 (2023): 1–59.
[6] Christian De Vito, Juliane Schiel, and Matthias van Rossum, "From Bondage to Precariousness? New Perspectives on Labor and Social History," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 2 (2020): 644–62, 647.
[7] Ibid.

We argue in this paper that systematically deploying an intersectional outlook in terms of objects of analysis as well as with regard to academic practices helps correct this imbalance, enriching our understanding of asymmetrical dependencies in the process. We show that contextualizing and specifying how categories of difference structure social life enables scholars to better understand the ways in which hierarchies and asymmetries are (re)produced and enacted. Thereby, intersectionality should not be seen as the application of a fixed set of ahistorical categories, but rather as an approach through which the dynamic interplay of various taxonomies in establishing as well as de-stabilizing and overcoming dependency can be analyzed. Intersectionality consequently allows for a more culminated portrait of systemic injustices and social inequalities and the added value that might come from it, not to mention providing a starting point for an overarching analysis for the study of asymmetrical dependencies. We also argue in this paper that intersectional analysis helps reveal the secret worlds and silenced voices of marginalized individuals and groups, who might otherwise slip through the researcher's net. In addition, epistemic regimes are at the center when it comes to academic self-reflection of the ways in which scholars develop their research. Chioma Daisy Onigye has recently reminded us that diversity is not a matter of adding tokens to a team (i.e. academia) that remains otherwise homogeneous in the way it approaches questions in the humanities.[8] It is of uttermost importance to include different styles and modes of thinking and writing and acting.

From our perspective, intersectionality refers to the spotlighting of entwinements, that is, underscoring and explaining how different social and cultural categories mutually reinforced or influenced one another in specific historical or present circumstances. By looking through the lens of intersectionality, we attempt to unearth new insights and resurrect hidden narratives obscured by monophonic, single-category approaches to dependency. Indeed, it is at the intersection of two or more divergent axes that we are liable to come across something new. In this sense, including intersectionality as part of the methodology of dependency studies also helps deconstruct stereotypes. In the first instance, this makes us examine our own preconceptions, which tend to inform our research unconsciously and thus inhibit our receptiveness to cultural nuances. Secondly, and more straightforwardly, long-standing stereotypes, which have been reproduced and reiterated in academic discourse, need to be addressed and corrected. In some cases, this new thinking may even give rise to a paradigm shift. Consequently, an intersectional approach also has the potential to contest established assumptions about slavery and dependency, particularly those wrought from the models of the transatlantic slave trade as Jennifer Morgan has recently done, following the footsteps of another social history icon, Angela Davis.[9]

Our primary questions underpinning the exploration of intersectionality and asymmetrical dependencies are as follows: Firstly, what new insights can we gain by bringing together and relating distinct categories? How do such taxonomies mutually impact one another? Do they act to reinforce or weaken other social determiners? And finally, what new, respectively formerly unseen narratives can we uncover when looking through the spyglass of intersectionality?

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[8] Chioma Daisy Onigye, "Why Diversity Matters in Research and Development," BCDSS Open Lecture, 15.09.2022.

[9] Jennifer Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

Through this discussion paper, we intend to combine our thoughts and insights on the nexus of intersectionality and dependencies from an interdisciplinary perspective. Reflecting our backgrounds in history, anthropology, law and literature, we not only intend to start an integrative conversation, but advocate for an inter-temporal approach, bringing together expertise from a range of epochs. This makes it possible to include a broad array of historical contexts, as well as a number of contemporary settings. In drawing upon our collective knowledge of different regions — Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Europe — we thus contribute to a transregional and transcultural understanding of the link between intersectionality and dependency that is reflective of distinct as much as connected aspects.

Here, a caveat seems to be called for: While any form of asymmetrical dependency is shaped by the intersection of categories of (social) differentiation,[10] the triumvirate of class, race and gender constitutes the bedrock of intersectional thinking. However, focusing on only these three social formulae causes us to miss the potential for other conduits of discrimination, especially when seen from historical perspectives where other forms of social demarcation may have been effective. Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the range and variety of intersecting categories in theoretical approaches as well as in case studies. For example, social status, honorary rank, age, religious belief, sexual expression, descent, marital status, social reputation, citizenship, residency, knowledge and bodily constitution all may influence and have influenced the shaping of dependency relations and thus one's positioning and self-positioning in social, cultural and political orders.

In this paper, we will start by outlining the background, general ideas and approaches of intersectionality in section II, before presenting a number of examples of the productive application of this particular approach to research on the past in section III. We will then, in section IV, discuss conceptual and methodological challenges in research on past and present forms of social categorizations, especially along the axes of race and class and the concept of 'the individual'. An important point in this regard is taking into account how our present, 21st-century and euro-centric standpoint influences our reading and interpretation of the past and non-European societies. In section V, we show new perspectives, insights and possible avenues for further research. We stress that perceiving certain categories, such as ethnicity, as a process of identity formation and self-identification and in that as a leverage for enabling and constraining social action, helps us to better grasp dynamic processes of asymmetrical dependencies. Also, we emphasize the significance of a relational approach in order to grasp the mutual enforcement of different categories in producing asymmetries.

The topics and arguments in this discussion paper are induced by our empirical work on asymmetrical dependencies. We present how our findings inspire the critical discussion of 'established' concepts. Thereby, we highlight what can be found in current work in the field of dependency studies and what is still absent. We also intend to strengthen the comparison and the dialogue between our different perspectives based on our empirical findings. We don't provide one-size-fits-all solutions. But we describe a current process of articulating

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[10] Stefan Hirschauer, "Un/doing Differences. Die Kontingenz sozialer Zugehörigkeiten," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 43, no. 3 (2014): 170–91; Mary Lindemann, "The Multiple Identities of Maiden Heinrich," in *Gender in Early Modern German History*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 131–51.

pathways for how intersectionality can open up new perspectives and potentials for a better understanding of asymmetrical dependencies in past and in present societies.

II. Intersectionality in Social Science Research: Multiple Axes of Differentiation for Better Understanding Asymmetries

While the introduction of the term 'intersectionality' by Kimberlé Crenshaw has certainly rendered the concept more visible, the underlying idea that neither identity nor oppression can be explained sufficiently by relying on a single social category or one axis of analysis has also been put forward by other scholars (and activists) since the 1980s. In particular feminist scholars focusing on the experience of women of color rejected generalizations with respect to patterns of exclusion: "The women-of-colour critique of conventional feminism's essentialism emphasized the disconnect between feminism's claims to speak for all women and feminism's perennial inattention to racial, ethnic, class, and sexual difference(s)."[11] This critique is tangible in influential publications including bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman* or Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.[12] Thus, the beginnings of intersectional approaches in the 1980s and 1990s are closely connected with feminist publications by women of color and lesbians who drew attention to the limits and blind spots of mostly heteronormative mainstream feminist ideas.

In recent years, intersectionality has become a buzzword in both academic and non-academic debates about oppression and social inequality. Across various disciplines, adopting an intersectional approach by now seems almost de rigeur for analyses of inequality in contemporary societies. Jennifer Nash, for instance, claims that intersectionality "has become the 'gold standard' multi-disciplinary approach for analyzing subjects' experiences of both identity and oppression",[13] and Gabriele Dietze et al. even observe that there is an "intersectionality hype."[14]

Notwithstanding the popularity of intersectional approaches, pinning down the concept and operationalizing it turns out to be a fairly difficult endeavor. It has become commonplace to characterize intersectionality as "a loosely specified theoretical concept"[15] and to deplore "the term's conceptual vagueness"[16]. In a similar vein, Patricia Hill Collins points out that scholars tend to "conceptualize intersectionality in dramatically different ways when they use it." Though the "definitional fluidity" that seems to be inherent in intersectional approaches is often perceived as an obstacle, "intersectionality's unruliness" could perhaps not only be

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[11] Jennifer Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1–15, 3.

[12] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

[13] Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality": 2.

[14] Gabriele Dietze, Elahe Haschemi Yekani and Beatrice Michaelis, "Modes of Being vs. Categories," in *Beyond Gender: An Advanced Introduction to Futures of Feminist and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Greta Olson, Daniel Hartley, Mirjam Horn-Schott and Leonie Schmidt (London: Routledge, 2018): 117–36, 124.

[15] Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Elin Lindström, "Intersectionality," in *Gender: The Key Concepts*, ed. Mary Evans and Carolyn H. Williams (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013): 129–34, 130.

[16] Philipp Löffler, "Intersectionality in/and Cultural Studies," in *Key Concepts for the Study of Culture: An Introduction*, ed. Vera Nünning, Philipp Löffler and Margit Peterfy (Trier: WVT, 2020): 205–230, 206.

seen as a disadvantage.[17] After all, a concept that seeks to tackle relations between multiple social categories, which are in and of themselves highly complex, should be expected to display a certain degree of complexity.

Moreover, notwithstanding the vagueness or flexibility of the genuinely political concept, there still are core ideas that most proponents of intersectionality seem to subscribe to: "At its root, intersectionality posits that different dimensions of social life (hierarchies, axes of differentiation, axes of oppression, social structures, normativities) are intersecting, mutually modifying and inseparable."[18] This emphasis on relations and multiple axes is what renders the concept both attractive and challenging to work with. Even though the social categories that are foregrounded in intersectional case studies may vary, this approach is essentially based on the assumption that "[r]ace, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nation, ethnicity, and similar categories of analysis are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation from one another."[19] From a philosophical standpoint a current topic of intersectional concern has been highlighted: "The figure of the human on which the narrative of the Anthropocene builds thus appears to be neutral while it is, at the same time, shaped by a series of interrelated exclusions and power relations."[20] Sex and gender and race, unsurprisingly, are among them.

III. From 'Add and Stir' to the Mutual (Re)Enforcement of Categories in Research on the Past

Intersectionality thus means that various categories mutually (re)enforce each other in producing social, political, and cultural asymmetries of participation and representation, which is more than just adding categories. The 'add and stir' approach all too common in gender studies implies that gender injustice can supposedly be reduced by just adding more women to the scene. However, such an approach does not tackle the complexity of marginalization, asymmetrical dependencies and systemic discrimination. Intersectionality likewise does not simply mean adding more categories and stirring. Instead, a truly intersectional approach to the study of asymmetrical dependencies looks at how different categories influence and reinforce each other within the framework of strong asymmetrical dependencies.

The idea of the mutual reinforcement of different categories has been productively applied in historical research. It is, for example, exemplified in the work of Monica Miller on Black enslaved young men in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fashionable English society.[21] She refers to the fate of 'Sambo', who was a quasi-servant/page to Elizabeth Chudleigh, the "profligate Duchess of Kingston."[22] His story is shaped by the complex intersections of race, age, gender, and enslaved status. Caught between social mobility and bondage, surveillance and insignificance, and experiencing both luxury and deprivation, this example communicates the complexity of asymmetrical dependencies when they intersect with embodied categories

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[17] Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemma": 3.

[18] Sigle-Rushton and Lindström, "Intersectionality": 131.

[19] Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemma": 14.

[20] Susanne Lettow, "The Figure of the Human in the 'White (M)anthropocene'. Philosophical Narratives on Sex, Race and Organic Kinship," in *Ecologies of Gender. Contemporary Nature Relations and the Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Susanne Lettow and Sabine Nessel (London: Routledge, 2022): 189–205.

[21] Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

[22] Ibid.: 55.

of gender, racialization, age (or sexual maturity, to be more precise). 'Sambo' was raised from childhood in the entourage of aristocrats and socialites. An 'elegantly dressed' house boy, he frequented popular spots and commanded attention for both himself and his mistress. He was afforded a high degree of comfort, popularity, fame, and was even brought into the confidence of socialites. He was notionally enslaved, and yet, due the precise intersections between his race and his age, he experienced a social world, and a 'class position', that many enslaved individuals did not. This intersection was not stable though. As he reached adulthood, his presence, and apparent adult (aka sexual) behavior, became increasingly problematic to Elizabeth Chudleigh. As puberty advanced, the balance between his social mobility and his bondage changed, as his exploits were gossiped about and his adult body became more visible. The adult male body raced as Black was arguably more 'problematic' than that of a liveried child who just *happened to be* raced as Black. As a result, the young man was moved to the West Indies to work as a slave on the plantations, where his mobility was ultimately diminished and where enslavement became concomitant to the status of an adult male raced as Black.

The idea of the intertwinement of specific categories of differentiation also already underpins research conducted within the BCDSS, for example, by Eva Lehner,[23] who is working on Early Modern church registers from German parishes. Since the sixteenth century, Christian clerics (both Protestant pastors and Catholic priests) recorded the lives of their parishioners in entries on baptism, marriages, and burials throughout Europe and later on globally. The church ministers developed and established categories to identify people in this religious and bureaucratic text type. In the evolution and prioritization of specific categories, gender mattered in intertwinement with other categories, such as age, personal status (single, married, widowed), social status, and religion. Married women thus were not registered *as women* but as wives belonging to a household and a husband. Single women were registered as maidservants belonging to the household in which they were employed or to the household they grew up in. Children were also registered as daughters or sons belonging to a housefather (*pater familias*). Unbaptized or stillborn children were mostly documented without a gender. No baptism meant having no name. No name meant having no gender to document. However, these infants were registered in their relation to God because their souls were in a critical condition before and without baptism. Children born out of wedlock were registered as belonging to their mothers and could be marked as illegitimate. Women could be legally registered as daughters to fathers and wives to husbands, as children, servants, war captives, and enslaved people, as the property of parents and masters. The categorization of individuals became markedly complicated when considering diverse religious beliefs and legal statuses, notably distinguishing between free and unfree statuses. This complexity became particularly apparent in situations involving war captives, who, if adhering to a different religion, could be temporarily enslaved. Such intricacies were heightened when these captives underwent conversion and were subsequently documented in Christian registers.[24]

Including the colonial context of the Cape in South Africa during the early modern period shows more explicitly that enslaved people could be included in church records. Children born to enslaved Asian or African women were not exempt from this complex categorization.

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[23] Eva Lehner, *Taufe, Ehe, Tod. Praktiken des Verzeichnens in frühneuzeitlichen Kirchenbüchern*, Historische Wissensforschung 22 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2023).
[24] Ibid.: 138–52.

Despite their status as enslaved individuals, these children could be baptized and formally recorded in the Christian registers of the Dutch Reformed Church especially when their fathers were free European Christians and the Dutch Trading Company claimed 'ownership' over these children.[25] In this colonial setting, a variety of factors, including religious beliefs, free and unfree status, lineage, origin and eventually ethnicity or race, played key roles in classifying and positioning individuals within a community and its social hierarchies and dependencies. Thus, church registers do not only make visible dependencies but also dependent actors who rarely have a direct voice in historical sources. Looking at the intertwinement of different categories provides a deeper understanding of dependencies: when registering a woman as a maidservant or an enslaved person, gender is related to her age, her status as a single woman, and her dependency on her family, her employer or owner. Searching for their indirect, yet still effective, interagency through these relationships might be a new pathway to accessing subaltern(ized) actors who have been invisible or unseen in most other sources.[26] Dependents become visible in and through their relationships and dependencies on others. Reading sources like church registers and court records, we find people interacting with and through each other and the various communities one could belong to. These interactions or interagencies can happen within and across hierarchies and dependencies, they are not a one-way-street and definitely not a top-down-action. Furthermore, zooming in on the relationships and interdependencies makes the intersectionality of multiple categories visible.

The above examples show how an intersectional approach can sharpen our understanding of how identities were established and documented in the past. However, there are also challenges to applying an approach that has, after all, originally been developed to analyze *modern* forms of inequalities and discrimination to the past, and especially to the premodern world.

IV. Challenges in Research on Social Formations in the Past and in Present Non-European Contexts

IV. 1 'Race': Different Meanings in the Past

For historians it is always a challenge to minimize the effect of our present situation, our thinking, cultural context and social paradigms on the way we view the past in our research. This is particularly the case when we examine an era that is very different from ours due to major changes and/or differences regarding basic beliefs and social paradigm shifts. Today, Western ways of thinking tend to be informed by concepts such as individual rights and freedom. It is still a matter of ongoing academic debate how important these concepts were in premodernity but certainly they were less hegemonic. Each category of differentiation that scholars are investigating needs to be understood and explained in reference to the specific socio-cultural and historical contexts. Scholars must be aware, for example, that ideas of

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[25] Eva Lehner: "Religion, Slavery, and Resistance in Cape Town during the Dutch Colonial Period (1652–1795)," in *Slavery, Law and Religion in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Christoph Haar (Paderborn: Brill/Schöningh, forthcoming 2024).

[26] Juliane Schiel, Isabelle Schürch and Aline Steinbrecher, "Von Sklaven, Pferden und Hunden. Trialog über den Nutzen aktueller Agency-Debatten für die Sozialgeschichte," *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte/Annuaire suisse d'histoire économique et sociale* 32 (2017): 17–48, 22.

'race', 'gender' or 'class' did not have the same meaning in different (past) societies, which makes it necessary to consider the challenges resulting from this lack of familiarity. This renders it difficult and perhaps undesirable to apply certain categories of differentiation, although we would like to stress, it does not make it entirely impossible or useless.

In this regard, we draw attention to how the concept 'race' is currently being used among some premodern scholars and how we can make these debates productive for work on asymmetrical dependency. Conventionally, premodern historians have followed modern historians in arguing that 'race' as it is understood today in the English language did not gain currency until the late 1800s.[27] Scholars like Catherine Hall have argued that the abolition of slavery changed the meaning of the word, which hitherto had referred to 'lineage' ("Geschlecht" in German) rather than to a supposedly biological state. As the transatlantic slave trade diminished and the British Empire expanded later in the 19th century, categorizations of 'race' as a skin color hierarchy, with whiteness at the top, replaced the idea of enslavement as a primary marker of social differentiation. Race discourse became a justification for other forms of asymmetrical dependency (and even genocide). As Catherine Hall argued, "once slavery no longer fixed the African as inferior, other legitimations for his/her subordination had to be found."[28] For historians of premodernity, this raises the question of whether the concept of 'race' can even be used outside post-1800 contexts.

More recently, however, scholars employing Critical Race Theory have stressed the usefulness of the concept even for the premodern world. After all, the contemporary understanding of 'race' as a phenomenon is that it functions through mechanisms of categorization upon the basis of *perceived* and essentialized traits, which need have no basis in reality but produce real outcomes of discrimination and inferiorization, which then predetermine the organization of power relations. Such mechanisms, as is widely known from social and gender history, certainly existed in premodernity, an observation which has been vital for scholars of Premodern Critical Race Theory, whose work identifies and analyses these mechanisms in a variety of spatio-temporal contexts. Of course, there remains a debate as to whether given instances of such categorical ascription should be considered 'race thinking' in a given context, and this debate can generally be divided into two major camps. The first emphasizes the importance of retaining the term 'race' for premodernity, seeing this as a means of departing from the notion that humankind had a stage of 'pre-racial innocence'. These scholars criticize the self-congratulatory narrative that in order to overcome racism, modernity had to 'invent' race. They highlight that it is the very intersectionality of racial mechanisms that enables them to function, via their overlap and association with other modes of social organization, such as gender, dis/ability, and religion. From this, these scholars argue that 'race-thinking,' even if not described in those terms, has always been a possible component of human socio-political organization. Examples of settings for which they claim to have identified such race-thinking include classical Hellenism, dominant

[27] See e.g. David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (London: Blackwell, 2002); for a critical summary of this approach, see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 16–20.

[28] Catherine Hall, *Legacies of British Slave Ownership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 8.

expressions of early Christianity, later medieval antisemitism and ideals about nobility, and the earliest colonial encounters of the late medieval and early modern periods.[29]

These works have faced criticism, however, from a second camp, themselves adherents to the insights provided by Critical Race Theory, who agree that racial thinking could have a presence in premodernity. Their criticism therefore lies in the specific attempts at empirical identification of these mechanisms made by scholars of Premodern Critical Race Theory. They also point out that many of the arguments put forward by such scholars themselves display teleological thinking and amount to simply shifting the starting point of the development to an earlier stage. They argue that such concern with conceptual similarity risks losing the contextual specifics of the categorizing phenomena under examination, and likewise risks simply reifying categories that stem from modern mechanisms for prejudicial race-making, thereby losing some of the liberatory potential found in recognizing the socially constructed nature of race.[30]

This debate has been productive in that it allows us to retain historians' emphasis on the alterity of the past while nevertheless being attentive to the existence of phenomena that can be productively analyzed through the framework of Critical Race Theory, provided the social institutional mechanisms necessary for such phenomena to take form are present (such as those of a premodern state). An example of this can be found in scholarly work on the later Roman Empire, which has shown how normative expectations about ideal gendered behavior within the household intersect with normative expectations about civic versus martial, or civilized versus 'barbarian' behavior. Fused with Greco-Roman geographic and ethnographic intellectual frameworks,[31] such discursive mechanisms drove the production of social categories in the late antique world characterized by perceived superiority or inferiority, which was, as is always the case with race-thinking, inconsistently determined, via a combination of socio-cultural behaviors, geographic, biological, and epidermal features, and strong asymmetrical dependencies.[32] Such classical frameworks were directly inherited by

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[29] Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Shelley P. Haley, "Be Not Afraid of the Dark: Critical Race Theory and Classical Studies," in *Prejudice, and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christianity*, ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009): 27–50; Geraldine Heng, "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages, I: Racial Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass* 8, no. 5 (2011): 258–74; Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*; Dorothy Kim, "Reframing Race and Jewish/Christian Relations in the Middle Ages," *transversal* 13, no. 1 (2015): 52–64; Matthew X. Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages: Race and the Construction of the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2018); Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[30] S.J. Pearce, "The Inquisitor and the Moseret: The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages and the New English Colonialism in Jewish Historiography," *Medieval Encounters* 26 (2020): 145–90; Vanita Seth, "The Origins of Racism: A Critique of the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020): 343–68.

[31] Rebecca F. Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Identity in the Classical and Medieval Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[32] Kate Cooper, "Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy," *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992): 150–62; Guy Halsall, "Gender and the End of Empire," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 17–39; Guy Halsall, "Classical Gender in Deconstruction," in *Genre et compétition dans les sociétés occidentales du haut moyen ages (IVe–XIe siécle)*, ed. Régine Le Jan and Joye Sylvie (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018): 27–42; Vince L. Bantu, "'Is a Cushite Made in the Image of God?': Christian Visions of Race in Late Antiquity," *Horizons* 49, no. 1 (2022): 152–73.

post-Roman successor states, even if their identities were partly defined by their putative 'barbarian' heritage,[33] which enabled peoples who had formerly been placed into subaltern categories by these mechanisms of race-making to themselves re-apply these same inherited categories elsewhere.[34] James M. Harland has shown how such inheritance has forced a fundamental rethinking of how certain forms of material culture, previously assumed to passively reflect barbarian migration and ethnicity, instead worked to construct new identities, which formerly asymmetrically dependent peoples from the peripheries of the Roman Empire were able to use to establish new political hierarchies in which they took ascendency, creating new asymmetrically dependent relationships in the process.[35] Harland is currently investigating the role which this subaltern inheritance of late Roman institutional and ideological mechanisms, and the influx of new ideas from the contemporary Roman/"Byzantine" East, played in the construction of state mechanisms and the production of new asymmetrical dependency relationships in the post-Roman West.[36]

IV. 2 'Class': Different Meanings in Contemporary Non-European Contexts

Another example of issues surrounding the use of concepts in transhistorical or transregional ways is the category of 'class', which encompasses different meanings and contents in different epochs and non-European socio-cultural backgrounds. In contemporary social sciences the term 'social classes' refers to sociological theories of political economy and the capitalization of the labor market and the society by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Max Weber.[37] They argue that during industrialization in the 19th century, new social classes were formed, which were defined predominantly by economic criteria and interlinked power, such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, the transfer of the term 'class' to non-European societies is often inappropriate. In current Southeast Asia, for example, the majority of the population still works in the agricultural sector. In the context of the formation of nation-states after independence in the 1960s, existing elites were strengthened based on ethnic belonging, kinship, aristocracy and the military. A more suitable term for social distinctions would be societal milieus or strata, and it seems useful to apply the concept of 'strategic groups' coined by Hans D. Evers and Tilman Schiel.[38] In Indonesia, the most important strategic groups are family clans, which dominate the political realm, the military elite, and companies. They are all tightly connected and established patronage networks based on lucrative bureaucratic positions and economic opportunities. Through collusive

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[33] Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[34] Nicole Lopez-Jantzen, "Between Empires: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages," *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9 (2019): 1–12.

[35] James M. Harland, "Rethinking Ethnicity and 'Otherness' in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017): 113–42; James M. Harland, *Ethnic Identity and the Archaeology of the* aduentus Saxonum*: A Modern Framework and its Problems* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

[36] James M. Harland, *At the Limits of Empire: The Transformation of Identities on the Roman Peripheries, c. 300–800* (forthcoming).

[37] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Samuel Moore (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1888). Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* [Economy and Society: Outline of Understanding Sociology], ed. Johannes Winckelmann, 5th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980 [1922]).

[38] Hans D. Evers and Tilman Schiel, *Konzept der strategischen Gruppen. Vergleichende Studien zu Staat, Bürokratie und Klassenbildung in der Dritten Welt* (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1988).

relationships between private businesses and state functionaries, the capitalist elite has been closely tied to the state.[39] Patronage is common in many countries in Southeast Asia, historically deeply rooted and especially prevalent in the natural resource sector.[40] In Indonesia, patron-client relationships played an important role in the relationship between peasants and the local elite in precolonial times in the mid-20th century, as anthropologist James Scott points out.[41] Today, the social and political order in Indonesia continues to be marked by a high level of inequality and by a rigid hierarchy. Edward Aspinall argues that patronage networks are a key feature of Indonesia's economic, political, and social organization, despite the fact that equality is among the foundational principles of the modern state.[42] In the BCDSS, Kristina Großmann, in her anthropological qualitative research on contemporary large-scale and destructive coal-mining activities in peripheral regions in Indonesia, describes that employment opportunities in mining companies are part of a wider patron-client network that binds villagers to the coal mining companies. Relationships between miners, members of the village elite, and company representatives take the form of patronage, which is highly asymmetrical in terms of power, status, and wealth. It is unregulated, personalized, multifunctional, and often quite flexible, but always embodies highly unequal power relations. Mutual expectations that patron-client obligations will be fulfilled are extremely high. If the patron or client is not able to fulfil these expectations, he or she, in turn, asks their patron or client. Thus, many people enact both roles, as patron and as client, being interlinked in a pyramid-shaped network of patronage. Usually, the mining companies as patrons provide opportunities to earn or otherwise make money, personal support for milestones in life, as well as village infrastructure, under the terms of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs to villagers. In return, the village elite and miners as clients provide labor and support. They are prepared to endure increasing pollution and acquiesce in the destruction of their environment caused by the mines. The patron-client relationship is not limited to business relationships but extends into the private sphere. Representatives of the company attend wedding ceremonies and funeral rites in the village. In so doing, they not only contribute gifts and financial support to the family concerned but are also seen to be fulfilling the social responsibilities of the person with a higher status.[43]

IV.3 'The Individual': Non-Existent in the Past?

Also, focusing on identity formation may lead to problems, as the concept of identity is closely tied to a notion of the individual. The modern concept of the individual envisions human beings as independent entities. This has been criticized as a white and mostly male fiction by feminist scholars and scholars working on subalterns alike.[44] For historians, the rhetoric of

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[39] Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot, *Democracy for Sale: Elections, Clientelism and the State in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

[40] Helena Varkkey, *The Haze Problem in Southeast Asia. Palm Oil and Patronage* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[41] James Scott, "Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia," *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 1 (1972): 91–113.

[42] Edward Aspinall, "The Triumph of Capital? Class Politics and Indonesian Democratisation," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 2 (2013): 226–42.

[43] Kristina Großmann, "Patronage Networks and the Hope for a Better Future: Coal Mining in Indonesia," in *The Political Economy of Extractivism. Global Perspectives on the Seduction of Rent*, ed. Hannes Warnecke-Berger and Jan Ickler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023): 123–36, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003303268.

[44] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271–313.

identity is fraught with problems. The current Western core concept of (individual) identity has been identified as a modern European idea, which cannot simply be transferred to pre-modern and/or non-European discourses and practices.[45] Similarly, the notion of the 'subject' as a prime site of intersectional resistance against oppression is informed by the legacy of European Enlightenment philosophy .[46] By drawing upon the 'subject' as a central category, intersectional approaches might run the risk of reproducing a concept that "is at the core of the Euro-American occidental fantasy of superiority",[47] which led to an exclusion of "women, the enslaved, and the majority of people of color […] from its proclamation of free political subjects."[48] Therefore, it has been suggested to replace the loaded term 'the individual' with 'person/persona' when it comes to premodern analyses across and within cultures, spaces and times.[49] 'Person' pertains to insights by many scholars who discovered in close proximity to ethnological and microhistorical studies that humans in premodernity conceived of themselves not at all as independent entities but as genuinely social beings whose identity is formed in social relations, including those to institutions and norms. With this approach, it becomes possible to overcome a very limited Western notion of the 'individual'/'citoyen' as produced by French (male) revolutionaries. At the same time, we have to be cautious about just replacing terminologies without questioning the underlying ideology which might remain the same. Intersectional approaches that include history as an alternative to present discourses and practices prove to be a tremendous help to developing dependency studies because they foster a reflection of 'our' epistemic regimes.

IV.4 Limits and Opportunities: Uncovering Marginalized Voices in Records From the Past and Reflecting on Our Epistemic Regimes

As we have shown, with regard to intersectional analyses of social configurations in the past there are a number of conceptual and methodological insecurities that have to be faced beyond the use of concepts. Historical sources have, for the longest time, been considered very limited in their potential for uncovering history from below. Indeed, there have been thoughts (and arguments) to perceive of archives as providing little or no information on the identities and practices of oppressed and dependent people. And when they do, they in some cases tend to do so through the lenses of authorities. However, to begin with, the scope of sources has been extended significantly since the 1990s. New types of sources - such as criminal records, church registers, paintings and material culture as well as ego documents - have been retrieved from the archives and have made it possible, via profound methodological discussions, to get through to voices of ordinary and subordinated people, enslaved or oppressed, that are usually not preserved in administrative historical records. This means that the "lived experiences of identity" that intersectional approaches typically focus

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[45] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,' *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1–47; Lehner, *Taufe, Ehe, Tod.*

[46] Philipp Löffler, "Intersectionality in/and Cultural Studies," in *Key Concepts for the Study of Culture: An Introduction*, ed. Vera Nünning, Philipp Löffler and Margit Peterfy (Trier: WVT, 2020): 205–30.

[47] Gabriele Dietze, Elahe Haschemi Yekani and Beatrice Michaelis, "Modes of Being vs. Categories," in *Beyond Gender: An Advanced Introduction to Futures of Feminist and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Greta Olson, Daniel Hartley, Mirjam Horn-Schott and Leonie Schmidt (London: Routledge, 2018): 117–36, 121.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Claudia Ulbrich and Gabriele Jancke, "From the Individual to the Person: Challenging Autobiography Theory," in *Mapping the 'I'. Research on Self-Narratives in Germany and Switzerland*, ed. Claudia Ulbrich, Kaspar von Greyerz and Lorenz Heiligensetzer (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 13–33.

on remain less elusive than oftentimes contended.[50] The intersectional project of "giving voice to those who previously were excluded" is thus not always doomed to fail.[51] Criticism has been explicated in regard to the perhaps very paternalistic, potentially neo-colonial concept of "giving a voice" to those allegedly without a voice.[52] Yet, dependency studies could be the place where the polyphony of enslaved and oppressed, of violated and tortured grown-up people and children, could be heard or made heard. Dependency studies should not claim to speak *for* somebody but seek to open the floor and the archives for the perception and experiences of those muted (through archival practices and selective record-keeping but also by social and genealogical practices).

V. New Avenues for Improving Our Understanding of Asymmetries in the Past and the Present

From the above, it has become clear that there are clear challenges to applying an intersectional approach to all past periods and all regions, as it has, after all, been developed in the social sciences with reference to specific twentieth-century contexts. However, it has also become clear that there are methodological and conceptual ways of overcoming the limits described above. In the following, we would like to point out the benefits of trying to do so and the opportunities that an intersectional approach provides for a better understanding of asymmetrical dependencies in the past as well as in the present.

V.1 Focusing on 'Interlocking Systems of Oppression'

In addition to the widespread emphasis on the complexity of identities, some intersectional approaches also seek to describe "interlocking systems of oppression" in intersectional terms.[53] For the study of asymmetrical dependencies in past and present societies, this means, firstly, identifying which categories determine a person's or group's asymmetrical dependency. It is worthwhile remembering that Kimberlé Crenshaw is interested in "categories of experience and analysis."[54] Helma Lutz argues that intersectionality can serve as "a heuristic device or a method that is particularly helpful in detecting the overlapping and co-construction of visible and, at first sight, invisible strands of inequality."[55] Due to their focus on multiple categories and axes of oppression, intersectional approaches likewise promise to draw attention to relations between social categories in a way that enriches or even corrects knowledge about asymmetrical dependency. To gain a more complex picture of asymmetrical dependency, it might be useful to go beyond the widespread focus on "those who are 'multiply-marginalized'"[56] and also pay attention to the social categories establishing

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[50] Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality": 5.

[51] Christine E. Bose, "Intersectionality and Global Gender Inequality," *Gender and Society* 26, no. 1 (2012): 67–72, 68.

[52] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

[53] L. Ayu Saraswati, Barbara L. Shaw and Heather Relihan, "Mapping the Field: An Introduction to Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies," in *Introduction to Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies*, ed. L. Ayu Saraswati, Barbara L. Shaw and Heather Rellihan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 1–19, 13.

[54] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex": 139.

[55] Helma Lutz, "Intersectionality as Method," *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2015): 39–44, 39.

[56] Bose, "Intersectionality and Global Gender Equality": 68.

privileged and non-privileged groups alike, even though this is a rather uncommon approach in intersectional studies: "Given its genealogical roots in radical justice activism in Kimberlé Crenshaw's pioneering work, intersectionality has often become shorthand for describing processes of Othering rather than being understood as a way of critiquing all identity formations, including hegemonic ones."[57] Due to the alleged lack of material on marginalized voices for many historical contexts (but not, e.g. in Marxist historiography and the *Annales*-School), a more flexible analysis might, to some extent, help to compensate for gaps in history writing.

V.2 Deconstructing Ethnicity

In the social sciences and the humanities, the 'classical' understanding of ethnicity, which perceived ethnicity as static and primordial, has been challenged by the constructivist turn since the 1970s. Researchers increasingly conceptualize ethnic groups as constructed, imagined entities and as a marker in the formation of social identity. 'Ethnicity' thus is disentangled from a predetermined set of ideas, often specific to the English-speaking West. Ethnic prejudices, for instance, often bespeak the marginalization of an indigenous, minority or autochthonous culture (a Greek root, αὐτός + χθών, lit. "self [of the] earth", i.e. where people come from). Current studies focus less on the cultural characteristics of ethnicity and more on the social processes which (re)produce boundaries of identification and differentiation. Ethnicity is perceived in the sense of ethnic identity, which is seen as being constructed and habitually reproduced in a mutual process of delineation against the 'outer'. Ethnicity is thus seen as ethnic identity and as a biographically grounded way of living, experiencing, perceiving and remembering everyday situations, both enabling and constraining social action.[58] Identity formation in social sciences is conceptualized as social identity and as such as a dynamic process based on the relationship and interaction between individuals and groups.[59] Following an intersectional approach, ethnicity is one category amongst others in the development of one's identity. In order to better understand the mutual reinforcement of categories of differentiation in producing asymmetrical dependencies, intersectional studies often focus on the dimensions of identity formation and how these identities are practiced. In recent processes of postcolonial transformations and the political self-determination of marginalized groups, ethnicity or indigeneity has gained increasing importance. Currently, growing cultural reflexivity, ethnic revitalization, and also the instrumentalization and politicization of ethnicity are at play in struggles over power and authority. Thereby, ethnicity may be used in an essentialist way to enhance power and authority, as a political tool and a commercial asset .[60]

Understanding ethnicity not in an essentialized, but in a constructed way makes the concept also applicable to research on colonial times, where we can then equally focus on the instrumentalization and politicization of ethnicity. In this regard, Noack and Presta hint towards the polysemic and changing characteristic of categories of difference used to describe the colonial societies in the Americas, as self-ascriptions and re-categorizations

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[57] Dietze et al., "Modes of Being vs. Categories": 124.
[58] Christian Karner, *Ethnicity and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2007).
[59] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2014).
[60] Tania Murray Li, "Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resource Politics and the Tribal Slot," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 1 (2000): 149–79.

assigned by colonial authorities depended on local and temporary circumstances, and social relations.[61] This is underpinned by research conducted within the BCDSS by Danitza Márquez Ramírez, who suggests that certain self-ascriptions in Colonial Peru depended on the prerogatives a determined category may bring. In this world, land ownership lawsuits within the kin were common as the number of co-heirs increased through time. At the same time, subsequent division and allocation of inheritance developed alongside recurring conflicts between noble native lineages and indigenous communities over a more particular control of commonly-granted lands. Márquez Ramírez shows that some women circumstantially claimed their noble indigenous descent and used it as a strategy to legally contend for land ownership, even though they neither referred to themselves in notarial records nor socially performed as *indias*. Parties in lawsuits could attempt to delegitimize these women's claims by pejoratively addressing them as *mestizas*.[62] In these contexts, the category *mestiza* referred to an indigenous woman who 'denied' her indigenous descent by publicly dressing *a la española*[63] and thus, resonates with Verena Stolcke's proposal on the constructed, performative and ambivalent features of the term *mestizo*.[64] Following this narrative, *indias* who 'pretended' to be *españolas* through clothing were to lose their condition as coheiresses to kinship lands, especially if noble indigenous ancestors obtained them in the first place. Therefore, self-identifying as *indio* or *india* and, most importantly, socially performing as such (as in dressing-in-public, granting notarial records, or being socially acknowledged as such) was a legal strategy to be granted land ownership in such cases. In practice, however, verdicts depended on intersectional factors, including wealth, reputation, marital status, and social networks.

Also, self-descriptions changed throughout a lifetime. Occasionally, one person could use a certain indigenous-related ascription to obtain something (in a lawsuit, for example), even though that ascription could *a priori* contradict another given (or claimed) one. Danitza Márquez has also shown that in Colonial Peru, some self-ascribed *vecinas* (early modern citizens) and domicile owners, females in this case, labeled as *mestizas* by colonial officers and described as social disrupters, could redeem a sullied reputation by instituting their souls as their universal heirs and likewise enhance their condition as coheiresses to kinship lands.[65] In these cases, these *vecinas* did not self-identify as *indias* but as daughters or grand-daughters, thus establishing a matrilineal bond to the first noble indigenous land owners. Interestingly, this practice enabled their heirs to claim land ownership despite neither self-identifying as *indios* or *indias* nor belonging to the indigenous kin. Therefore, the circumstantial self-identification or use of entangled belongings advocated for a conscious

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[61] Karoline Noack and Ana María Presta, "Introducción," in *Repensando La Sociedad Colonial: Perspectivas, Abordajes y Desafíos de Los Enfoques Multidisciplinares – Perú y Nueva España, Siglos XVI–XVIII*, ed. Karoline Noack and Ana María Presta, Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Lateinamerika 7 (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2023): 11–25.

[62] Danitza Márquez Ramírez, "La 'última voluntad' de una rea convicta de la Santa Inquisición. Cajamarca, siglo XVIII" (master's thesis, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2018).

[63] Danitza Márquez Ramírez, "Agencias y dependencias de las élites intermedias en la Cajamarca virreinal," paper presented at the IX Congreso Nacional de Historia, Simposio de Etnohistoria, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima, 02.–07.11.2020.

[64] Verena Stolcke, "Los mestizos no nacen sino que se hacen," in *Identidades Ambivalentes en América Latina (Siglos XVI–XXI)*, ed. Verena Stolcke and Alexandre Coello (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2008): 14–51.

[65] Márquez Ramírez, "La 'última voluntad' de una rea convicta de la Santa Inquisición." For conceptualizations of 'citizenship' in Colonial Spanish America, see Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

identification in some cases. This practice denoted the ability to exercise some degree of agency within the normative order. In this regard, societal constraints materialized in the ever-growing pursuit of individual access to commonly used lands, with indigenous communities facing native land dispossession throughout the colonial period. Asymmetrical dependencies were therefore established in terms of acknowledgment of land ownership and intersectional relations. This would include rethinking the very term 'slave'/'enslaved' itself and all the implications it transports.

V.3 Focusing on Social Relations

For investigating asymmetrical dependencies along intersectional categories in social formations in the past, engaging in a relational approach might be helpful. In history, relationality means looking at the relations between people and also between people and institutions and people and norms, stressing their mutual entanglements and investigating networks rather than single persons. For example, relationality in early modern history focuses not only on specific categories of differentiations and thereby runs the risk of essentializing them but analyses the context in which they are produced and enforced. Researchers zoom in on how certain categories intermingle with other categories and which relations they produce in specific times and circumstances.[66] The behavior of any given female actor, for instance, might be as much motivated and constrained by her relational position in any given social interaction (e.g. as a mother of a son, or a servant to a matron) as by her gender. The dependencies between actors, for example, in a filial constellation are not simply based on the intersectional 'factors' of gender and age as they apply to each actor, according to social norms and ruling hierarchies, but how the relationship between them is concretely and intimately experienced. This experience could be influenced by many factors internal to the family structure, such as the number of other members within this family, the ages of the children, or whether they were adopted, as well as other factors relevant to this relation, such as the family's economic history, their personal emotional attachments, and prescribed cultural expectations of mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons in the wider social fabric. All of these factors, rooted in the experience of any given family relation, contribute to how asymmetrical dependencies were articulated by afflicted actors. They could catalyze a range of different responses, including the filial attachment of the son or daughter to their father, or the mother's propensity to send them away.

This is underpinned by research conducted within the BCDSS by Lisa Phongsavath's work on family, childhood and coerced mobility in the Tai world in the 18th century. She argues that interpersonal relations are contextually and intimately specific. Though it is impossible to unearth the exact nature of these relations, we may draw from various sources and examples possible orientations to how people might have perceived, constructed, and acted upon them. A mother and a daughter may follow legal or religious prescriptions for the latter's

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[66] See e.g. Andrea Griesebner, "Intersektionalität versus Interdependenz und Relationalität," *Erwägen Wissen Ethik. Forum für Erwägungskultur* (EWE) 24 (2013): 381–83; Claudia Ulbrich, "Ständische Ungleichheit und Geschlechterforschung," *Zeitsprünge. Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* 15 (2011): 85–104; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Karin Hausen, "Die Polarisierung der 'Geschlechtscharaktere' – eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben," in *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas*, ed. Werner Conze (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1976): 363–93.

upbringing, but also act upon their own volition. It is vital not to let unconscious notions of what kin and family relations *should* look like dominate our research designs. Filial attachment, for example, might motivate, rather than deter, the act of giving a child away. Contemporary recruitment strategies in sex trafficking along the Laos-Thailand border, as anthropologist Sverre Molland emphasizes, rely fundamentally on close social relations. 'Traffickers' of girls in virginity sale are more often friends, family members, and neighbors than they are unfamiliar purveyors of organized crime.[67] For some families, separation could be a sign of anticipatory care. In the early-modern Tai kingdoms, it was common practice for elite families to gift their daughters and sons to the royal courts to obtain social privileges for both parents and children. In Europe during the Thirty Years War, it was advisable for all who could afford to do so to place their children with relatives or schoolmasters far away from the war and secure education or, at least, an upbringing. Sending children away, in these cases and others, were by no means shows of neglect, nor was trafficking purely a recourse to economic survival. In this vein, scholar Johanna Ransmeier describes the sale of people in 19th-century North China as akin to "community-level mutual aid."[68] Looking at social networks and relations puts intersectional approaches into practice. We can reveal meaningful linkages between intersectional dependencies, social contexts, and relationships. Their patterns across different historical spaces draw us into the complexity of interpersonal action.

V.4 Questioning Narratives of Progression

In the context of intersectional thinking in the sense of critically examining the reproduction of asymmetrical dependencies it is also essential to question the periodization of traditional history. This is relevant in particular in relation to the notion of history as transformation, in traditional historiography but persistently perceived as moving in the direction of progressive change interlinked with the reduction of repression and the improvement of individual rights, freedom and self-determination, etc. The tension between continuity and change is fundamental in historical debates and thinking. In the course of the twentieth century, starting with the *Annales*-School, the notion of continuity was gradually given more prominence than before, and major historical events were seen as less fundamental than had hitherto been assumed. This was to become a more mainstream historiographical approach, in particular in relation to the late medieval and early modern periods. Braudel's work is of interest in this context, in particular his invention of different paces in history, in favor of a *longue durée* approach that includes geography and nature. It advances a temporality that transcends rupture and discontinuity. He wrote that "there can be no science without historical continuity [and that] anonymous history, working on the depths and most often in silence" is at the center of his approach.[69]

The historiographical angle of continuity is relevant in relation to work on intersectionality within the framework of asymmetrical dependency, whose aims include revealing unheard

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[67] Sverre Molland, "The Trafficking of Scarce Elite Commodities: Social Change and Commodification of Virginity along the Mekong," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2011): 129–45.

[68] Johanna S. Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017): 5.

[69] Fernand Braudel, "The Situation of History in 1950," in *On History*, ed. Fernand Braudel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980): 6–24, 7; 10.

voices. Joan Kelly, for instance, has argued that traditional historiography, placing major (political) events at its center, does not adequately reflect the periodization of women's history.[70] While she did not draw upon the concept of intersectionality, her observations can be and have been extended to other marginalized groups.[71] In her seminal essay "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History", Kelly writes about her finding "a fairly regular pattern of relative loss of status for women precisely in those periods of so-called progressive change."[72] This process has been described as "an often-inverted synchronization between history of women and traditional history."[73] While most major historical events, such as the Renaissance and the Reformation, have had disruptive effects, "we seem to assume that these turning points must have affected women's status, leaving to us the straightforward task of weighing the transformation. In doing so, we strive for an overall assessment – women's status getting better or getting worse – instead of considering the possibility that, despite change, shift, and movement, the overall force of patriarchal power might have endured."[74] Changes for the more privileged need not come with a parallel transformation for marginalized groups. The latter may move in a different direction or experience no change at all. Bennett has illustrated this observation very poignantly in her study on ale brewsters in London between 1300 and 1600. While in 1300 women controlled the trade of brewed drink, by 1600 men had taken over control. This period is associated with expanding business opportunities, and the trade of brewing underwent many of the transformations typical of that era: capitalization, professionalization, even some small-scale industrialization, etc. Faced with the expanding opportunities for business and commercialization, women lacked the capital to invest in new equipment, had only limited authority over substantial workforces and insufficient networks of contacts for obtaining supplies or accessing new markets. While there may have been changes in women's experience as workers, there was little transformation in their work status in relation to that of men.[75] Challenging historical periodization is relevant to the study of asymmetrical dependency in relation to intersectionality, because it implies asking a different set of questions compared to more traditional historiography. Bennett describes this in terms of 'history-as-transformation' versus 'history-as-continuity'. She writes: "History-as-transformation asked me to explain decline – to explain [the] brewsters' […] lost control of a trade once their own. History-as-continuity asked me to explain something quite different – to explain why brewsters were […] unable to take advantage of the expansion of the market for brewed drink after 1350. […] What were the pressures for continuity – for maintaining the low work status of women – that ensured that brewsters could not retain control over the trade once it began to prosper?"[76] In other words, for women in this case but also for marginalized groups in general in the case of an intersectional approach, the underlying

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[70] Joan Kelly, "The Social Relations of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History," in *Women, History, and Theory*, ed. Joan Kelly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 1–18. Also in the same volume: "Did Women Have a Renaissance?": 19–50.

[71] E.g. Sandra Greene, "A Perspective from African Women's History: Comments on 'Confronting Continuity'," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 85–104, 98; Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 331.

[72] Kelly, "The Social Relations of the Sexes": 2.

[73] Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006): 63.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.: 72–79; also Judith Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300–1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[76] Bennett, *History Matters*: 75.

questions may be less concerned with the history of transformation and may need to evolve more around a history of missed opportunity for transformation.

It is also important to challenge our thinking in relation to historical periodization when it differs from the traditional Western and central European perspectives. Scandinavia, for example, was not conditioned by the Roman Empire, nor by strict feudalism. Their societies were based on principles of kinship. Women were not necessarily systematically excluded from holding land or from legal capacity to represent themselves in the pursuit of justice, as was the case in medieval feudal Europe. The Norwegian Code of 1274 is a good example that shows a high level of gender-neutral language implying that women were not systematically excluded to the extent that they were in contemporaneous legal text written in strictly binary language, as for example is the case in Normandy or Saxony.[77] To the extent that women could hold land in thirteenth-century Norway, they also had some limited legal capacity and duties that came with holding land (e.g. paying duties or contributing to war/defense of the land efforts). The provisions in the Norwegian text do not specifically refer to women, but the gender-neutral language potentially includes them or at least does not exclude them.

Rising marginalization of women due to industrialization is also a vibrant topic in contemporary Southeast Asia. Society in Indonesia has been described as relatively unstratified by gender.[78] Women have always been involved in sustaining family livelihoods and play a central role in family management. However, industrialization and the advance of capitalism are creating new asymmetries between men and women, mainly due to gendered patterns of inclusion and exclusion in newly introduced economic systems. Research on gendered identities and asymmetries in the context of industrialized resource extraction in Southeast Asian societies suggests that women are increasingly disadvantaged and sidelined to the family realm. Lahiri-Dutt and Mahy show that the decline in the subsistence economy that has accompanied the expansion of mining leads to "a lowering of women's status within the family and society whilst increasing their work burdens."[79] Similarly, the current expansion of the palm oil industry creates new gender asymmetries that increasingly exclude women from economic and political spheres.[80] Writing about the Iban Dayak in Malaysia, Oliver Pye and Julia White describe how the industrialization of agriculture and resource extraction has led to "the transfer of power and ownership into the hands of the male 'head

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[77] Caroline Laske, *Medieval Women in the Très Ancien Coutumier de Normandie. Textual Representation of Asymmetrical Dependencies*, Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series 3 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2020); Caroline Laske, "Women in the *Sachsenspiegel*: Gender and Asymmetrical Dependencies," in *Naming, Defining, Phrasing Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies: A Textual Approach*, ed. Jeannine Bischoff, Stephan Conermann and Marion Gymnich, Dependency and Slavery Studies 8 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023): 213–38.

[78] Kristina Großmann, Martina Padmanabhan and Suraya Afiff, "Gender, Ethnicity, and Environmental Transformations in Indonesia and beyond," *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2017): 1–10; Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Kristina Großmann, "Gender in Südostasien," in *Südostasien. Gesellschaften, Räume und Entwicklung*, ed. Karl Husa, Rüdiger Korff and Helmut Wohlschlägl (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2018): 314–29.

[79] Kundala Lahiri-Dutt and Petra Mahy, "Impacts of Mining on Women and Youth in Indonesia: Two Mining Locations," final report, Canberra, Australian National University, 2008: 1.

[80] Julia White and Ben White, "Gendered Experiences of Dispossession: Oil Palm Expansion in a Dayak Hibun Community in West Kalimantan," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (2012): 995–1016; Tania Murray Li, *Social Impacts of Oil Palm in Indonesia: A Gendered Perspective from West Kalimantan*, CIFOR Occasional Paper 124 (Bogor: Center for International Forestry Research, 2015).

of household'."[81] Only a few authors assert that women also profit from newly emerging industries and challenge the "singular 'victim' narratives."[82] Among these authors, Lahiri-Dutt and Mahy describe the benefits for women from mining in the form of new income opportunities and infrastructure improvements.[83] Rebecca Elmhirst et al. assert that women benefit from new employment opportunities in oil palm production, while remaining excluded from male-dominated networks of power.[84]

V.5 Embracing the Unexpected

Despite the just described problems of fitting marginalized people into customary narratives of human progress or development, an intersectional approach can, however, also help us to reorganize these narratives by addressing agency in unexpected areas. Kristina Großmann and Alessandro Gullo argue that the rise of new gender asymmetries that exclude women from the economic and political spheres is only partly observable in the case of a mining village in Central Kalimantan.[85] While men are expected to earn most of the money, the financial management of the family stays in the hands of women, just as it was before families started to engage in mining. In many families, the wife receives the husband's entire income and decides how much to give back to the husband for his personal spending. Women's responsibility for taking care of the household includes being responsible for financial decision-making. While the growth of male employment in the mines definitely increases the economic dependency of women within nuclear families, it also gives wives greater control over productive activities in the forest gardens. Furthermore, the expansion of the mining economy provides opportunities for women to take on new tasks and duties in the public realm. The increasing prominence of women in the public sphere is predominantly due to the spatial displacement of men while working in the mines. Many miners stay in mine-based camps for three weeks followed by one week spent with their families in the village. Although travelling for work is not a new phenomenon among men in Kalimantan, the expansion of the mining economy has greatly increased both the number of men absent from the village and the length of time they are away.[86] This has profoundly impacted gender roles and duties in the village. Women now assume representative public offices as well as representing the family in public events. However, the extent to which these developments challenge deeply embedded gender hierarchies should not be overstated.[87] Interestingly, parts of this are also true for early modern households in Europe - it has been mostly the women who were in

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[81] Oliver Pye and Julia White, "Climate Politics and the Gendered Palm Oil Landscape of Southeast Asia," in *Klimaveränderung, Umwelt und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Wandel—neue interdisziplinäre Ansätze und Perspektiven*, ed. Petra Dannecker and Birte Rodenberg (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2014): 205–24, 221.

[82] Rebecca Elmhirst, Mia Siscawati Bimbika Sijapati Basnett and Dian Ekowati, "Gender and Generation in Engagements with Oil Palm in East Kalimantan, Indonesia: Insights from Feminist Political Ecology," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 6 (2017): 1135–57, 1135; https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1337002.

[83] Lahiri-Dutt and Mahy, "Impacts of Mining on Women and Youth in Indonesia."

[84] Elmhirst et al., "Gender and Generation in Engagements with Oil Palm in East Kalimantan, Indonesia."

[85] Kristina Großmann and Alessandro Gullo, "Mining and Masculinity in Indonesia," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2022): 185–200, https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2021.2019824.

[86] See Kristina Großmann, "Gaharu King – Family Queen: Material Gendered Political Ecology of the Eaglewood Boom in Kalimantan, Indonesia," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 6 (2017): 1275–92.

[87] See also R.W. Connell and J.W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–59, 853.

charge of administering the material and financial resources. Research on Caribbean plantations before 1800 has shown that oftentimes enslaved men were keeping the records for the family of the enslavers, at least during their frequent absence. Joseph Biggerstaff is currently investigating the connexes of gender and heritage on Barbados in late 17th until early 19th century. His findings will contribute to an intersectional strand of research results that also speaks to a re-consideration of our categories.

Looking through the lens of intersectionality thus also means encountering categories and dynamics in the past and the present, which might be unexpected. Moreover, newly established narratives might help us explain and understand the past and the present in a better way. No matter how these categories are to be defined, they doubtlessly influenced the experience of historical actors.

V.6 Revising Preconceptions and Enhancing (Self-)Reflexivity

In order to analyze intersectional entanglements which might not be familiar or immediately recognizable to us as researchers, we have to critically rethink our own stance, positionalities and assumptions. In this sense, intersectional approaches might also provide an impulse for a critical examination of the premises adopted by research on asymmetrical dependency. Kimberlé Crenshaw famously argued that "the paradigm of sex discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of white women; the model of race discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of the most privileged Blacks."[88] This raises the question of which paradigms have been established in the study of slavery and other strong asymmetrical dependencies and whether they might have to be reconceptualized in light of intersectional thinking, e.g. to put the paradigm of transatlantic slavery into relation with other types and practices of slavery. Another paradigm might be that of binaries: Binaries are very strongly enforced on the normative level in laws, ideologies and state policies. The binary narratives, however, might be less strongly practiced on the level of daily life. People might think and act regardless or unaware of constructed binaries in socio-political discourses. However, we as researchers might not be aware of these non-binary spheres and the discrepancies between constructed binaries and non-binary practices. Thus, the question arises of how binaries are constructed and enforced and whose interests they serve. How might discrepancies between normative binaries and social practices be found and analyzed?

A self-reflexive approach thus enhances the awareness of how we, as researchers, understand and use concepts. Do we reproduce stereotypes and impose familiar categories or do we try to deconstruct these categories and are open to new categories of differentiation? Considering intersectionality thus also means being aware of and including different epistemologies and ontologies: Which modes of thinking were prevalent in the context of our research?

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[88] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex": 151.

VI. Conclusions: Towards an Intersectional Way of Thinking About Asymmetrical Dependency

Attempts to achieve exhaustive, all-encompassing intersectional analyses are doomed to fail due to the numerous factors which mutually (re)inforce each other in producing asymmetries: "Clearly, an intersectional analysis should aim to treat different social dimensions as mutually modifying or reinforcing, but that is difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish in its entirety."[89] The allegation that "its methodology remains poorly specified and underdeveloped"[90] seems to point to a serious deficit of intersectionality. However, this does not mean that intersectional approaches are pointless. Research on asymmetrical dependencies stands to benefit enormously from adopting an intersectional way of thinking, even if this may also mean realizing that some social categories remain elusive due to the lack of historical records. There is reason to believe, though, that new and intersecting ways of looking into and arranging material will make more historians see the formerly unseen. Even if 'only' two social categories are included in an intersectional analysis, this is already apt to produce much more satisfactory results than a single-axis approach, as Crenshaw's article and numerous other publications have shown. What is at least as important as the *number* of social categories that are paid attention to in intersectional analyses of asymmetrical dependency is the *manner* in which their relation is conceptualized. Intersectionality does not invite simplistic equations between the degree of oppression (or asymmetrical dependency) and the number of categories that marginalize an individual or a group: "The theory does not posit, for example, that Black lesbians (because they occupy three marginal categories—they are Black, female, and lesbian) will in every context be more disadvantaged than, for example, Black heterosexual men (because they occupy one marginal category—they are Black)."[91]

Despite their multidisciplinarity, studies of slavery and dependency have yet to fully incorporate (gender and) intersectional approaches into their methodologies. This discussion paper draws on the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and the scholars who followed her and seeks to address some of the key issues at stake for researchers drawing upon intersectional approaches. It also provides both some interventions and a framework that can be used in this field, whether the approach is historical, social scientific, anthropological or textual and interpretive or combines these forms of research. Of course, this is long overdue, especially if we understand categorizations as central in the formation of asymmetrical dependencies.

What this means, in summary, is that intersectional approaches to studies of asymmetrical dependencies offer opportunities for the critical re-examination of both categories and principles. Most strikingly, this means that scholars can move away from the binaries that have accompanied the field (not least the dichotomy enslaved/free), and focus on understanding the categories of gender, race, class, age, religion and status, which are often the key players here, in their respective historical contexts. These categories (and others) are highly contingent on asymmetries of power and also historical paradigms, and they need to be understood and analyzed as such.

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[89] Sigle-Rushton and Lindström, "Intersectionality": 133.
[90] Ibid.: 130.
[91] Devon W. Carbado, "Colorblind Intersectionality," *3 Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 4 (2013): 811–45, 813.

One challenge for scholars is that methodologies that advance intersectionality can seem initially vague or unsystematic, and this paper presents this as an advantage rather than as a weakness. In the field, modes of research need to be combined and rethought, and this can only be beneficial to this field as it evolves. More specifically, we might seek ways of understanding our fields by adopting i) a quasi-ethnographic self-reflexivity to the research we do regardless of field. We can challenge categories such as gender or race that we have held to be fixed. We might also explore ii) relational approaches that seek to emphasize sociological roles and functionality, again transcending and cutting across familiar categories. Finally, exploring the iii) past paradigms in relation to those of the present and making the very incompatibility into the very basis for cross-category analysis and the appreciation of intersectionality.

Intersectional approaches to asymmetrical dependency are clearly revisionist in that they reappraise, not just approaches to historiography, but also in the appreciation of key sources, secondary texts, or given conceptual categories. Such revisionism is not, however, an assault on previous scholarship that did not adopt these approaches to its handling of race, gender or other categories of identity. On the contrary, it is a chance to integrate and enrich Dependency Studies further.

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