Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Sarah Lentz, and Josef Köstlbauer

Beyond Exceptionalism – Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850

It is too early to speak of a shared history – this was the conclusion offered by Kenyan writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor on October 9, 2020 at a conference on research into the history of German colonialism. The various experiences were so different, the wounds so deep, and the colonizers' behavior so brutal, she said, that one could not yet speak of “our” shared past. Instead, Owuor urged both sides to investigate their own “shadows” in order to lay a foundation for better mutual understanding.¹ This collaborative volume is intended as a step in that direction. It investigates not the colonial period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but rather the long eighteenth century; not the colonial possessions themselves, but the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and its successor states.

For a long time, it has been assumed that German-speaking inhabitants of the Empire played only a marginal role in the history of slavery in the Atlantic world. The Prussian colonies were short-lived, and the importance of the Brandenburg African Company (1682–1717) was relatively minor compared to the other slave-trading companies. Consequently, slavery played almost no role in the national histories of the German-speaking peoples. Indeed, the Holy Roman Empire has seemed like the one European power that had no “slave problem” – the one major realm in Europe where Africans could live as free people.²

1 Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, “Derelict Shards: The Roamings of Colonial Phantoms,” keynote lecture at the conference on “Colonialism as Shared History: Past, Present, Future,” organized by Bettina Brockmeyer, Rebekka Habermas, and Ulrike Lindner, October 9–11, 2020, https://lisa.gerdahlenkel-stiftung.de/sharedhistory_keynote_owuor, accessed October 13, 2020. Owuor intermittingly also spoke in more conciliatory terms: “Come, let us search our shadows together” (minute 59 of her filmed speech), but the tenor of her talk emphasized fundamentally divergent experiences.

2 Jürgen Osterhammel, “Aufstieg und Fall der neuzeitlichen Sklaverei. Oder: Was ist ein weltgeschichtliches Problem?” in *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats: Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich*, ed. Jürgen Osterhammel, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 342–369, at 363.

Notes: This project was financed by the European Research Council (ERC) within the framework of the EU Research Support Program entitled “Horizon 2020” (ERC Consolidator Grant Agreement No. 641110: “The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and Its Slaves,” 2015–2022). The contributions published here represent only the views of the authors; the ERC is not responsible for their contents or for any subsequent use made of them.

Translation: H. C. Erik Midelfort, Charlottesville, Virginia

Over the last few years, however, this self-image has increasingly been called into question, not least as a result of debates on the persistence of systemic racism. For a long time, Peter Martin's pioneering study *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren: Afrikaner in Geschichte und Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (*Black Devils, Noble Moors: Africans in German History and Consciousness*), originally published in 1993, stood alone among a scattered handful of articles with a primarily local and regional focus. In recent years, however, research in this field has become more and more dynamic. One important stimulus has come from Black³ communities within Germany,⁴ with another stemming from economic history. Since the early 2000s in particular, Klaus Weber has been investigating the ways in which Germans continuously – though indirectly – participated in slavery and the slave trade: Not only did they consume products produced by slaves in the colonies, they were heavily invested in the production of trade goods to be exchanged for slaves as well. They provided ships, capital, clothing, and plantation supplies, along with manufactories that used the raw products from the colonies.⁵ The many new publications in recent years make it clear

³ We have decided to spell 'Black' with capital letters since it has recently developed into a widely accepted spelling underlining that Blackness "is not a natural category but a social one – a collective identity – with a particular history" (see Kwame Antony Appiah, "The Case for Capitalizing the B in Black," *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/>). Excepted from this spelling are citations from historical sources whose wording – and consequently meaning – we did not want to change. Although we agree on the constructed nature of whiteness as well, we refrained from capitalizing 'white' in order to avoid any confusion with white supremacist usage. Moreover, to enable the authors of this volume to adequately describe highly complex historical situations – especially since many terms had a very specific and sometimes different meaning in the early modern period – we have refrained from imposing guidelines with regard to terminology and spelling in the individual papers.

⁴ See, for example, the controversies surrounding the names of specific streets, such as *Mohrenstraße* (Moor Street) in Berlin, which was renamed *Anton Wilhelm Amo-Straße* in August 2020 after many years of protests (Amo was a famous Afro-German professor of philosophy at Halle, Wittenberg, and Jena, d. after 1753); or the *Gröbenufer* in Berlin (Gröben River Bank, named for Otto Friedrich von der Gröben, a slave trader in the Brandenburg African Company, d. 1728), which was renamed *May-Ayim-Ufer* in 2010 (in honor of Afro-German poet, activist, and teacher May Ayim, d. 1996). There have also been protests surrounding the erection of monuments, such as the bust of Heinrich Carl von Schimmelmann (a Danish-German slave trader, d. 1782) in Hamburg-Wandsbek, unveiled as late as 2006 and subsequently removed in 2008.

⁵ Klaus Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680–1830: Unternehmen und Familien in Hamburg, Cadix und Bordeaux* (Munich: Beck, 2004); Klaus Weber, "Deutschland, der atlantische Sklavenhandel und die Plantagenwirtschaft der Neuen Welt," *Journal of Modern European History* 7 (2009): 37–67; Klaus Weber, "Mitteleuropa und der transatlantische Sklavenhandel: Eine lange Geschichte," *Werkstatt Geschichte* nos. 66–67 (2014): 7–30; Klaus Weber and Anka Steffen, "Spinning and Weaving for the Slave Trade: Proto-Industry in Eighteenth-Century Silesia," in *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680–1850*, ed. Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 87–107; Anne Sophie Overkamp, "A Hinterland to the Slave Trade? Atlantic Connections of the Wupper Valley in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Slavery Hinterland*, ed. Brahm and Rosenhaft, 161–185; Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, *Deutsche Kaufleute in*

that German scholars are catching up with a development that other countries, especially in Western Europe, have been working on for much longer.⁶

Among the earliest and most prolific authors on the African diaspora in Württemberg and the Habsburg territories of the Holy Roman Empire were Monika Firla and Walter Sauer.⁷ The extent and impact of the Holy Roman Empire's involvement in the Atlantic slave trade were more recently discussed in Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov's doctoral thesis *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich (Black Europeans in the Holy Roman Empire)* (2013) as well as in collaborative volumes such as *Germany and the Black Diaspora* (2013), *Europas Sklaven* (2014), *Slavery Hinterland* (2016), and *German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery* (2017).⁸ The journal of Johann Peter Oettinger, newly discovered by Craig Koslofsky and Roberto Zaugg (2020), even provided fresh insights regarding the relatively well-researched direct involvement of Brandenburg ships in the Atlantic slave trade.⁹ However, an overwhelmingly extra-European and modern emphasis is recognizable in the geographic and temporal range covered by these publications: Among the many essays on activities of Germans

London: *Welthandel und Einbürgerung, 1660–1818* (Munich: Oldenburg, 2007); Magnus Ressel, "Hamburg und die Niederelbe im atlantischen Sklavenhandel der Frühen Neuzeit," *Werkstatt Geschichte* nos. 66–67 (2014): 75–96; Jutta Wimmeler and Klaus Weber, eds., *Globalized Peripheries: Central Europe and the Atlantic World, 1680–1860* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020).

6 For a European and comparative perspective, see Annika Bärwald, Josef Köstlbauer, and Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, "People of African Descent in Early Modern Europe," in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Atlantic History*, ed. Trevor Burnard, DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199730414-0326, last modified January 15, 2020.

7 See for instance Monika Firla and Herrmann Forkl, "Afrikaner und Africana am württembergischen Herzogshof im 17. Jahrhundert," *Tribus* 44 (1995): 149–193; Monika Firla, *Exotisch – höfisch – bürgerlich: Afrikaner in Württemberg vom 15. bis 19. Jahrhundert: Katalog zur Ausstellung des Hauptstaatsarchivs Stuttgart* (Stuttgart: Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, 2001); Monika Firla, "AfrikanerInnen und ihre Nachkommen im deutschsprachigen Raum," in *AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland und schwarze Deutsche: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Reinhard Klein-Arendt (Münster: Lit, 2004), 9–24; Walter Sauer, ed., *Von Soliman bis Omofuma: Afrikanische Diaspora in Österreich 17. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2007) with contributions by Sauer on "Angelo Soliman: Mythos und Wirklichkeit," 59–96 as well as "Sklaven, Freie, Fremde: Wiener 'Mohren' des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts" (together with Andrea Wiesböck), 23–56.

8 Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich: Handel, Migration, Hof* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann, eds., *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact 1250–1914* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Doris Bulach and Juliane Schiel, eds., *Europas Sklaven*, Special Issue *Werkstatt Geschichte* nos. 66–67 (2014); Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft, eds., *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680–1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016); Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Pia Wiegmann, eds., *German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery*, *Atlantic Studies* 14, no. 4 (2017).

9 Johann Peter Oettinger, *A German Barber-Surgeon in the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Seventeenth-Century Journal of Johann Peter Oettinger*, ed. and translated by Craig Koslofsky and Roberto Zaugg (Chapel Hill, NC: University of Virginia Press, 2020).

outside of Europe, as well as on later epochs and other European countries, treatments of slavery and the slave trade *within* the Holy Roman Empire are few and far between. Earlier studies mostly doubted that slave status existed in the Old Empire, and even Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov's dissertation is limited to the better-documented and therefore more frequently studied world of the courts. Her focus on the prestigious role of so-called "Court Moors" mainly reconstructs the perspective of the men and women who profited from the transport of human beings into Europe. Therefore, as Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Pia Wiegink concluded as late as 2017, "an encompassing and systematic study of the multiple forms of German entanglements with slavery remains to be published."¹⁰

In this context, what can a collaborative volume on *Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany* aim to achieve? For one thing, the essays collected here focus on the hitherto largely neglected early modern German towns and territories (rather than the non-European world or the activities of Germans in neighboring lands or colonies). Secondly, they concentrate on the entanglement of these towns and territories in slavery and the slave trade. This calls attention in particular to questions regarding the legal and social status of persons abducted into the Holy Roman Empire, their room for maneuver, and the origins and significance of racist ideas, all of which have become controversial in recent years.¹¹ Thirdly, we have attempted to reconstruct the perspectives of *all* the participants by considering the experiences and viewpoints of people who were trafficked into the German Empire or

¹⁰ Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Pia Wiegink, "German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery: An Introduction," *Atlantic Studies* 14, no. 4 (2017): 419–435, at 421. Even in studies dealing with the European side of the story, the Holy Roman Empire is usually missing, indicating that international research has not yet integrated Germany into the Atlantic world.

¹¹ Monika Firla and Andreas Becker thus assumed that slave status was nullified in the Empire (Firla, "AfrikanerInnen und ihre Nachkommen im deutschsprachigen Raum," 15; Andreas Becker, "Preußens schwarze Untertanen: Afrikanerinnen und Afrikaner zwischen Kleve und Königsberg vom 17. Jahrhundert bis ins frühe 19. Jahrhundert," *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte* 22 (2012): 1–32, at 15–16, 28). Similarly, Vera Lind and Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov tend to stress possibilities within the estate-based early modern German society, while Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Arne Spohr, and Renate Dürr have taken more skeptical stances; see Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*; Vera Lind, "Privileged Dependency on the Edge of the Atlantic World: Africans and Germans in the Eighteenth Century," in *Interpreting Colonialism*, ed. Byron R. Wells and Philip Stewart (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2004), 369–391; Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, "There Are No Slaves in Prussia?" in *Slavery Hinterland*, ed. Brahm and Rosenhaft, 109–131; Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, "Verhandelte (Un-)Freiheit: Sklaverei, Leibeigenschaft und inhereuropäischer Wissenstransfer am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 3 (2017): 347–380; Arne Spohr, "Zunftmitgliedschaft als Weg zur Freiheit? Zur rechtlichen und sozialen Position schwarzer Hoftrumpeter und -pauker im Alten Reich," in *Wege: Festschrift für Susanne Rode-Breymann*, ed. Annette Kreutziger-Herr et al. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2018), 357–366; Renate Dürr, "Inventing a Lutheran Ritual: Baptisms of Muslims and Africans in Early Modern Germany," in *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 196–227, at 206–208.

who immigrated, even if the sources often provide only fragmentary and scattered evidence for their views.¹² Finally, in this introduction in particular, we intend to interweave and consolidate the growing number of individual studies so as to go beyond the level of case studies and consider – to the extent current research allows – macro-historical perspectives as well as the similarities and differences between the Holy Roman Empire and its European neighbors.

We are well aware that with regard to the analysis of global life trajectories, the exchange of goods, and the circulation of ideas, confining ourselves to the territories of the Empire does not adequately mirror this aspect of mobility. At the same time, however, the geographic limitation permits us to promote research on the comparatively less well-understood German territories. Historians have to search hard for clues in this context, since there is no defined body of sources like the registers of trafficked persons existing in some other European countries. Instead, seeking out the fragmentary and scattered sources relating to persons transported to Europe is made even more difficult because they were highly mobile and mostly of low social standing. The microhistorical approaches used in many of the contributions in this volume therefore represent not just a conscious methodological decision allowing us to illuminate the life circumstances of such individuals in their full complexity; they are often a forced choice owing to the nature of our sources.

From the German “Sonderweg” to Slavery Hinterland

The fragmentary and scattered character of our sources is probably one of the reasons why the hitherto accumulated knowledge about German connections to and integration in the Atlantic system of slavery has not yet received adequate recognition even by professional historians.¹³ As late as 2020, Renate Dürr wrote that “the idea that the Holy Roman Empire languished in the backwaters of history and scarcely participated in European expansion, global trade, and slavery is hard to eradicate.”¹⁴ As a matter of fact,

¹² The following are positive examples of recent consideration of the agency of Black and subordinate persons: Ottmar Ette, *Anton Wilhelm Amo: Philosophieren ohne festen Wohnsitz. Eine Philosophie der Aufklärung zwischen Europa und Afrika* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2014); Heather Morrison, “Dressing Angelo Soliman,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44, no. 3 (2011): 361–382; Honeck, Klimke, Kuhlmann, *Germany and the Black Diaspora*.

¹³ See e.g. Ulrike Schmieder, Katja Füllberg-Stolberg, and Michael Zeuske, “Introduction,” in *The End of Slavery in Africa and the Americas: A Comparative Approach*, ed. Ulrike Schmieder, Katja Füllberg-Stolberg, and Michael Zeuske (Berlin: Lit, 2011), 7–14, at 9–10.

¹⁴ Dürr, “Inventing a Lutheran Ritual,” 196. Together with Ronnie Hsia, Carina Johnson, Ulrike Strasser, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Dürr advocates the notion of “Globalizing Early Modern German History,” *Forum German History* 31, no. 3 (2013): 366–382.

the only truly comprehensive and macrohistorical treatment of the importance of Atlantic slavery for the development of German history was published more than twenty years ago by Jürgen Osterhammel. He began his essay on *Slavery and the Civilization of the West* with these pointed sentences: “Slavery existed elsewhere; not in Germany. The Germans observed it from afar.”¹⁵ In the second revised edition of his book in 2009 he repeated this idea and stated even more generally:

Nowhere else in the sphere of Latin Christendom did slavery and servile forms of unfreedom as a historical experience play a lesser role than in Germany, the one large country in Europe without an early modern colonial past.¹⁶

In this context, Osterhammel described people transported into the Holy Roman Empire as “exotic guests” and stray “aberrations,”¹⁷ thus emphasizing the putatively unusual and completely “irregular” character of the phenomenon.

Just one year later, Osterhammel proposed an even more far-ranging thesis in his essay entitled *Aufstieg und Fall der neuzeitlichen Sklaverei* (*The Rise and Fall of Modern Slavery*), which considered the consequences of this previously postulated German exceptionalism. Now the supposed abstention of inhabitants of the Holy Roman Empire, and later of the German Confederation, from the Atlantic slave economy and the fight against it became an explanation for the so-called German *Sonderweg*, the special path that led to the Holocaust.¹⁸ While the abolition of slavery in the Western European countries was embedded in “great public convulsions and battles, protests, and intellectual debates,”¹⁹ the antislavery movement supposedly attracted little attention in the German territories – where the question of slavery allegedly prompted nothing more than “academic frivolities” – during the first half of the nineteenth century: “It did not move people’s hearts or minds.” As a result, the Germans never lived through the “formative and cathartic collective process found in the Western democracies – the experience of self-liberation from a slave-holding past.” It was for this reason that the Germans supposedly lacked this “moral immunization” as they entered the twentieth century, a deficit Osterhammel propounded as an explanation for Germany’s course to National Socialism.

¹⁵ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Sklaverei und die Zivilisation des Westens* (original edition: 2000; 2nd rev. ed. Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 2009), 7.

¹⁶ Osterhammel, *Sklaverei und die Zivilisation des Westens*, 12.

¹⁷ Osterhammel, *Sklaverei und die Zivilisation des Westens*, 9–10.

¹⁸ Osterhammel, “Aufstieg und Fall der neuzeitlichen Sklaverei,” 342–369. Even though it has been widely critized, the German *Sonderweg* paradigm is still debated. It no longer forms the central rationale of current research, however. See James Sheehan, “Paradigm Lost? The ‘Sonderweg’ Revisited,” in *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, ed. Oliver Janz, Sebastian Conrad, and Gunilla Budde (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 150–160; Jürgen Kocka, “Looking Back on the Sonderweg,” *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 137–142.

¹⁹ For this and the following quotation, see Osterhammel, “Aufstieg und Fall der neuzeitlichen Sklaverei,” 367–368.

These theses by Osterhammel have been refuted not only by the research of the past two decades on the integration of the German territories into the system of slavery and the slave trade. It has also been shown that the antislavery movement did indeed resonate in the Holy Roman Empire and its successor states.²⁰ And although the abolition movement in Germany was undoubtedly small compared to its counterpart in Great Britain, comparisons with various neighboring countries in central Europe such as the Netherlands and Denmark reveal significant similarities in both the dimension and the course of its activities.²¹ Consequently, comparing the German anti-slavery movement to the formation of abolitionism in these two neighboring countries is sufficient to refute Osterhammel's *Sonderweg* thesis, or at least to cast serious doubt on it.²²

Osterhammel's "hypothetical considerations"²³ nevertheless prompt the question why the image of German abstention from slavery and the slave trade has persisted so long among scholars, and why the last twenty years have seen no reaction to his interpretation of the supposed special status for the German lands, i.e. the German *Sonderweg*. The fact that Osterhammel's work has prompted no scholarly discussion could suggest tacit acceptance – and may also have been a consequence of the relatively minor importance attributed to the connections between the Atlantic slave system and the German context in international and German-language research.

The historical foundation of Osterhammel's theory (few colonial possessions and the short life of the Brandenburg African Company) is but one reason why it has hitherto remained unchallenged. Much more significant – and still influential in current scholarship – is the fact that early modern German authors were already compensatively reinventing the Germans "in their imaginations" as morally superior colonizers.²⁴ Sarah Lentz shows in her chapter how the legend of German eschewal of

20 On this, see Sarah Lentz, "Wer helfen kann, der helfe!" *Deutsche SklavereigegnerInnen und die atlantische Abolitionsbewegung, 1780–1860* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020); Katharina Stornig, "Catholic Missionary Associations and the Saving of African Child Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Atlantic Studies* 14, no. 4 (2017): 519–549; Karin Schüller, "Deutsche Abolitionisten in Göttingen und Halle: Die ersten Darstellungen des Sklavenhandels und der Antisklavereibewegung in der deutschen Historiographie des ausgehenden 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Pasajes – Passages – Passagen: Festschrift für Christian Wentzlaff-Eggebert*, ed. Susanne Grunwald et al. (Sevilla: Secretariado de Publ., 2004), 611–622.

21 On the Dutch and Danish movements, see e.g. Maartje Janse, "'Holland as a Little England'? British Anti-Slavery Missionaries and Continental Abolitionist Movements in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Past and Present* 229 (November 2015): 123–160; Erik Gøbel, *The Danish Slave Trade and Its Abolition* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 65–69.

22 In view of the vehement public debates and street fights concerning colonialism, racism, and the lingering effects of slavery in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the USA during the years 2019 and 2020, one might also ask to what extent the British, Dutch, Americans, Brazilians, and Spanish have actually freed themselves from their history as slave owners.

23 Osterhammel, "Aufstieg und Fall der neuzeitlichen Sklaverei," 366.

24 Susanne M. Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

the slave trade was utilized more widely in the nineteenth century to play an important role as a “source of moral capital” in the development of a German national consciousness during the *Vormärz*, the period in German history and culture between 1815 and 1848.²⁵ In fact, we can observe an uncritical acceptance of this narrative all the way into the twentieth century: For example, Sander L. Gilman tellingly entitled his 1982 essay collection *On Blackness without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany*.²⁶ The assumption that there had been no German involvement in slavery and the slave trade – and therefore no Black presence in the German-speaking lands – has long shaped the majority of research on the German discourse on slavery. As a result, this discussion has been interpreted as a surrogate discourse in which the topic of slavery was instrumentalized, for example in polemics against feudal and absolutist conditions.²⁷ In this vein, Rainer Koch explained in 1976 that the German debates about slavery were merely a “forerunner to criticisms of social, economic, and political conditions in Germany.”²⁸ Somewhat later, Uta Sadji proposed that the historical actors writing about slavery in the late eighteenth century were “in fact, either consciously or unconsciously, only arguing about German conditions.”²⁹ One specific issue in this context was the institution of serfdom, which generated lively controversy; but another concerned the political rights of burgher citizens – the very group from which most contemporary writers originated. It is only since the 2000s, and especially since the 2010s, that the number of scholarly works in which criticism of slavery is not primarily treated in a figurative sense but instead connected to contemporary practices of enslavement has been increasing.³⁰

25 See also Lentz, “Wer helfen kann, der helfe!” and Magnus Ressel, “Hamburg und die Niederelbe im atlantischen Sklavenhandel der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Werkstatt Geschichte* nos. 66–67 (2014): 75–96, at 94.

26 Sander L. Gilman, *On Blackness without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany* (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1982).

27 Uta Sadji, *Der Negermythos am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland: Eine Analyse der Rezeption von Reiseliteratur über Schwarzafrika* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1979), 283. Cf. also Anna-Christie Cronholm, “Die Nordamerikanische Sklavenfrage im deutschen Schrifttum des 19. Jahrhunderts” (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 1959).

28 Rainer Koch, “Liberalismus, Konservatismus und das Problem der Negersklaverei: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des politischen Denkens in Deutschland in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 222, no. 3 (June 1976): 529–577, at 533.

29 Sadji, *Der Negermythos am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 107.

30 See e.g. Schüller, “Deutsche Abolitionisten in Göttingen und Halle”; Andreas Gestrich, “The Abolition Act and the Development of Abolitionist Movements in 19th-Century Europe,” in *Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labor Relations: The Long-Term Consequences of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, ed. Marcel van der Linden (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 245–261; Jeanette Eileen Jones, “‘On the Brain of the Negro’: Race, Abolitionism, and Friedrich Tiedemann’s Scientific Discourse on the African Diaspora,” in *Germany and the Black Diaspora*, ed. Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann, 134–152; Barbara Riese, *Schöne Mohrinnen, edle Sklaven, schwarze Rächer: Schwarzendarstellung und Sklavereithematik im deutschen Unterhaltungstheater, 1770–1814* (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2010). To be certain, considerable research interest continues to be focused on the specific appropriation and reinterpretation of the

Even in these studies, however, scholars still show little interest in the actual *German* involvement in the slave trade and slavery. It is thus not surprising that the supposed German abstention from the slave trade has continued to have such a lasting impact that Monika Firla, for example, assumed in 2004 that the Germans – in contrast to all other Europeans – had not purchased Africans on the West Coast of Africa as slaves but rather *paid to redeem* (i.e., liberate) them.³¹

If we examine the lives of these Germans and the African people who accompanied them (usually involuntarily) within the larger global context in which they operated, however, it becomes clear that the difference between the colonial powers and the countries that did not have colonies was much smaller than has long been assumed. For example, Pomeranian slave trader Joachim Nettelbeck wrote in his memoirs that the Dutch colony Suriname might be called “a German colony rather than a Dutch one, because on plantations such as Paramaribo, one discovers out of one hundred whites perhaps as many as ninety-nine who had assembled here from all the regions of Germany.”³² Even if we assume Nettelbeck to have been exaggerating, historian Carl Haarnack has estimated that around 1800, roughly one third of the European inhabitants of Suriname (men and women) – about one thousand in all – came from the German lands.³³ The German presence in the largest Dutch colony was no exception; rather, it was a structural characteristic caused by the chronic shortage of manpower in the Netherlands. Similarly, Germans could be found as owners of slaves in the Danish islands of the Caribbean³⁴ or the British

discourse on slavery as applied to internal German affairs. Excellent research on this topic has been done, for example, by Heike Paul, “The German Reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’” in *Amerikanische Populärkultur in Deutschland. Case Studies in Cultural Transfer Past and Present*, ed. Katja Kanzler and Heike Paul (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002), 21–40.

31 Firla, “AfrikanerInnen und ihre Nachkommen im deutschsprachigen Raum,” 15.

32 Joachim Nettelbeck, *Eine Lebensbeschreibung von ihm selbst aufgezeichnet*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1821), 36. On Germans in Suriname, see 25–37 and 102–109. For more details, see Sarah Lentz, “Deutsche Profiteure des atlantischen Sklavereisystems und der deutschsprachige Sklavereidiskurs der Spätaufklärung,” in *Das Meer: Maritime Welten in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Peter Burschel and Sünne Juterzenka (Cologne: Böhlau, forthcoming).

33 See Carl Haarnack, “‘Nachrichten von Surinam’: Representations of a Former Dutch Colony in German Travel Literature, 1790–1900,” in *Travel Writing in Dutch and German, 1790–1930*, ed. Alison E. Martin, Lut Missinne, and Beatrix van Dam (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2017), 114–138, at 114–116.

34 Registers from the Danish West Indies provide a ready source for identifying German (and other) land- and slaveholders on the Danish islands. See e.g. Danish National Archives 446, The West India and Guinea Company, Bookkeeper’s Accounts for St. Thomas and St. John, Land Lists for St. Thomas (1688–1754); or Danish National Archives 571, Audited Accounts, West Indian Accounts, Land Register of St. Thomas and St. John (1755–1915).

colonies in America.³⁵ And from these colonies, they brought people of African origin into the Holy Roman Empire and its successor states.³⁶

Considering the South Asian region as a source of slaves, Roelof van Gelder has estimated that between 1602 and 1795, approximately half the employees of the *Vereenigte Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) were foreigners, i.e. non-Netherlanders.³⁷ Most of them came from German territories, and not only from regions that bordered on the Netherlands; they also came from the electorates of Saxony and Prussia, the Duchies of Württemberg, Saxony-Weimar, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony-Gotha, and Silesia, as well as from imperial cities such as Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and Ulm.³⁸ Of the estimated 973,000 persons who journeyed to Asia in the service of the VOC, only around 360,000, or roughly one third, returned home.³⁹ If we accept these numbers, then approximately 180,000 “foreign” – that is, mostly German – VOC employees came back with experiences of slavery and the slave trade, and some of them also brought their “servants,” both male and female, with them.⁴⁰ Others started families with enslaved women in India, which also influenced their lives back in the Old Empire.⁴¹

35 On German slaveholders in British colonies, see e.g. James Van Horn Melton, *Religion, Community, and Slavery on the Colonial Southern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Aaron Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717–1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

36 See e.g. Mark Häberlein, “‘Mohren’, ständische Gesellschaft und atlantische Welt: Minderheiten und Kulturkontakte in der Frühen Neuzeit,” in *Atlantic Understandings: Essays on European and American History in Honor of Hermann Wellenreuther*, ed. Claudia Schnurmann and Hartmut Lehmann (Hamburg: Lit, 2006), 77–102, at 89, 96–97. On German Moravian missionaries and their role in bringing enslaved persons from the West Indies to Germany, see Josef Köstlbauer, “Ambiguous Passages: Non-Europeans Brought to Europe by the Moravian Brethren During the Eighteenth Century,” in *Globalized Peripheries*, ed. Wimpler and Weber, 169–186.

37 Roelof van Gelder, *Das ostindische Abenteuer: Deutsche in Diensten der Vereinigten Ostindischen Kompanie der Niederlande (VOC), 1600–1800* (Hamburg: Convent, 2004), 14. The personal data of employees, sailors, and soldiers employed by the VOC can now be retrieved from the publicly accessible database of the Dutch National Archive: <http://hdl.handle.net/10648/9b54fab1-6340-474a-93d8-04bf78294de8> (accessed October 16, 2020).

38 Van Gelder, *Das ostindische Abenteuer*, 51.

39 Van Gelder, *Das ostindische Abenteuer*, 33, 50.

40 Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, “Verschleppte Kinder im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation und die Grenzen transkultureller Mehrfachzugehörigkeit,” in *Transkulturelle Mehrfachzugehörigkeit als kulturhistorisches Phänomen: Räume – Materialitäten – Erinnerungen*, ed. Dagmar Freist, Sabine Kyora, and Melanie Unseld (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), 15–37. See also the essay by Josef Köstlbauer in this volume.

41 Francisca Hoyer, *Relations of Absence: Germans in the East Indies and Their Families c. 1750–1820* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2020).

The same applies to German soldiers in North America.⁴² Roughly 30,000 German soldiers were recruited by the British to serve in the American War of Independence, some of them sold into service by their own territorial rulers. The largest group (between 17,000 and 19,000) came from Hesse-Kassel. Of these men, around half returned home to Hesse-Kassel seven years later, bringing with them over one hundred free, liberated, or escaped Afro-American men, women, and children – as well as persons they had bought as slaves.⁴³ These examples clearly challenge the categorical distinction drawn between the colonial powers and countries without colonies. Indeed, the very composition of the various colonial societies, trading companies, and international armies requires us to reconsider such supposed contrasts.⁴⁴

Economic history has provided important insights into the structural nature of German integration in the Atlantic world. The abovementioned research into the broad and continuous indirect involvement of Germans in slavery and the slave trade has demonstrated that the production of exchange goods, the provision of ships, capital, plantation equipment, and clothing, as well as the further processing and consumption of colonial wares were carried out not at the state level but by individual actors and groups.⁴⁵ These connections were partially invisible even to contemporaries, since such commerce was conducted under the flag of the respective host country. But they were nevertheless important and consequential. In his essay for this volume, Klaus Weber concludes that

German involvement in the slave trade and the plantation economies built on slave labor was neither occasional nor limited to a few well-connected investors and maritime traders. Producing barter commodities for the slave trade was a key element contributing to the growth of

⁴² On this and the following, see Inge Auerbach, *Die Hessen in Amerika 1776–1783* (Darmstadt: Hessische Historische Kommission, 1996); Rolf Böttcher, *Auf dem Weg nach Amerika: Auswanderung im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Bremerhaven: Wirtschaftsverlag NW, 1997), 17, 22.

⁴³ Maria I. Diedrich, “From American Slaves to Hessian Subjects: Silenced Black Narratives of the American Revolution,” in *Germany and the Black Diaspora*, ed. Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann, 92–111.

⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Felicia Gottmann questions the notion of “national” trading companies: “Prussia all at Sea? The Emden-based East India Companies and the Challenges of Transnational Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of World History* 31, no. 3 (2020): 539–566; together with Philip Stern, “Introduction: Crossing Companies,” *ibid.*, 477–488; Felicia Gottmann, “Mixed Company in the Contact Zone: The ‘Glocal’ Diplomatic Efforts of a Prussian East Indiaman in 1750s Cape Verde,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 23, no. 5 (2019): 423–441. For military history, see also Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, “German Auxiliary Troops in the British and Dutch East India Companies,” in *Transnational Soldiers: Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era*, ed. Nir Arielli and Bruce Collins (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 32–49; Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *German Soldiers in Colonial India* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014).

⁴⁵ See footnote 5.

economies of proto-industrial regions throughout the Holy Roman Empire, and the additional income generated by hundreds of thousands of rural workers allowed the population in these specific regions to grow.⁴⁶

In some regions, this growth led to a doubling of the population over the course of just fifty years.

Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft's definition of continental Europe as a *Slavery Hinterland* in their collaborative volume published in 2016 therefore seems justifiable. The essays collected in their book established Central Europe as an economic periphery of the Atlantic core, a region that simply cannot be explained without its links to Atlantic markets, including slavery. The unfolding material connections between Atlantic and Central European zones also extended to the level of discourse – especially regarding the question of slavery as a challenge to moral consciousness, a challenge that resulted from both direct and indirect confrontation with slavery systems.⁴⁷ One can thus no longer speak of a “surrogate” discourse, for it was also a debate rooted in concrete historical experience. Similarly, it is high time to stop thinking of the persons kidnapped and transported to the German lands as “exceptions.” Even if current research mostly treats individual cases, the transportation of human beings into the Holy Roman Empire was a *collective* experience connected to global systems of slavery. And while slavery in the German lands did not resemble the massive subjection of people in the plantation economies but rather the Mediterranean or Atlantic form of household slavery, it was no “irregular” or “special” occurrence. Defining it as such means to fall prey to a conceptual exoticism that confines slavery to the colonial periphery as though it was not part of life in Europe as well. As the contributions in this volume show, the opposite was true.

The Individual Articles

Since the persistent notion of a German *Sonderweg* shows the impact of historiography on perceptions of the topic, our collection of essays begins with a contribution by Klaus Weber, who demonstrates the close connection between modern political developments and historiography. Historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century had already begun to examine the long-term engagement of German cities and territories with the Atlantic world, an engagement that dated back to the

⁴⁶ This and the following Klaus Weber, “Germany and the Early Modern Atlantic World: Economic Involvement and Historiography,” in this volume, 46–47 (quotation) and 38.

⁴⁷ See Sarah Lentz, “Abolitionists in the German Hinterland? Therese Huber and the Spread of Anti-Slavery Sentiment in the German Territories in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *Slavery Hinterland*, ed. Brahm and Rosenhaft, 187–211; Sarah Lentz, “Deutsche Profiteure des atlantischen Sklavereisystems.”

beginning of the European expansion in the sixteenth century and encompassed direct as well as indirect involvement in the slave trade. But the proximity of earlier historians to the colonialist politics of Imperial Germany and the ideology of National Socialism “contaminated” the entire field of study, causing it to be avoided by younger historians or treated in a decidedly positivist manner after 1945. It was thus only after a new generation of historians emerged and global history approaches gained momentum that research integrating these findings into the bigger picture resumed. However, the effects of the Cold War and the consequent divisions between East and West in historiography are still being felt today.

The following essays concentrate mainly on direct involvement in the slave trade and slavery, with a focus on the territories of the Holy Roman Empire. The contribution by Arne Spohr subjects the life of Christian Real, one of the first documented Black trumpeters at a German court, to an insightful close reading. While Real was largely treated by earlier scholars as an example of how Blacks could successfully integrate into early modern society, Spohr shows that when Real fell victim to a serious violent crime in Stuttgart in the year 1669, the reasons for the attack included aspects of honor, social status, and Blackness. The assault was thus a consequence of the tension between Real’s initial status as a slave and his later privileged position as a member of the court. Accordingly, Spohr reveals that associations between Blackness and servitude or slavery appeared not only in countries that were directly involved in the transatlantic slave trade; they were also significant for the lives of Black individuals in the “slavery hinterland” of the Empire.

Using the example of two Native Americans appearing at the court in Dresden in the 1720s, Craig Koslofsky shows in his article that it was not only people of African origin who were abducted to the Holy Roman Empire; other population groups could serve the demand for exotic personnel as well. In the case of the two men in question, their darker skin was less important than their extensive tattoos, which attracted the curiosity of contemporaries. After being displayed by their owner for several years throughout Europe, the two Native Americans were purchased by August the Strong in 1723. Instead of seeing their tattoos as signs of honor and status as was the case in their native communities, however, European observers dismissed them as ornamental signs without meaning, thereby devaluing them along with their wearers. Similarly, the invasive and inappropriate examinations of the men’s bodies are reminiscent of the manner in which “human merchandise” was scrutinized at slave markets. In this way, the tattoos of these honorable warriors were treated not as individual signs but as ethnic markers, and the two men were robbed of their individuality and degraded to mere objects – as was generally the case with African slaves.

Enslaved persons brought from colonial mission fields to Europe also “served” in the symbolic communication of the Moravian Church. In his study, Josef Köstlbauer shows just how important the gaps and omissions in the preserved records are. Typically, Moravian archives remain silent on the status of Africans or West Indian Creoles living as slaves in Germany. These converts and captives provided edifying images of

he Brethren's missionary achievements and their eschatological visions, and the rhetoric of spirituality and communal equality pervading Moravian discourse served to obscure slavery. The result was an ambiguous position: On the one hand, such individuals were accorded a highly visible role of considerable symbolic value; on the other hand, close reading of the sources and semantic analysis of the terminology employed shows that although slavery may have been concealed by church discipline or servitude, it was by no means revoked. Indeed, scattered evidence shows that depending on circumstance, Moravians were ready to claim authority over individuals based on their slave status.

The status of trafficked persons in the Holy Roman Empire did not necessarily remain ambiguous, as Rebekka von Mallinckrodt demonstrates. Examining the reception of Roman Law, which remained an authoritative (though subsidiary) source for German lawyers until the end of the eighteenth century whenever positive German law did not provide an explicit or contrary regulation, she reconstructs an entire legal tradition applied to persons of African or Ottoman origin who had been abducted, purchased, or captured in war. According to this legal tradition, their status as slaves was explicitly affirmed. Court cases confirm that Roman law was not merely a theoretical affair but was in fact applied in practice as well. Parties to these judicial cases took other legal sources such as legislation in and for the colonies or the older tradition of natural law into account as well; furthermore, they referred to property rights in general and to the institution of serfdom that survived in many German territories in particular. The argumentation in favor of recognizing personal servitude could thus still rely on a multitude of sources even as opposition against such practices and discourses was increasingly taking shape.

By contrast, Walter Sauer's contribution demonstrates the limited value of normative legal texts as well as the limitations of their application in practice. In a compact comparison, he describes how the function and recruitment of "exotic" servants in the lands of the Habsburg Monarchy changed over the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. While the practices of display among the baroque aristocracy and among the wealthy bourgeoisie differed only in minor aspects, the abolition of the transatlantic and Mediterranean slave trade along with explicit prohibitions like those found in the Austrian Civil Code of 1811 brought significant changes. Human trafficking did not cease, but its practices changed – as did the legal status of the abducted individuals. The locations of the actual trading shifted to places outside of Europe, and the trafficked men, women, and children were no longer officially slaves in Europe, but they nevertheless lived in conditions of unequivocal dependence.

Annika Bärwald's essay complements these examples of how the (former) status of slaves could survive covertly, explicitly, or ambiguously by focusing on the agency of legally free people of African or Asian descent in Germany. Her analysis of help-wanted ads in Hamburg newspapers between the end of the eighteenth and the

beginning of the nineteenth century also disproves the still common assumption that the *Black presence* in the German territories was confined to princely courts. While Bärwald's evaluation of these ads clearly proves the precarious status of non-Europeans as house servants, her study also delivers impressive evidence of the opportunities available to such subaltern actors (both male and female), who skillfully navigated the Hamburg job market mostly as free persons. Bärwald persuasively argues that the strategies employed by these people of Asian and African descent should be perceived as cosmopolitan practices and evidence of intercultural competence.

The following articles turn the reader's attention to the contemporary *discussion* of slavery, which appears in a different light as the German involvement in both slavery and the slave trade increasingly becomes clear. Jutta Wimmmler's essay pursues the question why many of the products provided by enslaved labor – she uses the example of American dyestuffs and medicinals – remained “invisible” in the German context while other products like sugar became key symbols of slavery. According to Wimmmler, this difference in reception is owed to two interwoven factors. Firstly, certain products were marginalized within the “narrative of modernity.” Secondly and perhaps even more importantly, the materiality and further processing of certain products led to them being less visible. In the context of this long-term history of reception, Wimmmler examines the extent to which the slave labor involved in the processing of various products was perceived or understood by German contemporaries. Using two popular encyclopedias, she demonstrates that the discourse on the connection between slavery and various products at the time was much more multi-layered and nuanced than current research based on the “narrative of modernity” would lead us to expect.

Mark Häberlein approaches the perception of the slave trade and slavery in Germany through the work of Protestant pastor Gottlieb Tobias Wilhelm, who presented the anthropological knowledge and intellectual debates of his time in the three volumes of his *Unterhaltungen über den Menschen* (*Conversations Concerning Mankind*) (1804–1806). Thanks to its encyclopedic character and the pastor's method of compiling his materials, this extremely popular work manifestly displays the intensive reception and discussion of both the transatlantic slave trade and the efforts to abolish it. An analysis of the sources used by Wilhelm also reveals the media channels through which information about colonies, slavery, and the slave trade circulated. Häberlein highlights the ambivalence of Wilhelm's clearly critical attitude toward slavery: While he emphatically condemned the cruelties of the slave trade and repudiated the supposed inferiority of Africans, his work was nevertheless permeated by the notion that humanity was divided into races with certain characteristics, a view partially influenced by theories of climatic determinism. As a result, Wilhelm assumed that Africans could reach their full potential only by living in Europe or America.

A fascinating body of sources forms the center of Jessica Cronshagen's chapter. She bases her study on a collection of letters sent by children in Moravian communities to enslaved children in Suriname, and her analysis merges questions about the German discourse on slaves and slavery with issues pertaining to literacy, communicative practices, and childhood. The youthful authors of these letters did not know their correspondents by name; their letters were essentially directed at stereotypical "poor slave children," and their content and diction is steeped in missionary rhetoric. The Moravians' conviction that they were part of a worldwide religious community did not alter these differences in perception. West Indian slavery was simply a *fait accompli* that prompted no deeper questions. The analyzed letters represent a unique source for the perception of slavery in Central European societies that were distant from colonial slaving zones.⁴⁸ The unreflected acceptance of slavery expressed and implied in them is valuable in helping to explain why the institution could survive unopposed for so long among the Moravian communities in Suriname as well as in Europe.

Proceeding from the legal investigation carried out against three Hanseatic ships seized on suspicion of slave trading, Sarah Lentz discusses contemporary responses to traces of the slave trade in the German Confederation. Although awareness of German entanglement in slavery and the slave trade increased in Britain as a result of these legal cases, the German press rejected any suggestion of participation. With its coverage mainly presenting the arguments laid out by the defense, German readers were offered an account of the situation that was much clearer and simpler than what the totality of relevant facts implied. When some of the initial British accusations turned out to be baseless, German public opinion became even more firmly convinced that foreign opposition to slave trading was a pretext for eliminating unwanted German competition. The arguments of German moral superiority based on Germany's supposed abstention from the slave trade were thus perpetuated from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century – for example in works published for a broader audience – despite evidence to the contrary. With few exceptions, even German abolitionists accepted this myth.

Beyond Exceptionalism

This final section completes the arc of our general narrative, bringing it back around to historiography where we began. In contrast to the basically apologetic discourse that was first formulated in the early modern period but has continued to influence modern historiography, almost all of the essays collected here make it clear that the Holy Roman Empire (respectively its successor states) was much more similar to the

⁴⁸ Jeff Fynn-Paul, Damian Alan Pargas, eds., *Slaving Zones: Cultural Identities, Ideologies, and Institutions in the Evolution of Global Slavery* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

other Western European colonial powers than has long been assumed. Leaving behind national or imperial histories, we can find numerous commonalities and connections at the level of individual actors and transnationally active groups. These shared aspects include the experience of slavery, which had repercussions back in the homelands; the abduction of people as well as the mobility of freedmen and freedwomen between colonies and the European mainland; the fight against slavery in the form of an abolitionist movement; but also the financial and economic entanglements with plantation economies, the tacit acceptance or even explicit defense of buying and selling human beings, and the rise of racist stereotypes. Furthermore, the slave trade and ownership of slaves within the Holy Roman Empire were not confined to royal or noble courts: We find simple artisans, burghers, and lesser nobles involved as traders, go-betweens, and slave-owners as well.⁴⁹ Enslaved persons also explored their options, orienting themselves in a world that was initially completely foreign but led some of them to resist their fate. In addition, we find free and emancipated persons of Asian and African origin who navigated between continents and did not always aim to become integrated in the local (German) society.

Along with the similarities to the Western European colonial powers, which call into question the long-assumed special status of the Holy Roman Empire, Central European experiences like the Ottoman Wars shaped the situation in the German lands as well. Focusing exclusively on the Atlantic realm may therefore also lead to distorted images of reality.⁵⁰ Even during the late eighteenth century, when captives from the Ottoman Wars had *de facto* long since ceased to play a role, these conflicts were still being used as a reference point for the legal treatment of enslaved persons (see the chapter by Rebekka von Mallinckrodt). This referentiality can also be found in the clothing of so-called “Court Moors,” which adopted elements of Ottoman uniforms along with fictive elements of costume, thereby recalling the look of Ottoman prisoners of war even though the persons now wearing such garb mostly came from entirely different regions of the world.⁵¹ Finally, not all persons with dark skin arrived in the Holy Roman Empire by way of the transatlantic slave trade. Some came from the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire, India, or other Asiatic lands; and while some were abducted, others had traveled to Europe voluntarily.

⁴⁹ See the articles by Josef Köstlbauer, Craig Koslofsky, and Rebekka von Mallinckrodt in this volume.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Manja Quakatz, “‘ . . . denen Slaven gleich gehalten werden.’ Muslimisch-osmanische Kriegsgefangene im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation (1683–1699),” *Werkstatt Geschichte* nos. 66–67 (2014): 97–118; Stephan Theilig, *Türken, Mohren und Tataren: Muslimische (Lebens-)Welten in Brandenburg-Preußen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2013).

⁵¹ Mallinckrodt, “Verschleppte Kinder.”

Early modern German society did not remain untouched by all of this – rather, it was itself changed by these “entangled histories.”⁵² Aside from the surge of proto-industries that led to significant population growth in certain regions, racist ideas developed along with religious and civilizing notions of redemption, and these would come to play an important role in the colonization of Africa during the nineteenth century. Ancient ideas of slavery were revived and transformed. At the same time, we already find in the eighteenth century a multicultural society with highly mobile persons from extremely diverse backgrounds who moved freely between the colonies and various European lands. It was thus not only major trading and port cities such as Hamburg, but also relatively remote regions such as Lusatia that had links to these worldwide trade and communication networks, to the movement of goods, people, and services, and hence to a world in which the possession and trading of slaves, both male and female, was simply taken for granted and sometimes imposed upon Germans themselves.⁵³

Consequently, the juxtaposition of “completely slave-free metropolitan centers and the completely slave-saturated [colonial] peripheral regions”⁵⁴ is neither an adequate notion for the Empire nor for other European countries. The Holy Roman Empire (as well as its successor states) was not a slave society, but it was definitively a society *with slaves* – and as recent research on Mediterranean slavery has shown, this does not necessarily imply a small number of slaves. Scholars have gathered extensive evidence for enslavement practices in the late medieval and early modern states bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, even though they cannot be called slave societies in the strict sense.⁵⁵ If we shift our attention to enslavement practices and

⁵² On entangled histories and the concept’s significance for postcolonial perspectives, see Sebastian Conrad, Shalini Randeria, and Regina Römhild, eds., *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (2nd ed., Frankfurt: Campus, 2013); Angelika Epple, Olaf Kaltmeier, and Ulrike Lindner, eds., *Entangled Histories: Reflecting on Concepts of Coloniality and Postcoloniality*, Special Issue *Comparativ – Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 21, no. 1 (2011). The concept has also gained popularity in fields like Atlantic history, see Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 764–786.

⁵³ See e.g. Mario Klarer, ed., *Verschleppt, verkauft, versklavt: Deutschsprachige Sklavenberichte aus Nordafrika, 1550–1800* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2019).

⁵⁴ Osterhammel, “Aufstieg und Fall der neuzeitlichen Sklaverei,” 354.

⁵⁵ Giulia Bonazza, *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Arturo Morgado García, “El ciclo vital de los esclavos en el Cádiz de la modernidad,” *Revista de Historia Moderna: Anales de la Universidad de Alicante* 34 (2016): 297–315; Stefan Hanss and Juliane Schiel, eds., *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited, 500–1800 / Neue Perspektiven auf mediterrane Sklaverei, 500–1800* (Zurich: Chronos, 2014); Aurelia Martín Casares and Rocío Periañez Gómez, eds., *Mujeres esclavas y abolitionistas en la España de los siglos XVI al XIX* (Madrid: Iberomericana, 2014); William D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Rocío Periañez Gómez, *Negros, mulatos y blancos: Los esclavos en Extremadura durante la edad moderna* (Badajoz: Diputación de Badajoz,

focus on agents (slaves, owners, traders, and intermediaries) rather than on the institution of slavery itself – and on individual slaving activities rather than on slave-holding societies or systems of slavery, as Michael Zeuske and Joseph C. Miller have urged for a long time⁵⁶ – we can hope to escape such artificially antithetical contrasts and overly simplified opposites. And in doing so, we can gain the ability to see just how deeply and variedly Europe was affected by slavery despite the fact that it imagined and idealized itself as a slave-free society.

With the publication of these essays in the form of a collaborative volume, we hope that international research into slavery will be as much enriched by the integration of the German territories as research in Germany may benefit from inclusion in this larger context. The former might learn how far-reaching and widely ramified early modern trading currents in goods and people were: They certainly did not involve only the countries bordering on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The latter might cease to perceive persons trafficked into the Holy Roman Empire and its successor states as exotic, isolated, and exceptional phenomena, but rather as a part of the global systems of slavery. Last but not least, we hope to contribute to a comprehensive and differentiated picture of the interwovenness of German history with global slavery systems; a picture that appropriately portrays the heterogeneous realities of life of all the historical actors, male and female – from those who were abducted and enslaved to those who benefited from the slave economy, as well as the German opponents of slavery. Only in this way can a heightened and critical awareness of the relevance of slavery and the slave trade to German history be achieved – both within the world of German historical scholarship and among the broader public – and perhaps the foundation for a truly “shared history” be laid.

2010); Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Sally McKee, “Domestic Slavery in Renaissance Italy,” *Slavery & Abolition* 29, no. 3 (September 2008): 305–326; Aurelia Martín Casares, *La esclavitud en Granada en el siglo XVI: Género, raza y religión* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2000); Salvatore Bono, *Schiavi musulmani nell’Italia moderna: Galeotti, vu’ cumpra, domesticci* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1999).

56 Michael Zeuske, “Historiography and Research Problems of Slavery and the Slave Trade in a Global-Historical Perspective,” *International Review of Social History* 57 (2012): 87–111, at 87, 105, 110; see also Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei: Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Joseph C. Miller, “Slaving as Historical Process: Examples from the Ancient Mediterranean and the Modern Atlantic,” in *Slave Systems: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Enrico Dal Lago and Constantina Katsari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 70–102; Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

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Klaus Weber

1 Germany and the Early Modern Atlantic World: Economic Involvement and Historiography

Two world wars, a slump in international trade lasting from 1914 until well into the 1950s, and Germany's cultural and political alienation from its western neighbors contributed to the idea that the integration of Germany into a global economy only began in the 1950s. Not only the lay audience needs to be reminded that the nineteenth century already saw a spectacular growth in maritime trade and that from around the middle of the century, German industrial products (in particular in the electrical and chemical sectors) were in fierce competition with British manufactures on markets around the world. Even more overlooked is the early modern involvement of German cities and territories with the Atlantic World, which date back to the very beginnings of European expansion. The following contribution will remind us of these connections: participation in the Iberian expansion across the Atlantic, participation in the slave trade operated under the Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, French, and British flags, massive investments in plantations established in those countries' colonies, and the production of barter commodities for the purchase of enslaved Africans on a very large scale.

The second part of this text will offer a brief overview of the historiography on the topic, as the mentioned German entanglements are inseparable from the writing of their history for several reasons. Some of the early historians writing and publishing on these issues in the late nineteenth century were themselves involved in colonialist politics of the Wilhelmine Empire, aiming anew at the African markets that had been purchasing German-made goods since the sixteenth century. The relevant historians of the subsequent generation were in turn deeply enmeshed in National Socialism. These two expansionist ideologies contaminated the entire field of study to some degree, which explains why it was avoided altogether by younger historians trained during the 1960s. Only since the 2000s has yet another generation of researchers begun to revisit the topic with new questions and methods.

Notes: The research for this article was funded by the German Research Foundation (WE 3613/2-1, "The Globalized Periphery: Transatlantic Commerce and Social and Economic Change in Central Europe, ca. 1680–1850"). I am indebted to Anka Steffen for valuable hints concerning scholarly literature, and to Chris Smith and Stephan Stockinger for ironing my English.