

## Preface

Established on 1 January 2019, the Cluster of Excellence (EXS 2036) at the University of Bonn is dedicated to “Beyond Slavery and Freedom” Asymmetrical Dependencies in Pre-modern Societies” ([www.dependency.uni-bonn.de](http://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de)). So far, general debates about forms of bondage and forced labour have focused primarily on slavery. Furthermore, the historical experiences with transatlantic slavery, which is closely linked to the development of the modern West, shape our understanding of freedom and bondage to this day. The cluster would like to overcome this dichotomous idea of “slavery versus freedom” by developing a new key concept: “asymmetrical dependency”. This concept covers all forms of dependencies, such as debt bondage, forced labour, servitude, serfdom, housework, but also wage labour and forms of patronage.

Although these phenomena are being researched upon in around 100 projects in the EXS 2036, there is currently no project that specifically deals with the connection between slavery and capitalism. It is well known that Eric E. Williams (1911–1981), who was not only the prime minister of Trinidad for many years but also an interesting historian, had already presented theses in his work *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). In this monograph, he states that the investment capital of industrialization came from the profits reaped from slave labour in the Caribbean, and the discussions about the abolition of slavery became more intense in Great Britain at the very moment when the profits were declining. Against this background, slavery was considered to be outdated and moral could denounce the form of forced labour to be rejected. Many revisionist studies in the last 15 years have confirmed the interdependencies between the “rise” of Europe and the capital generated by slavery. This interweaving also formed the basis for the *second slavery* as well as the development of slavery capitalism in the nineteenth century, with which most of the articles in this volume deal.

With all this in mind, we felt it was very fortunate that the two editors of this journal gave us the opportunity to create a special edition of *Comparativ* on the subject of “The Slavery/Capitalism Debate Global: From ‘Capitalism and Slavery’ to Slavery as Capitalism”.

We would like to thank the editors of *Comparativ* very much for this. Our thanks also go to all contributors. The cooperation with them was extremely constructive and goal-oriented. This has decisively contributed to the success of this special edition of *Comparativ*.

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