

EDITED BY

Daniel
Domingues
da Silva,
Hans
Hägerdal,
Angelina
Kalashnikova,
Filipa
Ribeiro
da Silva

Colonial
Encounters
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Slavery
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COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS AND SLAVERY IN EARLY MODERN ASIA

Edited by

Daniel Domingues da Silva, Hans Hägerdal,
Angelina Kalashnikova and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva

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INTRODUCTION

Enslaved Worlds: Colonial Encounters and Coercion in Early Modern Asia

*Daniel Domingues da Silva, Hans Hägerdal,
Angelina Kalashnikova and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva*

1. Slavery, colonialism, and the Asian setting

Colonialism as a historical phenomenon is, in its broadest definition, the subjugation and exploitation of a geographical area by any external power. The phenomenon is commonly associated with Western overseas expansion; for example, sociologist Gurminder Bhambra argues that ‘colonialism is a distinctively modern phenomenon which, in turn, gives European overseas empires a character different from other empires contemporaneous with them. This difference rests, in large part, in the specificity of a political economy of colonialism that is often misidentified as a separate capitalist modernity’.¹ Others may argue that it could be perpetrated by any dominant group. Thus, one may speak of Chinese colonialism in Inner Asia in the Qing period, Japanese colonialism in Korea and Taiwan in the modern era, and so on.² The object of colonial enterprises can be either overseas and at relatively close distance, as shown by Swedish and Norwegian colonialism in Sápmi (the land of the Sami people), early modern English policy in Ireland, or the Indonesian exploitation of western Papua. The broader definition of the term also presents challenges on how to use it as an analytical tool, since all types of discrimination of disadvantaged and geographically defined populations might conceivably be claimed as ‘colonialism’.³ There are, however, some distinguishing features. The process of colonisation usually entails discriminatory practices towards outlying or overseas areas to keep the original populations in a subservient state, at worst extermination. This is commonly accompanied by cultural othering of these populations, ranging from exoticism to demonisation and very often entailing overt or implicit racialisation. All this is entwined with an idea of the right of the dominant ethnicity or nation to exploit resources in the subordinated territory. That these

¹ Bhambra, ‘Empires and Colonialism’, p. 192.

² Hennessey, *Rule by Association*.

³ Sultan, ‘What Is Colonialism?’, pp. 1–2.

practices include slavery and coerced labour is evident from innumerable cases all over the world, and this is the focus of the present volume which deals with colonial-tinged slaving in Asia and adjacent seascapes from the 16th to the 19th centuries. As will be apparent from the ten contributions, European-driven colonial processes intersected with a variety of Asian forms of economic coercion and hierarchy to maintain systems of exploitation and trading in humans.⁴

Then, are there distinct Asian characteristics of slavery, as juxtaposed to a European-Atlantic system? At the heart of the matter, the answer is probably no. The late Joseph Miller, in his global synthesis *The Problem of Slavery as History*, has posited that slavery is not a sociological institution. Rather, slaving can be problematised as a historical strategy that arises out of multiple contexts.⁵ Climate, demography, cultural tradition, and political conditions have enabled societies to keep unprivileged groups in bondage in quite different ways, from the Siberian taiga to the Sumatran rice fields. However, Jeff Fynn-Paul has tentatively argued that Asian together with African slaveries tend to have some characteristic features that set them apart from Atlantic and Middle Eastern forms.⁶ The legal status is often vague and elusive, and there is usually no clear-cut concept of 'free' as against 'slave'. What we call slaves were dependents under their masters in a highly vertical system of social relations. Similar to Africa, Asian slaveries often tended to be 'open', meaning that their status was flexible and they could eventually be absorbed into the majority society, in contrast with the racialised Atlantic 'closed' system where slave status tended to be permanent up to the 19th century and the slaves or ex-slaves would hardly merge with white society (although this did not entirely apply to the situation in Latin America).⁷ The 'open' type slaveries were also often relatively mild, although this should not be exaggerated. There were nevertheless Asian slave regimes that were closed and could be as brutal as anywhere else. An obvious contrast with the Atlantic type was the mostly non-racialised character of Asian slavery, as enslaved people would be much less distinguishable from their masters in terms of phenotype – that is, as long as European actors were not involved. Slave castes were known, especially in South Asia, but the physical features of such cast members were hardly different from the dominating castes. Asian slaves also performed a large variety of tasks and were not tied to plantation labour to the same extent as in the Atlantic world.⁸ All this, of course, should be regarded as broad tendencies. There is clear evidence of enslaved Asians being

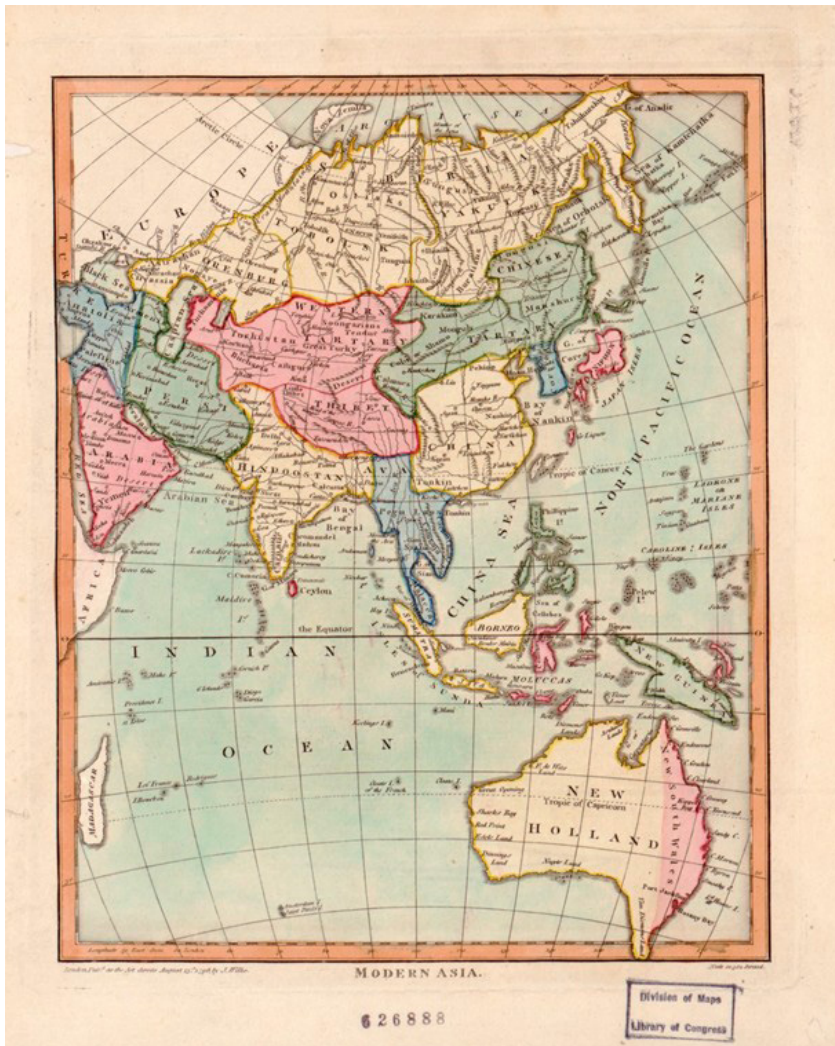
⁴ This Introduction will be relatively brief in terms of the historiography of slavery. For fuller references to the work published in recent decades, see Richard Allen's Afterword, in this volume.

⁵ Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History*, p. 25.

⁶ Fynn-Paul, 'Slavery in Asia and Global Slavery', pp. 343–359.

⁷ Reid, 'Closed' and 'Open' Slave Systems in Pre-colonial Southeast Asia'.

⁸ Fynn-Paul, 'Slavery in Asia and Global Slavery', p. 349; Campbell, 'Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World', pp. vii–xxiv.



Map o.1. Map of Asia from 1796

tied to plantation work in the French, Dutch and the English territories. On the other hand, a considerable number of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas spent their lives working in urban spaces rather than in plantations, performing tasks that were in many ways similar to the tasks carried out by enslaved Asians. Moreover, Asia is a large continent with all types of climates and socio-economic forms, and the frequent demographic, religious and technological movements have made for an abundance of forms over the millennia.

Now, the dichotomy between European and Asian slaveries is blurred when we look at the impact of settlers and colonisers from the West in various parts of Asia after 1500. Miller has warned against seeing European-led slaving economies as reproducing legal frameworks and notions from the European tradition of slaving. Rather, encounters with overseas milieus are marked by hybridity where possibilities of shoring up economic advantage through slave labour is contingent on local preconditions. In the contact zones, ideas about the ownership of bodies and work are likely to influence each other, formally or informally. This process is reflected in several chapters of the present volume, in two ways. First, they demonstrate how Western merchants, settlers, administrators and raiders interacted with communities and agents in Asia and the Indian Ocean world; in other words, how cultural and economic processes engendered ever-new forms of enslavement and allocation of coerced labour. Second, they recover the impact of enslavement and the huge numbers of people involved. Through systematic and methodologically innovative analyses of archival data, they reveal that slaving was far from marginal in the larger region of the Indian Ocean and beyond, and was likely in the dimensions of the Atlantic slave trade.

2. Who is a slave?

Adjacent to this is the by now classical problem of defining a ‘slave’. Looking at the Asian map of coerced labour, a cultural factor of outing is omnipresent. All over Asia, we find categories of people in a heavily bonded and subservient position, who are considered a social estate of its own: the *ngofangare* of Maluku, *alipin* of the Philippines, *nubi* of China. None of these are unproblematic, however, as equivalents of the Western slave term. These and similar categories of people may not always be sellable or subjected to ownership in the Western sense and not necessarily subjected to ‘social death’ as posited by Orlando Patterson in his well-known study.⁹ Scholars such as Suzanne Miers find the conceptual problems so formidable that they discourage the use, or at least unreflecting use, of the thoroughly misused slave term. Rather, one may use local terms for ‘slaves’ and explain how these terms work in the local setting.¹⁰ The matter is not that simple, however. A lack of a viable definition has ethical consequences: if one is content with the statement that a plethora of coerced forms exist in history, it might impede us from taking resolute action against the abuses, considering the widespread prevalence of slave-like forms of labour to this day. The historical existence of countless

⁹ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

¹⁰ Suzanne Miers, ‘Slavery: A Question of Definition’, pp. 1, 11.

coerced labourers in Asian and African settings (and among native Americans and Pacific Islanders) calls for historical comparisons, making a basic definition desirable, if not important. A fundamental feature of coerced/bonded labour might be whether they are allowed to make a choice about the work to be undertaken, although such a criterion seems to imply larger groups than conventional 'slaves'.¹¹ Ownership is often pointed out as a common denominator. The 'slaves' do not own their own bodies and work in a way that sets them apart from the majority of the population. However, 'property-based' definitions of slavery have also come under recent critique, as they attempt to capture a complex social phenomenon using a concept – ownership – that is itself highly ambiguous. What can be owned, how ownership is exercised, who has the right to own, and on what basis – all these questions yield dramatically different answers depending on geographical and historical context. This variability underscores the inadequacy of a universal property criterion when analysing systems of bondage across cultures and time periods.¹² An even less convincing criterion is the lack of personal freedom since there is usually not a 'freedom' concept similar to the Western philosophical and legal term. In some societies the opposite of slavery (and corresponding terms) may not be 'freedom' but rather belonging to an in-group.¹³ The social historian Marcel van der Linden has argued for a broad definition of work that includes directly and indirectly coerced labour since, with reference to Marx, anyone working for a superior is not 'free'. Van der Linden's outline includes a comprehensive set of categories and sub-categories which cover entrance, work, and exit from the system. The forms may appear in different combinations and be contingent on such factors as economy, ideology, legal framework, warfare, international consensus, and degree of resistance. Here it can be hazardous to arrange socially organised form in a continuum – a simplified linear image aggravates efforts to counter abusive practices.¹⁴ We may therefore take broader perspectives in mapping dependency structures in peculiar historical environments and study modalities of domination and dependence through new and innovative methodologies and source curation.¹⁵ The analysis of exploitation of enslaved human resources needs a comprehensive take, as an interactive process that unfolded on a global level in the wake of expanding economic, political, and religious networks.

¹¹ Rönnbäck, 'Free or Enslaved Labor', p. 306.

¹² Lenski, 'Framing the Question: What Is a Slave Society?', p. 43.

¹³ Wimpler & Wiegink, 'Beyond Slavery and Freedom? An Introduction', p. 4.

¹⁴ Van der Linden, 'Dissecting Coerced Labour', pp. 293–322.

¹⁵ Wimpler & Wiegink, 'Beyond Slavery and Freedom? An Introduction', p. 2.

3. The roots of slaving institutions

Then why do people become enslaved in the first place? Miller, as mentioned above, has posited slavery as coming out of a multitude context, and hypothesises that the basic phenomenon, ownership over other people's bodies, has roots far back in prehistory, with the development of a functional syntactic language that enabled the definition of in and out groups. Miller emphasised the role of persons in a position of marginality, though not in the way we may expect. Marginality, in his model, means being on the margin of networks of people in control of authority and resources. For them, control over people, or in other words the means of production, helped them to gain wealth and increased prestige. Merchants had a great role in this respect, often working in concert with political authorities.¹⁶ This perspective is very relevant for the slaving that took place in the age of colonial expansion, where the position of the Dutch East India Company (hereafter VOC) in maritime South and Southeast Asia offers an almost archetypical case. European trading companies and traders, while ultimately dependent on European politics, greatly increased their position in Asian lands, initially restricted to coastal trading posts, by acquiring and trading in humans. Adding to that, English country traders were instrumental in developing commerce in maritime Asia, while merchants of what has been termed the Portuguese 'tribe' developed a 'shadow empire' in Asia and eastern Africa during several centuries. In many cases, the enslaved were instrumental in the production of cash crops and maintenance of the European-dominated posts.

More specifically, and still of common interest, is the old theory of Herman Nieboer, developed by Evsey Domar.¹⁷ The Nieboer-Domar hypothesis is that slavery becomes a profitable option when land is available, but labour is scarce or inaccessible. This no doubt speaks to many of the cases discussed in this volume. Large areas of Asia and the Indian Ocean world, which nowadays might be densely populated, were sparsely inhabited until the 19th century or later, or the local populations were not willing to undertake tasks needed for the maintenance of a colonial-style mode of production. The answer to this problem would be slaving, as shown by the slave routes co-opted or initiated by Europeans. However, the Nieboer-Domar hypothesis has not been fully developed into a theoretical economic model, and might underestimate the huge variety of coerced labour.¹⁸ A more recent theory holds that slavery is at heart an economic system, whatever the socio-cultural aspects of it, and that it was the economically most rational way

¹⁶ Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History*, p. 30.

¹⁷ Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System*; Domar, "The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom".

¹⁸ Rönnbäck, 'Free or Enslaved Labor', p. 306.

for masters to acquire labour, when the reservation wages (minimum wages) were higher than the cost of labour coercion.¹⁹ This theory might be valid for large-scale early modern modes of production, but will have to be tested against other aspects such as gender, religion, cultural practices, etc. Such questions are especially addressed in the first cluster of chapters which explore such aspects in several geographical contexts: Siberia, South Asia, the East Indies, the Indian Ocean. These demonstrate how a plethora of coerced labour forms were contingent on a complicated entanglement of 'rational' economic logics and culturally tinged factors and traditions.

4. Colonial expansion

In the multitude of variants of coerced labour, colonial expansion had a role from the very start. Colonialism is clearly, like slavery, a much-abused term that is used to characterise a wide range of practices, often with rhetorical aims. Basically, colonialism entails expansion by force (or sometimes invitation) into external lands, for the sake of political, ideological, or economic domination and exploitation.²⁰ Usually, as pointed out in the beginning of this text, the process is accompanied by a downgrading of colonised populations, although this could also change over time and become increasingly aggressive and racialised with the European advances of the 19th and 20th centuries. The term is often used in parallel with imperialism, although the matter is debated, since the latter is more associated with a program of political expansion, whereas the establishment of colonies is mostly tied to economic profit. For example, some current Dutch scholars argue that the Dutch undertaking in the East Indies was colonial but not an expression of imperialism.²¹ Often, of course, they tend to intermingle, since strategic goals, prestige matters, and economic aims are combined in national agendas. What is clear enough is that European domination of Asia was limited for the first few centuries, and mainly confined to North Asia and the Philippines, and several coastal enclaves. Recent economic-historical advances also suggest that the famous 'great divergence' between Europe and Asia began before the onset of serious European impact. The Indian and Chinese GDP per capita, insofar as it can be calculated, declined steadily after 1600 and was much lower than that of England, the Netherlands, and Italy.²²

¹⁹ Rönnbäck, 'Free or Enslaved Labor', p. 330.

²⁰ For a general overview of the problem of colonialism as a historical phenomenon, see MacQueen, *Colonialism*.

²¹ Van den Doel, *Zo ver de wereld strekt*, pp. 131–134.

²² O'Rourke, 'The Economist and Global History', p. 58.

However, European impact accelerated the trends as it initiated a limited global trading system after c. 1580 where Spanish silver from the Americas and the trade in spices had a considerable impact. This was strengthened by the European commercial organisations: the VOC system in the 17th and 18th centuries, the activities of the English EIC in the same period, and a variety of seafaring European nations, all with their coastal strongholds.

How the Portuguese of the 15th and 16th centuries coopted African groups to secure enslaved manpower is well known and studied, but their slaving activities in Asian waters is less familiar and is currently under exploration.²³ Early trading geographies by authors such as Duarte Barbosa (c. 1516) annotated the opportunities for slave trade in Asian coastlands, implying that Iberian seafarers were ready to partake in the opportunities and thus co-opt regional trajectories of slavery. They also took advantage of the possibilities of inter-continental trade, as East African slaves were brought to the Portuguese enclaves in India and sometimes ended up in other corners of Asia. From Portuguese Mozambique, enslaved manpower eventually found its way to even more distant places such as Brazil and the Caribbean. The method of combining European technology of shipping with intervention in existing slave markets was continued by other European groups, such as the Dutch and English East India Companies (VOC and EIC). As the Dutch established a steady grip on parts of maritime Southeast Asia after 1605, they became increasingly dependent on coerced labour. Numerous tasks in the early colonial enclaves could not be filled by free Asian, let alone European labour, and the answer was large-scale allocation of enslaved people. India, plagued by internal conflicts and famines, was a major source of manpower in the 17th century, later largely replaced by Southeast Asian victims of colonial or indigenous conflicts. East Africa played a certain role in the VOC trade, since many slaves from Mozambique were brought to the Cape Colony and war-torn Madagascar was a well-known source of slaves. Reasonable calculations indicate that something between 660,000 and 1,135,000 enslaved persons were brought to the VOC sphere of power during its nearly two centuries of existence.²⁴ Only a minor number were used for plantation work, at first for the profitable nutmeg production of the Banda Islands in Maluku. This has recently been the subject of a study by the well-known author Amitav Ghosh, who uses the bloody Dutch conquest and exploitation of Banda as a point of departure for discussing the long-term ecological effects of Western colonialism.²⁵ Although Ghosh is no historian and derived his material from secondary studies, his effort reminds us of the serious consequences of European profit-driven expansion

²³ Fujitani, 'Government Slavery in Portuguese Melaka, 1511–1523', pp. 141–160.

²⁴ Van Rossum, 'Towards a global perspective on early modern slave trade', p. 50.

²⁵ Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*.

where resource extraction and slaving tended to go hand in hand. While slaving had evidently existed in Asia since Antiquity (or longer), the regularity and coordination of Western shipping or land-based expansion after 1500 tended to reinforce or alter existing structures. This can be seen from several chapters in the present volume, such as Angelina Kalashnikova's case about Siberia and Hans Hägerdal's study of Maluku. Even internal Asian initiatives, such as the raiding system of the Sulu slavers of the 18th and 19th centuries, were partly an answer to commercial flows that evolved through European shipping.²⁶

Recent studies of slave trafficking in the Indian Ocean reveal that several European nations were complicit in the business. British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Danish traders are known to have traded a half million people or more to the various European posts in the oceanic region in the period 1500–1850 – in other words, persisting with the trade long after the official ban on slave journeys.²⁷ This is reflected in several chapters in the present volume, such as the contribution by Michael Reidy who also highlights the ingeniousness among slavers to circumvent regulations and sometimes collude with European officials to transport their human cargo. It must be stressed that it was seldom a 'purely' European business, since the slaving routes demanded strategic cooperation with Asian and other groups. This could be done in a way similar to the Atlantic slave trade: indigenous populations of maritime Asia or East Africa-Madagascar acquired slaves through warfare, raiding, etc. and sold them to European or European-affiliated merchants who would bring their human cargos to either colonial or indigenous buyers.²⁸ A well-known case is the activities of the Magh raiders of Arakan (Rakhine) which was bound up with the development of the VOC hub in Batavia. From the founding of the city, the Dutch were desperately on the hunt for labour. Labour was however expensive in Southeast Asia, and local Javanese were risky to use. Then, slavery was the answer. Men from Arakan raided populations of the Bay of Bengal in the 17th century in collusion with Portuguese mariners and exported some of the captives to the Dutch.²⁹ There was little compunction among Asian populations to sell their own to European merchants; however, some Indian polities tried to forbid the practice, while religious morality also played a role in the question regarding who could be sold.³⁰ Such scruples were not always efficient, however, as seen by numerous enslaved Muslims delivered to the Christian Dutch over the centuries. Local and European conceptions of slavery

²⁶ Warren, *The Sulu Zone*.

²⁷ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 15.

²⁸ Campbell, 'Environment and Enslavement in Highland Madagascar 1500–1750', pp. 58–62.

²⁹ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan, Birmanie*, p. 258.

³⁰ Hägerdal, 'Slaving, Colonial Diplomacy, and Resource Extraction in Seventeenth-Century Maritime Asia', pp. 40–42.

blended in a number of ways, especially since early modern colonial territories were contact zones that underwent a process of hybridity. Examples of this process are discussed in Angelina Kalashnikova's chapter about North Asia.

As well established, abolitionism in the Atlantic world became a powerful force towards the late 18th century, leading to the well-known British ban of the slave trade in 1807 and, in the following years, abolition of slavery in the Atlantic region, beginning with the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s and the new Latin American republics in the 1820s. Similar developments happened only later in the Asian colonies. Slavery was abolished in the territories of the English East India Company (hereafter EIC) in 1843, although it was actually outlawed only in 1861.³¹ The Dutch East Indies ended slavery in its directly ruled territories in 1860, and Portuguese Asia followed in 1876. In all these cases, slavery and coerced labour actually persisted longer than that, as seen in the contribution by Priya Kapoor in this volume. Old dependencies and bonded labour relations were not done away with by legal decrees but continued to flourish in a number of forms. Today (2025), it is estimated that more than 40 million people live in slave-like conditions around the world, of which a large part is found in Asian nations.³²

5. New methods of investigation – from databases to anthropology

Almost five centuries of colonialism in Asia has left abundant but underused source materials. While the existence of slavery in European-Asian relations has always been known to a degree in historical textbooks, it has tended to be underplayed, especially in comparison to the Atlantic world. However, the subject has been increasingly explored since the trailblazing works of Anthony Reid and James Warren in the 1980s, and later work on South Asia by Richard Allen, Indrani Chatterjee and Andrea Major.³³ This has entailed research about the statistics of slavery, using the often detailed data about ship movements for the creation of databases. It has also shown the possibilities of the colonial archive to follow the lives of slaves, and even to hear their voices (although under restrained conditions). Moreover, non-archival research by students of anthropology and oral history have deepened our understanding of the collective memory of enslavement and bonded labour.³⁴

³¹ Singh, "Enslaved for Life", 119–142.

³² *Global Slavery Index*, <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/highlights/>

³³ Reid, *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*; Warren, *The Sulu Zone*; Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*; Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*; Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India 1772–1843*.

³⁴ For an overview of all this, see Allen, 'Slavery, Slave Trading, and Bonded Labor Studies in Asia', 1–29; and Allen's 'Afterword' in this volume.

This volume presents a range of methodological cases in ten chapters. The contributions originate from papers delivered at the conference ‘Colonialism, Slavery and Local Histories in Early Modern Asia’, hosted by the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia (ESTA) network in September 2023. The common denominator is how early colonial establishments were able to co-opt and develop slave trade and coerced labour, roughly from the 16th until the 19th century. The authors ask, from several geographical angles and source categories, how European traditions of slaving (the acquisition and allocation of enslaved) ultimately derived from experience of the Atlantic world, or interacted with societies in the Indian Ocean and Asia to manage slaving routes and coerced labour regimes. Here, the authors combine cutting-edge quantitative methods and digital humanities infrastructures with qualitative archival data. The volume thus explores the possibilities of the colonial archive in conjunction with other types of sources. The volume’s scope means that several Asian regions are not represented by chapters, since they were not formally brought under Western colonial rule, or were only colonised at a rather late stage: Iran, Inner Asia, China, Japan.

A first cluster of chapters explores how colonial structures impacted on coerced labour systems in six geographical areas: Siberia, Sri Lanka, India, Eastern Indonesia, the south-western Indian Ocean, and the geographically scattered Portuguese empire. North Asia has usually been left out of discussions about Asian slaveries, which have tended to focus on the maritime parts of the continent where European trading organisations have provided rich material. However, Angelina Kalashinkova shows in her chapter, ‘Trafficking of Women in 17th-Century Eastern Siberia’, how a close reading of Russian-language sources yields fascinating insights in the encounter between Russian and indigenous Siberian cultures. The chapter explores the enslavement of local Yakut women in Eastern Siberia during the 17th century, shedding light on the methods of enslavement, the pricing of women and their strategies for social advancement. The research significantly broadens the perspective of Asian slave trade scholarship by revealing the issue of women trafficking and interethnic marriages in the region, which were previously beyond the scope of the Asian slavery discourse. The study is based on recently discovered archival materials, allowing for the tracing of biographies of indigenous women who were sold by their relatives to Russian colonisers, captured during military raids, or who sought refuge in Russian settlements.

At the opposite end of Asia, Lodewijk Wagenaar delves into the possibilities of the VOC records to pinpoint coerced labour on an island that was partly or entirely under European dominance for more than 400 years, in his chapter ‘The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and Its Use of Company Slaves (Companies lijfeijgenen) in Sri Lanka around 1681’. Focusing on colonial Sri Lanka in the 17th century, he demonstrates the kind of work that the VOC used its Company slaves for, who

were used in addition to other forms of unfree labour. As the chapter highlights, the Company was however also involved in the slave trade, sometimes in indirect ways. Moreover, the Company naturally benefitted from the fact that it facilitated its (poorly paid) staff to provide themselves with unfree domestic workers. All this is analysed through abundant archival materials. The nature of the work performed by Company slaves shows that the Dutch, being socio-economic aliens and occupiers, had no choice but to use forced, especially enslaved labour, to successfully exploit the land and keep other competitors out.

Moving forward in time, Priya Kapoor applies an anthropological long-term perspective on bonded labour in India in her contribution, 'Coolies of Shimla: Modern Slavery as Relic of the British Raj'. The chapter departs from the *baegar* system among agricultural communities in pre-British India in the early 19th century, that gave way to the institutionalisation of coolie labour during British colonialisation, and then modern practices of coolies and Khans, unorganised load bearers. The resilience and transformability of forced or near-forced labour over the centuries, despite the changes of time, is scrutinised. How has the practice changed and endured despite active civil society institutions' advocacy for human rights and equitable labour laws in the country? The study is informed by extant archives, media artefacts, and by conducting ethnographic interviews to understand current labour relations between the employers of commercial businesses and services and the employed. From a varied material, the chapter thus offers an understanding of the long lines of entwinement between coloniality and coerced labour regimes.

Continuing the discussion of the VOC as an Asian actor, Hans Hägerdal explores the activities of the powerful company in a Southeast Asian context in his chapter 'Slavery in the Shadow of the Plantations: Colonial and Indigenous Slaving in Early-modern Maluku'. Here, he studies structures of coerced labour in Maluku, an ethnically very diverse region in eastern Indonesia, and investigates how the local understanding of slavery met and was co-opted by European (in particular Dutch) demands for enslaved manpower in the early-modern era. This is done through a detailed case from 1684, namely the verbose Dutch report of a punitive expedition to the Aru Islands that describes slavery in the colonial-indigenous intersection. Scrutinising the sources about local society, we discern a continuum from an impersonal work-intensive slavery to a personal household-oriented one, even in an area characterised by relative externality and non-hierarchical social relations.

The two following chapters focus on slave trade, and the possibilities to track it down east of the Cape. While comprehensive databases have greatly clarified the Atlantic trade in humans, this is still in the process of development in Indian Ocean and Asian waters. Michael C. Reidy makes a contribution to this in his chapter 'The Case of the *Collector*: Michael Hogan's Illicit Slave Trade at the Cape of Good Hope

in 1800'. This chapter investigates the overlapping of public and private interests in the Indian Ocean slave trade that involved various European, African and Asian actors. Some of this trade went to the Cape. The study makes specific reference to the Collector's privateering voyage financed by British merchant Michael Hogan at the Cape of Good Hope at the end of the 18th century. The study demonstrates the international nature of the organisation of slave trading between the Cape and Mozambique. It also examines the context of European slave trading activity in the Indian Ocean during the Napoleonic Wars and the various strategies merchants employed in the engagement of the slave trade to the Cape during this time.

Filipa Ribeiro da Silva discusses Portuguese slaving from a historiographical and methodological perspective in her contribution 'Reconstructing Iberian Involvement in the Commerce in People around Maritime Asia: Between Challenges and Future Possibilities'. As she observes, Portugal has quite some way to go to come to terms with its history of enslavement, which has tended to drop from the collective memory. The goals of her study are three-fold. Firstly, she presents an overview of the existing scholarship on Portuguese slaving and their main contributions for the study of this topic. Secondly, da Silva discusses the main limitations and gaps in the available literature. Thirdly, she reflects on the main constraints imposed by the source materials, collections and archives. To conclude, she explores some of the methodological challenges faced by researchers working on the study of this topic and puts forward some core ideas in an attempt to draft an agenda for future research.

The second cluster of chapters explores the challenges and possibilities presented by new digital humanities infrastructures, particularly in relation to the archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The authors examine how digital tools and methodologies – ranging from machine-readable sources to named entity recognition and large-scale databases – can transform the study of slavery and forced labour in the Indian Ocean world and across Asia. Together, these contributions reflect on the ethical, methodological, and technical dimensions of the digital turn, while pushing the boundaries of what can be recovered from colonial archives and how global histories of slavery can be more inclusively and accurately written.

Manjusha Kuruppath, Matthias van Rossum, and Mrinalini Luthra contribute with the study 'Revisiting Indian Ocean History in the Face of the Digital Turn'. Their chapter focuses on the GLOBALISE initiative's digitisation of Dutch East India Company (VOC) archives, which will transform the study of colonial history in the Indian Ocean during the 17th and 18th centuries. It introduces machine-readable and contextualised sources that enhance digital historiography with inclusion of non-European perspectives. GLOBALISE addresses historical and technological biases and advocates for a multidisciplinary methodology in the ethical digitisation and analysis of historical data. This work thus not only advances the study

of the Indian Ocean world but also sets a precedent for other archival projects, demonstrating how to confront and mitigate biases to enrich our understanding of diverse global histories.

Continuing the discussion about compiling big data, Daniel Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Matthew Hopper take a global perspective in their chapter 'Integrating the Indian Ocean and Asian Slave Trades into Global History: Creating Trans-Regional Databases'. As they point out, momentum has been growing in recent years to form a database that would catalogue slaving voyages in the Indian Ocean and Asia. This chapter describes the progress and reflects on the challenges encountered to present. Including the Indian Ocean and Asia on the SlaveVoyages website is crucial to demonstrate the global extent and consequences of transoceanic slave trading. However, one must acknowledge the complexities and challenges involved in doing so. Studies of the Mascarenes and Southern Africa confirm the arrival of enslaved Indians and 'Malays' as well as East Africans and Malagasies in European vessels. These and other examples reveal that to uncover the scale of global slaving one needs to examine how people from all parts of the Indian Ocean were forcibly trafficked across the ocean (and beyond).

Muhammad Asyraf and Fathiyarizq Mahendra Putra apply cutting-edge methods to elucidate Dutch sources on slavery in 'Identifying and Linking Names, Legal Statuses, and Punishments of The Dutch East India Company Convicts in Early Modern Batavia Using Supervised Named Entity Recognition (NER)'. Under the Dutch East India Company (VOC) colonial law, the most susceptible social group to judicial violence, such as corporal punishment and the death penalty, were slaves and marginalised people. The *Criminele Rollen* is an archival genre created by the VOC that records the information about it, having the potential to reveal the history of convicts, prisoners and death row inmates. The authors envisage methods to uncover the names, legal statuses, and punishments of the slaves, convicts and death row inmates in the *Criminele Rollen* using Named Entity Recognition (NER). Thus, the chapter shows ways to uncover history from below using a digital humanities approach.

Finally, Pascal Konings, Merve Tosun, and Matthias van Rossum discuss the fascinating information that can be obtained by an analysis of materials from a database in 'Shifting the Tide: Data, Findings and Future of the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia Database'. The three authors have been instrumental in processing huge amounts of data about slave trade in the Indian Ocean, in a wide geographical sense. As they explain, the *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* (ESTA) project aims to remedy the discrepancy between the wealth of existing data and sources that document slave trade in the region, and the lack of resources to make detailed interregional and comparative quantitative analyses. The principles of the database are explained, and the exciting possibilities are highlighted by examples from

places like Malabar, Lampung, and Bali where figures from European trading companies, in the first instance the VOC, show the structures of the slave trade.

The volume concludes with an Afterword by Richard B. Allen, which comments on the ten contributions and sets them in a context of recent advances in slavery studies about Asia and the Indian Ocean. Allen points at the urgent issues that lie ahead, and the need to bring in other disciplines than traditional history, not least archaeology, into the discussion. A section of Allen's text is a critical intervention in the construction of databases that document the movements of enslaved. This is part of an ongoing scholarly debate that is likely to enhance our knowledge of the demography and migrations of coerced labour over the centuries.

The ten contributions and the Afterword give a lively view of the many forms that enslaved labour could take under the dominance of Russian, English, Dutch, and Portuguese masters and merchants. While the sources are primarily European, their abundance and detail provide important clues to the acquisition, social standing, trafficking, and employment of slave labour over four to five centuries of Western expansion. New techniques and methods of analysing the sources point to new and exciting avenues for research on a once largely neglected corner of the world.

Trafficking of Women in 17th-Century Eastern Siberia

Angelina Kalashnikova

Abstract

This chapter examines the trafficking of women in 17th-century Eastern Siberia, focusing on the Yakutsk region during Russia's early expansion. Using unpublished petitions for baptism, court interrogations, and other archival sources, it reconstructs how Yakut women were sold by male relatives, captured during military raids, or sought protection by joining Russian settlers. It explores the overlap between Yakut marriage customs, such as *kaly*m (bride price), and colonial practices, where servicemen and traders engaged in illegal yet tolerated exchanges. The study demonstrates that women were transferred for money, livestock, and goods. By applying the modern concept of human trafficking, the chapter reveals how women's ambiguous legal and social status blurred the boundaries between marriage, slavery, and dependency, thereby offering new insights into gendered coercion in early modern Siberia and contributing to broader debates on colonial labour regimes.

Keywords: Yakutsk; Siberia; Russian colonisation; human trafficking; slavery; women; bride price; 17th century.

The Muscovite state began expanding east in the second half of the 16th century. Colonisation of the huge territories of Siberia was rapid. In pursuit of furs, Russian troops, fur traders, and trappers moved from one river basin to another, reaching the Lena River as early as the 1630s. This area was inhabited by many different local peoples, including the Yakut, Tungus, Dolgan, and Yukaghir. In 1632 Lensky fort was founded. Throughout the 17th century, it stood as one of the most remote Russian settlements in Siberia. Over time, it transformed into the central hub of the new region and was subsequently renamed Yakutsk.

Most of the Russians who came to Siberia were male. It was unusual for military personnel and fur traders to bring their wives with them from Moscow to Siberia. This gender imbalance resulted in local trafficking in women. In surviving historical documents from the 17th century, numerous accounts shed light on the practice of local people selling their female relatives to Russians. Notable Russian pioneers, whose names are commemorated in the names of Siberian cities and

geographical landmarks, are known to have purchased local women. In 1642, renowned Russian explorer Yerofey Khabarov, after whom the city of Khabarovsk is named, purchased a Yakut woman from Fidor Balagur. Balagur received a mare as payment for the woman. Subsequently, Yerofey Khabarov sought permission from Russian authorities to baptise the woman.¹ Another noteworthy figure, Semyon Dezhnev, who navigated the Bering Strait 80 years before Vitus Bering, was married to a Yakut woman named Abakanda Syuchy.²

In this chapter I will examine who the local women sold to Russians were, and why they were sold. Furthermore, I will address the prices Russian men paid for local women, and explore the techniques of trafficking in local women in the Yakutsk region.

The issue of slavery in a colonial context has been studied since the 1970s. It has developed a profound historiographic tradition and remains a current research topic.³ Recently, the research focus has shifted from the Atlantic slave trade to Asian slavery, and slavery studies have become more regional.⁴ Studies of slavery cover various aspects and subtopics, with one of the most important for this chapter being the issue of female slavery and the experiences of enslaved women.⁵

In the context of Russian history, the research focus was traditionally on serfdom, and it was Richard Hellie who first started to study the issue of slavery in premodern and imperial Russia.⁶ He also reflected on Russian female slavery.⁷ The issue of slavery and various forms of dependency in Russia has become a research topic in the context of imperial studies in recent scholarly literature.⁸ However, most research focuses on the European part of Russia and its borders with the Ottoman Empire, while Siberia remains on the periphery of scholarly interest. This chapter is an early attempt to fill this historiographic gap and add another region to the map of early modern slavery.

¹ Archive of Saint-Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Arch. St.-P. IH RAS). Fund. 160. Inventory 1. File 28, f. 1.

² Bakhrushin and Tokarev, *Yakutia v 17 veke*, p. 408; Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund. 160. Inventory 1. File 39, f. 6.

³ The entire bibliography of slavery, including 25,000 scholarly works across all academic disciplines and in all Western European languages published since 1900, can be found online at: <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/bib/index.php> Last accessed on 16.05.2024.

⁴ Hägerdal, *Lords of the Land*; Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*; Rossum, *Global Slavery, Local Bondage?* pp. 693–727.

⁵ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*; McLaurin, *Celia: A Slave*; Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*; Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women*.

⁶ Hellie, *Slavery in Russia*.

⁷ Hellie, 'Sex and power', pp. 83–95.

⁸ Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*; Stanziani, *After Oriental Despotism*; Witzenrath, *The Russian Empire, Slaving and Liberation*.

Human trafficking is a relatively new concept, but it has been successfully utilised in contemporary scholarly literature. For instance, Christopher Paoella, in his study of slavery, sexual exploitation, and prostitution in Northern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Eurasian Steppe from late antiquity to the early modern period, applies this concept. He argues that the concept 'human trafficking' has advantages over 'slavery' because it has an internationally accepted definition.⁹ This definition was elaborated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2000: 'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.¹⁰ Paoella claims that this definition can be successfully applied to premodern contexts. Moreover, he underlines that the concept of slavery does not fully incorporate the concept of human trafficking because victims of trafficking were not necessarily legally recognised as slaves in their societies.¹¹

I find these ideas very useful for examining women trafficking in 17th-century Eastern Siberia. The social status of local women who lived with Russian settlers 'as wives' was barely legally defined. Shifting the focus from slavery as a social institution to trafficking would shed new light on the dynamics of relationships between Russians and Indigenous people.

Russian officials produced a vast amount of documentation: every quarrel, order, investigation, and official request was meticulously recorded. The Yakutsk office generated and preserved a multitude of documents that offer valuable insights into the history of Siberia, including its colonisation, administrative practices, and the interactions between Russian trappers, fur traders, and military personnel and the local populations.

The archive of the Yakutsk office has survived in relatively good condition, and its history has been known since the third decade of the 19th century. In the 1830s, an official named I. S. Selsky conducted statistical research on the Irkutsk province.

⁹ Paoella, *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; online at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons> Last accessed on 13.05.2024.

¹¹ Paoella, *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe*, p. 12.

In 1839, he travelled to Yakutsk to study documents held in the Yakutsk archive. Selsky discovered that the documents from the 17th and 18th centuries were housed in a dilapidated building with a leaky roof. Concerned about the potential damage to these valuable historical documents, he reported the situation to the governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Wilhelm Rupert. Selsky highlighted the risk of mold and decay due to poor storage conditions. Subsequently, Wilhelm Rupert initiated correspondence with the Archaeographic Commission, an institution established in St. Petersburg in 1834 for the collection and publication of historical and ethnographic materials. As a result, the most precious historical documents from the 17th and 18th centuries in Yakutsk were sent to St. Petersburg between 1840 and 1846, while the rest stayed in Yakutsk until the 1860s, when they were transferred to Moscow.

The documents that were transferred to The Archaeographic Commission in St. Petersburg are currently stored in the Scientific and Historical Archive of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History at the Russian Academy of Sciences, renowned as one of Russia's most precious collections of historical documents. This chapter is primarily based on unpublished archival sources from this archive: 60 petitions for baptism dated between 1641 and 1643 were used.¹² These petitions were submitted by Russian servicemen, fur traders, trappers, and by the Indigenous people themselves appealing to the Russian tsar for permission to baptise local women and children. These documents provide valuable insights into the life stories of the local women who made the decision to undergo baptism or to have their children baptised. Within these accounts, they share details about the circumstances of their enslavement, the prices paid for them, and various aspects of their personal lives.

1. Was trafficking legal?

Not only were Russian fur traders and trappers involved in trafficking local women, but military personnel, whose primary responsibilities included military service and the collection of fur taxes from the local population, also engaged in the practice. Moreover, Russian servicemen bought local women from fur traders, trappers, and other servicemen, married and cohabited with them, and from these unions, children were born. Central authorities prohibited Russian servicemen from taking part in any commercial transactions with the locals.¹³ However, the Russian authorities found it difficult to enforce these prohibitions in practice. Despite trafficking and other interactions with locals contradicting the duties of

¹² Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund 160. Inventory 1. Files 20, 28, 43, 67, 183.

¹³ Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya Severo-Vostoka Sibiri*, p. 57.

servicemen, Russian administrators displayed tolerance towards the ways in which military personnel sought to enrich themselves. In challenging situations where Russian military personnel might go unpaid for extended periods, administrators had to strike a delicate balance between the obligation to collect fur taxes and the need to maintain control over an armed group of individuals. Local administrators were aware that their garrison had the potential to riot at any moment. Given these circumstances, administrators likely preferred to avoid any unnecessary conflicts with military personnel and therefore turned a blind eye to the illegal activities their subordinates took part in, such as the fur trade and trafficking in women.

We do not know the true number of Indigenous women living inside the fort, or the ratio of local women to Russian men in the fort, but we can make an educated estimate. Four hundred servicemen arrived with the first governors in Yakutsk fort in 1638. After that, Russian local authorities sent frequent complaints to Moscow asking for more people to help colonise the region.¹⁴ But even in 1676, the garrison still consisted of only 531 people, although there should have been at least 644.¹⁵

The local Russian administration regularly sent servicemen to very remote regions to collect fur tribute, as well as to serve in other forts. Consequently, a serviceman needed to be mobile and ready for relocation. Before leaving the fort, servicemen settled their private affairs. They decided what to do with their property, livestock, Indigenous women, and children: they could sell them, arrange for someone else to care for them, or, in the case of women, baptise them so they could marry and take them to their new assignment.

A list of military personnel in possession of Indigenous wives, children, and slaves from 1641 includes servicemen who were to be replaced for the next year.¹⁶ This document is titled 'A list of slaves belonging to different kinds of people whose wives are to be baptised' and includes 64 names of Russian servicemen who had 68 'Yakut wives' living with them. It also contains notes on whether these women and their children should be sold, released or baptised into Orthodoxy. Conversion usually meant that a serviceman intended to marry his local woman. Thus, according to a single surviving document, 68 local women were recorded as living in the fort in 1641. Given that these women resided with servicemen who were subject to rotation, it is likely that additional local women also lived in the fort. Moreover, some Russian men preferred that their local woman remained with her relatives even after they had bought her; only visiting her from time to time. Thus, in the early 1640s, at least 64 of approximately 400 Russian servicemen lived with local women inside the fort, amounting to sixteen percent.

¹⁴ Ivanov, *Pis'mennye istochniki*, p. 61.

¹⁵ Bahrushin, *Nauchnye trudy*, p. 28.

¹⁶ Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund. 160. Inventory 1. File 39, ff. 3–6.

Russian servicemen acquired these local women through various means. Although it was illegal for servicemen to buy women from locals, they often did so, and more frequently, they purchased them from other Russians.

Tensions between the fort's administration and servicemen or even trappers due to Indigenous women arose when Russians left the fort without permission. Living in a nomadic camp ('in the yurt') with locals was considered a misdemeanour. The Russian fort and the local communities were strictly separated, and administrators attempted to control the border. Each time Russians left the fort, they had to submit an official document asking for permission to leave and explaining the reason behind their trip. This was obligatory not only for military personnel, who were not free to move, but also for fur hunters, who had fewer obligations to the state.

A court case from 1646 concerns the illegal trafficking of a Yakut girl.¹⁷ A local prince, Lagui, went to the Russian court to complain about a fugitive slave girl, Agii, who also turned out to be his wife's sister. Agii ran away from the prince because he wanted to marry her off to a candidate she did not like. She stayed with two Yakut men for a while before they sold her to some Russians. The prince claimed that the transaction was invalid because the Yakuts did not own the girl they sold. During the investigation, several other crimes were uncovered. Two Russian men were involved in the transaction – fur hunter Agafon and serviceman Parfen Grigoriev. They had been allowed to leave Yakutsk fort to go fishing nearby. Both the local prince Lagui and Agii testified that Agafon bought the girl. However, it appeared that the real customer was Parfen Grigoriev. The Russians knew that purchasing Agii was illegal, so Parfen Grigoriev, being a serviceman, had asked fur hunter Agafon to make the transaction for him.

Parfen Grigoriev lived with the girl for some time but then gave her to Agafon and Agii ran away again. This angered Grigoriev and he forced Agafon to go to the locals to find Agii and bring her back. Agafon did not want to go to the locals and in the end, he paid a Yakut acquaintance to bring the girl back. The fort's administration sentenced Agafon to whipping for participation in a dubious transaction and for going to the locals to get the girl without permission.

The Russian administration tried to control any contacts between locals and Russians, regardless of social status. For Russian military personnel, all commercial relations with locals were illegal, including trafficking in women and fur trade. Despite this, they still participated in such practices. Moreover, fur traders and trappers, who were not legally forbidden from engaging in trafficking women, had to follow certain rules. The transaction had to be fair, meaning that a dependent woman must be sold by her male relative willingly for a price that he deemed

¹⁷ Ibid. File 142, ff. 30–35.

fair. Presumably, this scheme of trafficking was set up long before the arrival of Russians and was rooted in local traditions.

2. The bride price (*kalym*): the local marriage traditions

The Yakut people practiced the custom of buying their wives, known as *kalym* or '*kurum*' in the Yakutian language, well before the Russians came to the region.¹⁸ Yakut men typically paid for brides with cattle, and the number of cattle offered as *kalym* depended on the wealth of the bride's and groom's families. Interestingly, *kalym* did not exclude the provision of a dowry, the value of which was often correlated with the amount of *kalym*. In other words, marriage was an exchange between the families of the bride and groom, but the bride's family typically received more in return. In historical documents, the term 'price' (*tsena*) was frequently employed to denote *kalym*.¹⁹

In Yakut society, women possessed a low social status. Their marriages were treated as transactions, and women were viewed as commodities that could be bought, sold, or used to settle debts. Women with small children appeared to be unwanted by male relatives, presumably because they were no longer able to work as before and needed to care for their children. A vivid example of this situation is a court case from 1645/46 involving Yakut individuals Tohtogoy and his father-in-law Kecha. Tohtogoy claimed that his wife had fled to her father. In response, Kecha argued that Tohtogoy was severely beating his daughter, and when she sought refuge with him, he gave her to another person to settle his debts. Ultimately, Tohtogoy stated that he no longer desired his wife as she had left him while pregnant ('*potomu chto de ushla ta baba ot nego Tohtogoya bryuhata*'), but he requested compensation from his father-in-law for the period of time his wife had stayed with her father.²⁰

A similar situation, in which a female relative of the Yakut was perceived as property, is evident in the lawsuit concerning the Yakut girl Agii mentioned in the previous subchapter. During various interrogations, it turned out that Agii was Lagui's wife's sister. She had lived with Lagui since she was seven years old. Lagui claimed that he had raised her and that she was his slave ('*kholopka*').²¹ As a result, Lagui received compensation of two mares from the fort's administration for the girl.

¹⁸ Tokarev, *Obshchestvennyj stroj yakutov*, pp. 60–63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund 160. Inventory 1. File 142, f. 30.

From these observations, it is evident that women held a low status in Yakut society. The custom of selling and purchasing women, irrespective of their marital status, was deeply ingrained in Yakut traditions. The husband possessed rights over his wife, who was not free to leave him even in the face of abuse. Furthermore, if a husband no longer wished to live with his wife, he had the authority to sell her. Similar rights were held by the fathers and other male relatives of Yakut women. This prevalent practice likely contributed to the widespread trafficking of women between the Yakut people and Russians, eventually becoming a standard part of trade relations.

3. How did Russians obtain local women?

There were three ways to acquire women in Eastern Siberia. The first was as the outcome of military expeditions, sometimes referred to as '*pogroms*' in the documents. When Russian troops attacked local settlements or nomadic camps and emerged victorious, they would seize women, children, and cattle as spoils of war. Enslavement of women during times of conflict had deep roots in Siberian history.²² Historical documents provide numerous accounts of inter-ethnic military clashes that resulted in the plundering of the defeated, particularly involving the capture of women, children, and cattle.

A petition from 1642 for the baptism of a Yakut woman named Katok includes Katok's explanation of why she desired to convert to Orthodoxy where she shares her life story. She recounts that she could not recall her father's name as she was taken by Russians during a '*pogrom*' when she was only a child. She further explained that she had previously lived 'among Russians,' but that she now has nothing to eat or drink and was starving to death.²³ In short, Katok was forcibly captured from her community as a child, likely being one of those taken as trophies from the defeated local community.

Another form of enslavement in Siberia involved trafficking, where local people would sell their relatives to Russians. Sometimes the locals would sell their women to combat poverty. Gurvich mentioned that the Yukaghirs of Yana River sold their maidens and children to Russians because of hunger in 1659.²⁴ However, the women sold to Russians were not always orphans or from poor families. There are documented cases where individuals of higher social status willingly sold their daughters. For instance, local prince Orgui sold his daughter Mychak to a Russian serviceman for a cow.²⁵

²² Tokarev, *Obshchestvennyj stroj yakutov*, pp. 95–97.

²³ Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund 160. Inventory 1. File 28, f. 13.

²⁴ Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya Severo-Vostoka Sibiri*, p. 21.

²⁵ Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund 160. Inventory 1. File 43, ff. 26–27.

Russians did not necessarily purchase or capture local women in battle; sometimes they acquired them without any effort or payment. One such case is preserved in historical documents. It tells the story of Ladchka, a Yakut woman who was abandoned by her husband and left with no means of support. She sought refuge in the Russian camp and resided there for two years before eventually being brought to Yakutsk with her child in 1643. During her interrogation, Ladchka revealed that she had been a slave ('*yasyr*') of the fur trader Oderka Martemyanov. She had a child with him and expressed her desire to be baptised.²⁶ It appears that Martemyanov acquired this woman without any cost, lived with her for a period, and then seemingly cast her aside.

4. Prices

In their research on mixed communities in Northern Siberia, Peter Schweitzer, Evgeniy Golovko, and Nikolai Vakhtin (2002) argued that in the 17th century, women in North-Eastern Siberia were sold to Russians for 10–20 rubles. The authors supported their claim by referencing 19th century scholar Mikhailov further noting that the price was relatively high.²⁷

Mikhailov's article, published in 1886, primarily focused on serfdom and peasantry in 19th-century Siberia.²⁸ However, the introductory section briefly delves into the history of 17th-century Siberian slavery. Mikhailov mentioned the price range of 10–120 rubles for a local woman, accompanied by a comment that the price was low.

Mikhailov's introduction seems to be an inaccurate adaptation of Serafim Shashkov's 1872 paper on slavery in Siberia, the earliest study dedicated to the topic.²⁹ When discussing the enslavement of local women in Siberia, Shashkov mentioned that Russian authorities, such as governors, maintained harems of local women and participated in trafficking.³⁰ To support his argument, Shashkov referred to a publication of historical documents: 'Supplements to Historical Acts, collected and published by the Archaeographic Commission'. However, upon examination, the publication contains no mention of Siberian harems but rather petitions from Verkhoturye related to grain.³¹ Another phenomenon mentioned by Shashkov was the existence of brothels maintained by Russian authorities. Once again, he referenced a historical

²⁶ Ibid. File 53, f. 20.

²⁷ Vakhtin, Golovko, Schweitzer, *Starozhil'cheskie obshchnosti Severo-Vostoka Sibiri*, p. 13.

²⁸ Mikhailov, *Krepostnichestvo v Sibiri*, pp. 93–137.

²⁹ Shashkov, *Rabstvo v Sibiri*, pp. 163–187.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 165.

³¹ *Dopolneniya k aktam istoricheskim*, p. 69

source that, upon verification, was found to be irrelevant. In fact, the publication Shashkov referred to is a Tsar's charter to the Astrakhan Transfiguration Monastery and does not include any mention about brothels in Siberia.³²

Both Shashkov and Mikhailov portrayed the realities of 17th-century Siberia as a triumph of depravity and vice. According to them, both Cossacks and Russian authorities were depicted as corrupt individuals who engaged in practices such as having multiple wives and concubines, operating brothels, engaging in child molestation, and renting out their own wives. In speculating about the prices for local women and mentioning that the price varied between 10 and 20 rubles, both Shashkov and Mikhailov referred to 18th century Gerhard Friedrich Müller's 'History of Siberia'.³³

'History of Siberia' was not fully published during Müller's lifetime. Shashkov and Mikhailov cited its publication in the journal «*Ezhemesyachnye sochineniya, k pol'ze i uveseleniyu sluzhashchie*» from 1764, which included only chapters 6–8. Chapter 8 focused on the establishment of the Tobolsk diocese and territories of Western Siberia, including Narym, Pelym, Tara and Verkhoturye. Archbishop Kiprian († 1634) was reporting to Patriarch Filaret all the irregularities he had observed in Tobolsk and along his journey there. In a section titled 'A History of Mores', in the 31st paragraph, Müller recounted the observations of the archbishop regarding the relations between Cossacks and women. The passage states:

They, like the Tartars, bought and sold wives; when they needed money, they mortgaged them for a fixed term. They were devoid of jealousy or the tenderness that arises from a woman who belongs solely to us; on the contrary, they considered the ownership of a woman no different from owning any other property, which they could dispose of as they pleased. When a Cossack traveled to Moscow, he would often mortgage his wife until his return. Whoever offered him 10, 20, or more rubles for her would enjoy her company during that time. If, at the end of the agreed term, she was not redeemed, the lender could choose to keep her, marry her off to someone else, or sell her.³⁴

There are no references to primary sources in that section of Müller's paper. Therefore, it becomes evident that the mention of the price of 10–20 rubles for a woman in Yakutia, as stated in modern research, originates from 18th-century research that describes a different geographical region (Western Siberia, Tobolsk). Furthermore, the price mentioned in that book is associated with rentals rather than sales. Moreover, Müller's paper discusses the selling and renting of wives but does not specify that the wives were Indigenous women.

³² *Akty Istoricheskie*, p. 183.

³³ Mikhailov, *Krepostnichestvo v Sibiri*, p. 96; Shashkov, *Rabstvo v Sibiri*, p. 165.

³⁴ Müller, *Sibirskaya istoriya*, p. 412.

As we have observed, scholars have referred to the price range of 10–20 rubles as both high and low. Even though this price does not align with the actual prices of the 17th century, it is important to note that 10–20 rubles in 17th century Siberia constituted a significant amount of money. According to the calculation of Galina Leontieva, the annual salary of a Cossack in the 17th century was 5 rubles.³⁵ Although a military personnel's salary included more than just money, encompassing items such as bread and salt, we can ascertain that 5 rubles constituted a significant sum.

The historical documents preserved in the Yakutsk archive contain valuable information regarding the prices of local women. During my research, I managed to identify 42 Yakut women who, between 1641 and 1646, sought permission for baptism in Orthodoxy. In most cases, all we have is a short petition containing a few details about the petitioner, but in some conflict situations, interrogations have survived, providing more details about the case, including the price that was paid for a woman. In 9 cases, there is information concerning transactions and prices.

Apparently, there was no standard price for a local woman, but it is possible to identify which items were most often exchanged for women. The most frequently mentioned item (four times) in the documents is a bed made from reindeer pelt. It could be accompanied by other items such as clothes, axes, copper pots, beads, and money, but in at least one case only the bed was offered in payment.

In three cases, livestock such as mares and cattle were offered in payment for a woman. For instance, Mychak, daughter of local Yakut leader Orgui, was sold to a serviceman named Nikulka Yuriev in exchange for a cow.³⁶ When paying for a local woman with livestock, additional items were not required, as was the case when paying with reindeer pelt beds. It is important to draw parallels here with the Yakut bride price, which was typically paid with livestock.

According to Gurvich, the price for a woman was equivalent to 40–50 sable pelts. He cited a document describing an incident from 1661/1662 in which Amos Mikhailov, an administrator of a Russian camp, sold his *yasyr* – a young Lamut woman – to her father for 40 sable pelts. However, he later took her back in exchange for two reindeer.³⁷ Gurvich built his argument on one concrete document, while there are other sources containing information that contradicts his point. For instance, Yakut woman Nomychai was sold in 1640 for 80 sable pelts.³⁸ We know that she was neither young nor of high social status.

In some cases, we can trace all transactions, including price changes and the movement of a woman from her home to Yakutsk fort. A notable example of this is

³⁵ Leont'eva, *Sluzhilye lyudi v Vostochnoj Sibiri*, pp. 81–82.

³⁶ Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund. 160. Inventory 1. File 43. pp. 26–27.

³⁷ Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya Severo-Vostoka Sibiri*, p. 35.

³⁸ Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund 160. Inventory 1. File 28. pp. 47–50.

the previously mentioned story of a Yakut woman Mynik. She was initially sold by her son-in-law to a Russian fur trader named Froll Samoïlov, who paid half a ruble, a pot, and ten strands of white beads for her. Subsequently, she was sold to another trapper named Ivan Sokolov for one ruble. Finally, she was sold to the priest Vasiliï for two rubles.³⁹ It's worth noting that in 1640, it was possible to purchase a grain barn for two rubles in the region.⁴⁰

Another case that illustrates several stages of trafficking transactions in detail is the story of Agii. Testimonies from interrogators varied regarding the amount of money paid for Agii when she was first sold. According to some, it was 10 altyn (less than one third of a ruble), while according to others, it was 1 ruble.⁴¹ In addition to money, the Russian men paid one bed made from reindeer skin, 'a lot of beads,' and 10 muksuns (a type of whitefish widespread in Siberian Arctic waters). When Agii was sold for the second time, Orthodox priest Porphyrius paid a sum as high as 5 rubles for her.⁴²

Due to the meticulous research of Richard Hellie, who studied various forms of dependency in the European part of the Muscovite state, we have comparative material on the issue of prices. Hellie concluded that around the year 1600, the average price of a single adult male slave was about 3.3 rubles.⁴³ Although we do not yet have enough material to draw definitive conclusions concerning cash prices for local Siberian women, it is reasonable to assume that the prices found in historical sources for Eastern Siberia were like those mentioned by Hellie for Muscovy.

As we can see from the cases of Mynik and Agii, initially they were bought from Yakut people not only for money but also for other valuable items. However, when we observe other transactions that took place between Russians, we see that these women were exchanged for money only. Furthermore, we observe that the price increased significantly as a woman got closer to the fort, sometimes reaching up to four or five times the original price. The price of a local woman in Siberia likely varied based on factors such as her age and social status. Regardless, the price was generally quite high, making trafficking a profitable business. The highest price traced was 5 rubles paid for Agii, equivalent to a year's salary of a servicemen in the region.

³⁹ Ibid. File 28, ff. 35-41.

⁴⁰ Ibid. File 6, f. 22.

⁴¹ The Muscovite monetary system of that time was sophisticated: one ruble was equivalent to 33 altyn and 2 dengas, thus 10 altyn was less than one third of a ruble.

⁴² Arch. St.-P. IH RAS. Fund. 160. Inventory 1. File 142, ff. 30-35.

⁴³ Hellie, *Slavery in Russia*, p. 338.

5. Conclusion

Yakut women of various social statuses and ages were sold by their male relatives to Russian servicemen, fur traders, and trappers. Some were sold due to poverty, while the reason behind other sales is unknown. The practice of selling women was deeply rooted in the local traditions of Yakut society, where women held very low social status. Some women were captured by Russians during military conflicts with locals, while others sought sustenance, shelter, and protection by coming to Russian settlements.

Commercial relationships between Russian military personnel and local people existed in a grey area: although there were legal prohibitions against military personnel engaging in trade with locals, the administration of remote Russian settlements in Eastern Siberia was often unable to enforce these prohibitions and rarely imposed penalties. Fur traders and trappers could legally buy women from their male relatives, but they also needed to adhere to certain rules for the transactions to be considered fair.

Although Russian administrators attempted to regulate interactions between Russians and locals by requiring all Russians, regardless of their social status, to obtain permission to visit a nomadic camp, they often failed to control these contacts effectively. In conflict situations reflected in judicial trials, it became evident that Russians had established various relationships with locals, including living with them or engaging in commercial transactions including the purchase of women.

Upon examination of scholarly literature, it is clear that the common view of the price range of 10–20 rubles for a local woman is based on secondary literature from the 18th and 19th centuries that failed to provide valid references to historical sources. Papers published by Shashkov and Mikhailov are much more noteworthy as examples of orientalist fantasies about non-European sexuality among 19th-century intellectuals than as research into 17th century Siberian trafficking in women.

An examination of 60 petitions for baptism, 11 interrogations, and 9 surety bonds from the 1640s showed that Russians paid for Yakut women with various types of goods, as well as livestock. In transactions between Russians, payment for women was usually made using money. There were no stable prices; rather, prices varied dramatically depending on the age and status of the woman, and the distance from the administrative centre at Yakutsk fort.

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and Its Use of Company Slaves (*Companies lijfeijgenen*) in Sri Lanka around 1681¹

Lodewijk J. Wagenaar

Abstract

Focusing on colonial Sri Lanka in the 17th century, the chapter shows what kind of work the VOC used its Company slaves for, who were used in addition to other forms of unfree labour. As the chapter highlights, the Company was also involved in the slave trade, however, sometimes in indirect ways. Moreover, the Company naturally benefited from the fact that it facilitated its (poorly paid) staff to provide themselves with unfree domestic workers. All this is analyzed through abundant archival materials. The nature of the work performed by Company slaves shows that the socio-economic alien and occupier had no choice to successfully exploit the land and keep other competitors out, than by using forced, especially enslaved labour.

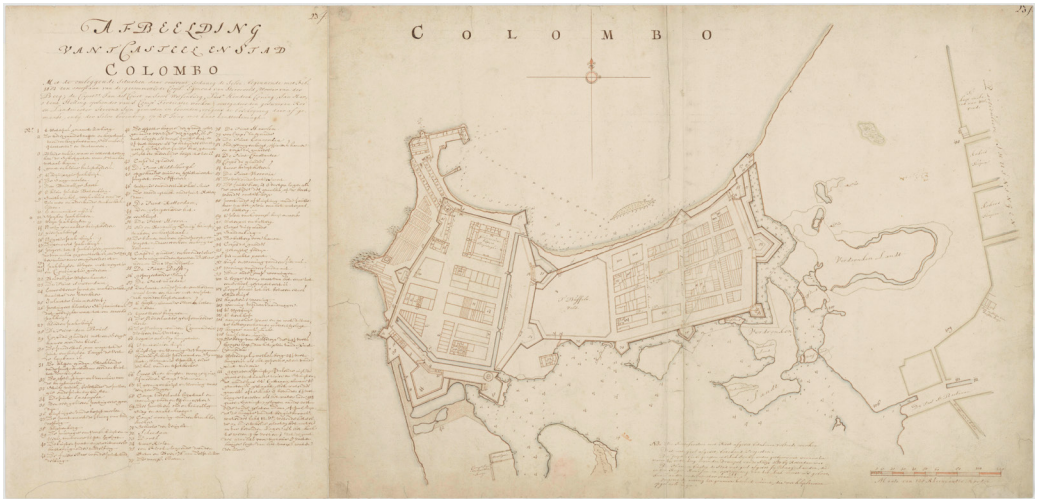
Keywords: VOC, Sri Lanka, statistics, labour regime, 17th century

1. Introduction

When the term slave labour is used, one often refers to forced labour carried out by persons enslaved in Africa, transported under appalling conditions to the American plantations and put to work. However, with the exception of the nutmeg plantations on the Banda Islands (Moluccas, Indonesia), the VOC did not operate plantations where slave labour was involved.² Nevertheless, it is well known that the Company and its personnel made extensive use of slave labour in their colonial settlements and trade posts. Since the VOC's geographic area of operation

¹ The draft version of this chapter was presented as a paper under the title 'The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the use of non-free labour, especially of the so-called *Companies lijfeijgenen* (Company slaves) in Sri Lanka round 1681' at the conference 'Colonialism, Slavery, and Local Histories in Asia', Växjö, Sweden 15–16 September 2023.

² The nutmeg plantations on the Banda Islands were formally exploited by private entrepreneurs. Their dependency of the Company was of a total character, therefore it is legitimate to call those Enterprises VOC-plantations.



Map 2.1. Colombo in 1681. Map made in Ceylon by Livinius Stevensz, 1681, redrawn c. 1695 by Isaac de Graaff, cartographer, for the VOC Atlas Amsterdam. Colour drawing on paper, 53 x 74 cm. National Archives, The Hague, entry 4.VEL, inv.nr. 944. On the left lies the Fort of Fort Colombo, known as 'the Castle'. At the right side one sees the Oude Stadt (Old Town), residence of Burghers and non-European inhabitants, such as Muslims, Chetties, Tamils and Sinhalese, and their private slaves.

was widespread, from the Cape Province in South Africa to the trading post in far-away Japan, it is self-evident that the character of the many settlements varied considerably. Therefore, the results of the research into the use of slave labour by the Company in the occupied coastal area of Sri Lanka cannot be generalised into a general picture of how the VOC itself made use of slave labour.³

Along the coast of Sri Lanka and inland the VOC possessed forts to protect itself against European competition or threats from the interior kingdom of Kandy.⁴ For the maintenance or construction of these fortifications slave labour was used, the most well-known form of this deployment. The Company used slave labour throughout its forts and neighbouring settlements. In order of size, these were the capital Colombo (*Colombo*), Jaffna (*Jaffanapatnam*) – administrative centre of the district of the same name in the extreme north of the island – the walled port town

³ This chapter will not discuss the use of private slaves by Company employees – generally this involved domestic work in and around the house, and this work would have been the same throughout the Company settlements.

⁴ Since the first contacts, the island was called Ceylon by Europeans. This name, retained at Independence in 1948, was changed to Sri Lanka in 1972. In this chapter, the name Ceylon will mainly be used when referring to the coastal area that was occupied by the VOC.

of Galle (*Gale* or *Punto de Gale*), 112 km south of Colombo (*Colombo*), and then the smaller fortresses, such as Matara (*Mature*) in the south, Kalpitiya (*Calpentijn*) in the middle, Mannar (*Manaar*) in the north, and finally Trincomalee (*Trinconomale*) and Batticaloa (*Batticaloa*) in the east – from the small fortresses Kalutara (*Caliture*) south of Colombo and Negombo (*Negombo*), north of Colombo, I have not found any overviews.⁵ In this chapter the use of the varied deployment of slave labour will be sketched based on a unique source, namely an overview of Company personnel and other dependent workers from 1681, which also provides a list of so-called Company slaves (*'lijfeijgenen'*) for all VOC places.⁶ The lists of 1681 are unique in their detailed description of the nature and location of the tasks performed by the Company slaves, totalling 3,040 persons.⁷ That number was fluctuating: in 1683 a number of 1,413 was reported,⁸ in 1684 the Company owned 2,363 slaves, 'although the majority of them were onbequaam' (unfit for work).⁹

The lists not only provide a unique insight into how the Company's slaves were used, more generally these documents show one of the major tools that the Company had at its disposal to achieve its main goal, namely the economic exploitation of the occupied coastal area of Sri Lanka.

Before I proceed to an extensive description of the use of Company slaves, I will first give a very brief description of the VOC's arrival and later presence in Sri Lanka, followed by the question of why the VOC, assuming that trade relations as they were used to in Europe were not possible and had therefore decided to replace Portugal as a colonial power, then had no other choice, in addition to using all the traditionally compulsory labour of the local population also to make use of slave labour.

⁵ Dutch proper names of places and words used in the 17th century are written in italics, and in the case of quotations from sources used, they are provided with double quotation marks.

⁶ NA, Den Haag (The Hague), VOC 8902, pp. 567–568: *Corte sommarium der voorenstaande 's Comp^s lijfeijgenen op 't geheele Eijlandt Ceijlon* (1681). In documents of the VOC the word *slaaf* (slave) is usually used, next to *man slaaf* (man slave) or *jongen* (boy). Females mostly are mentioned as *slavinnen* or *vrouwen slavinnen*. When the sex is not indicated, the term *lijfeijgenen* was used. This term 'lijfeijgenen' should not be confused with the same word used to denote the land-bound persons (in English: *serfs*) in the Middle Ages and beyond.

⁷ NA, The Hague, VOC 8902: Lists of Company slaves, pp. 555–567.

⁸ *Generale Missiven IV*, p. 569. Listed are: 1,160 Company slaves, men and women, fit (*bequaem*) to serve; 307 unfit due to advanced age and disabilities; 209 almost needy persons; 15 runaways (*weggeloopene*); 99 schoolchildren; 123 infants. Runaways usually found refuge in the territory of the kingdom of Kandy. On many occasions the Company asked Kandy to return those runaways, but the King usually refused to do so. Later in the discussion of the 'List of Company Slaves in Colombo' the phenomenon of running away will be returned to.

⁹ *Generale Missiven IV*, p. 733.

Arrival and later presence of the Company in Ceylon

In 1636, the king of Kandy had invited the VOC to help expel the Portuguese occupiers from the island of Sri Lanka.¹⁰ This resulted in a campaign (1638–1644) in which the Company conquered Batticaloa and Trincomalee in the east, and Galle and Negombo in the southwest. The last two coastal towns controlled the adjacent area where cinnamon trees grew, so that the Company could now take over its exploitation itself. After a ten-year truce, the VOC took up again its struggle to oust the Portuguese from Sri Lanka: their capital Colombo was conquered in 1656, and the northern city Jaffna in 1658, the last stronghold of the Portuguese. The King of Kandy soon understood that one European power had been replaced by another. In the period 1665–1675 the VOC governors Rijcklof van Goens the Elder and his namesake Van Goens Jr tried in vain to get control of the cinnamon-growing areas regained by the Kandians during the earlier Kandyan-Dutch struggle against the Portuguese. The aggressive and costly military adventure ultimately met with resistance from the VOC-management in Batavia and the directors in the Netherlands. The conquest of these areas was halted, but the king of Kandy refused to conclude a treaty with the VOC. So, the VOC's presence remained based on the treaty of 1638, which had stipulated that the Company should hand over conquered Portuguese forts to the king of Kandy as a precondition for obtaining freedom of trade.¹¹ The VOC had no other option than to grit its teeth and accept that its presence was actually only based on its military superiority. At the same time, the king could do nothing but accept the presence of the VOC, where the Company's expression 'servant of His Imperial Majesty' hardly helped to allay his dissatisfaction. The new 'appeasement' policy had some success, because every year since then the Company was allowed to send an embassy to Kandy, where valuable gifts were presented to the king, after which permission was obtained to also have cinnamon peeled in the King's territory by members of the caste of cinnamon peelers, the Chalias.

1.1. Stranger in a foreign land

The VOC's decision to take over the spice trade from the Portuguese in Sri Lanka by establishing itself as a colonial power put the Company in a special situation: it had become 'Lord of the Land' with the tacit consent of Kandy. This meant that, following the example of the Portuguese predecessors, the existing feudal administrative system was adopted, with the replacement of the pyramidal top by VOC officials

¹⁰ Until 1972 the island was named Ceylon.

¹¹ Arasaratnam, 'Dutch Sovereignty in Ceylon', pp. 105–121.

– the local administrators, the headmen at village level and above remained in place. That gave them great power over the population against which the Company could do little or nothing.¹² Be that as it may, the rights and obligations of the local inhabitants, largely farmer families, remained more or less the same, although changes did occur that always benefitted the Company. The Sinhala population in the southwest paid traditional taxes (usually in kind) and performed their corvée (Rajakiriya), because those were services owed to the higher castes and especially to the Company as ‘Lord of the Land’.

The Muslims (Moren) and Chitties (Chetties) were foreigners in the eyes of the Company, and provided substitute services that could be bought off – an example of a hated activity was the work at the VOC fortifications for twelve days a year.¹³

The corvée and taxes brought benefits to the Company, but were not a solution to the fact that the Western-styled Company was a stranger and remained so in an Asian society in which, generally speaking, the agricultural society remained closed and in which the Muslim and Chitty traders traditionally formed the *trait d’union* with the outside world.¹⁴ There was no free and available labour force, with the exception of some skilled craftsmen who could be hired.

Apart from this, in an agricultural society there were many activities that were carried out within the family: caring for the fruit trees in one’s own yard and picking the fruits (think of the important coconut tree), or caring for the livestock (think of the buffalo, the important draft animal). This was the type of labour to which the Company did not have normal access, but it would have caused great difficulty if this kind of work could not have been provided. An example related to the artillery of the forts can make this clear: no artillery without gunpowder; no gunpowder without a powder mill; no powder mill without buffaloes; no buffaloes without shepherds and grass cutters. Alas, cattle shepherds and grass cutters live with their families in the villages, far from the Dutch forts. They are children and elderly people, perhaps handicapped members of the family. So, in order to deter the British you need strong forts with threatening artillery, and of course gun powder. Without those shepherds and grass cutters that would be difficult to realise. However, those who can do such jobs are not available unless they are bought. Many more such examples will follow in the descriptions below, but it is clear that the absence of free workers had to do with the non-existence of typical Dutch

¹² Arasaratnam, ‘The Indigenous Ruling Class under Colonial rule in Dutch Maritime Ceylon’. See also: Remco Raben, *The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities 1600–1800*, p. 223.

¹³ For a short history of the Uliyam services, see Raben, *The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities 1600–1800*, pp. 227–230.

¹⁴ Muslims and Chitties: both groups have an Indian background and were important as retail traders who had good trade contacts with the ‘Overkust’ (Coromandel/Madurai in South India).

institutions and infrastructure. There were no hospitals in Sri Lanka, so there were no nurses, etc. available. There were no orphanages, so there was no group of free assistants or maids to be hired. The European carpenters, blacksmiths or masons had no children or apprentices around who could do small jobs or could be sent for a message. A solution had to be found to accomplish this often modest work, because without it the VOC could not work on its objectives.

Of course, the jobs mentioned above are just part of the work carried out by Company slaves. Other typical tasks were related to loading and unloading of the VOC-ships and shallops, for most of the dock-hands were slaves who were taken away from the maintenance of the fortifications (their regular 'daily work', due to the seasonal traffic in the port). And to end with the most important thing: the maintenance work on the forts was indispensable for the continued presence of the Company on the island.

1.2. Slavery in Ceylon

The phenomenon of Rajakiriya has already been mentioned above, which applied to certain groups of the Sinhalese – in areas inhabited by Tamils in the north and north-east, this system of corvée also existed, albeit with some differences. The colonial predecessors of the VOC, the Portuguese, as 'Lord of the Land' also made use of this, but like their successors, it did not offer them a solution for the fulfilment of many tasks. Because there existed no slavery in Central and South Sri Lanka (with the exception of a small group that had to perform specific unclean tasks (such as laying out the deceased from families of certain high Kandyan castes), the Portuguese used slaves imported from elsewhere – areas of origin were South India, Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. This did not involve 'cattle slavery', the brutal system that would arise in the Atlantic from the end of the 16th century, but these enslaved persons performed mainly domestic work.

In Sri Lanka the VOC followed in the footsteps of the Portuguese but greatly expanded the import of enslaved people, not only from nearby South India, but also from the Indonesian Archipelago. It was striking that the first massive deployment of slave labour had to combat a shortage of agrestic labour: the king of Kandy was so angry that his Dutch ally was not prepared to hand over the conquered Colombo to him in 1656 that he ordered the Sinhalese population to leave the coastal area and move to Kandy. The result was a food crisis and the VOC could only solve this by importing slaves en masse, particularly from South India.

The situation was different in the north. The system there was that members of some low castes were obliged to perform (mainly) agrestic labour, but that these serfs, in the relevant literature mostly called slaves, were not allowed to be sold outside the territory of the Jaffna province.

1.3. *Options*

It is important to realise that Company slave labour coexisted with other forms of non-free labour. Think of forced labour imposed by VOC administrators as a punishment for disorder, theft, violence, non-payment of debts or refusal to work. Or think about the work spoken of above, imposed on Muslims and Chitties.

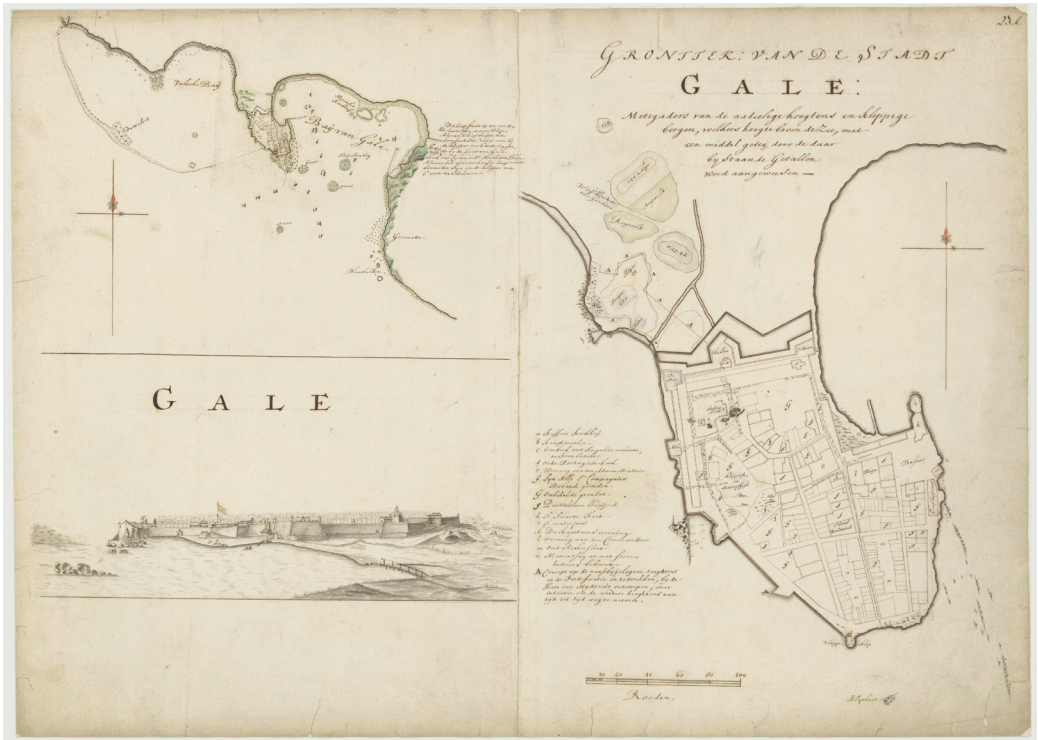
To understand why non-free labour was unavoidable for the VOC to get done certain activities, a large number of circumstances and conditions must be considered. Which work could best be carried out by personnel brought in from Europe? What were the possibilities of an alternative choice, for example by hiring local personnel – carpenters, blacksmiths, etc.? What were the financial consequences of such choices? The choices also depended on the area where the decision had to be made, for Sri Lanka was economically and culturally very diverse. In the northern and dry district of Jaffna (Jaffanapatnam), largely inhabited by Hindu Tamils, the situation was very different from the wet, fertile southwest, where the Buddhist Sinhalese formed by far the majority. The above-mentioned Muslims and Chitties lived along the coast, in the Company's territory, and also in the coastal strips that were (still) in the hands of Kandy.¹⁵ The directors of the Company were quite well informed about the various circumstances, and knew – or thought they knew – what they, as 'Lord of the Land', could ask the population, based on customary law and tradition, interpreted often in favour of the Company. It should be noted that the VOC regarded *corvées* and in general caste obligations as a generally acceptable form of labour by free inhabitants, in a situation where we now would speak of forced labour in most cases.

2. A search through the lists of Company slaves in 1681

2.1. *Company settlements: enclaves in a rural society*

To give some context to the Company's use of slaves in Ceylon, I will begin with a sketch of daily life in the coastal area occupied and exploited by the VOC. Since the colonisation by the Portuguese, some urban centres had sprung up on the coast, but the extent of these should not be exaggerated. These were small areas, almost enclaves in the countryside, consisting of a fort and neighbourhood adjacent to it.

¹⁵ In February 1766, a peace treaty was signed by the Company and the King of Kandy. This ended the war with which the king supported the uprising that had broken out in the south of the Company territory at the end of March 1761. Under this treaty, Kandy ceded the coastal area that had not yet been in the hands of the VOC.



Map 2.2. Galle in the late 17th century. Map made in Ceylon by an unknown surveyer, redrawn c. 1695 by Isaac de Graaff, cartographer, for the VOC Atlas Amsterdam. Colour drawing on paper, 53 x 74 cm. National Archives, The Hague, entry 4.VEL, inv.nr. 1054. Zooming in on the map on the National Archives website will reveal locations where Company slaves worked, such as comps. paardestal (horse stable) and comps. hospitaal (hospital).

Only in the case of Colombo can we speak of a real urban settlement, called the Oude Stadt ('Old Town').¹⁶ The stadt next to Jaffna Fort was nothing more than a small neighbourhood – only the street pattern with a limited number of streets and cross streets was a bit reminiscent of a European city. Only the walled town of Galle, though modest in size, had the character of a town. The smaller forts only had modest built surroundings, never larger than a simple hamlet. Outside of this the countryside started, especially in the vicinity of the sparsely inhabited forts. From their colonial enclaves the VOC administered an immense rural countryside – the number of Sri Lankan inhabitants in the entire coastal area under VOC administration is estimated at around 500,000.

¹⁶ See Raben, *The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities 1600–1800*, pp. 182–196.

As indicated above, the Company benefitted from taxes and corvée services provided by the local population, but essentially its presence was all about the production of the cinnamon, during two periods per year, by the members of the Salagama caste or Chalias, who peeled the precious bark in the forests, after which others took care of the transport of the dried bark to the VOC warehouses at the coast.

To protect the profitable cinnamon monopoly against European competitors, it was essential to maintain a ring of fortifications along the coast. Earthmoving, digging, lugging, chopping, that was the picture of every day. The Dutch artist Esaias Bourse left an interesting pictorial account of this in his *Tijkenboeck* (1662).¹⁷ Specialised 'kraal breakers' were active in mining coral in Mannar Bay and around Jaffna, but also in the south – tourists still watch from the glass bottom boats admiring the living coral of the Hikkaduwa Coral Reef. In the interior, laterite was dug to obtain square clay-like blocks, which hardened in the open air into usable building blocks. Most forts had a powder mill powered by buffaloes. Adult Company slaves worked on the mill, children and women cut grass for the buffaloes. Others emptied the poop barrels in which the soldiers of the bastions relieved themselves daily, and emptied them at designated places on land or in the sea. Everywhere in and around the forts, in addition to the hard work at the fortifications, there were small jobs such as mentioned above: cattle had to be herded, horses cared for in the horse stable, drinking water had to be fetched, etc., etc. Much of the light work was done by old women and small children – they were also used to carry lime, sand and stones, officially in modest portions 'just to learn the job'. Slaves also worked as washers, work that in the villages was practised by members of the washer casts. Women often worked as cooks or nurses in the hospitals or as maids in the orphanages in the urban VOC places.

2.2. *Matara*

The fortress of Matara, about 40 kilometres from Galle, lay on an elongated peninsula, about a kilometre long and 200 metres wide, between the Nilwala River and the sea. The peninsula was (and is) closed by a simple rampart with a gate; at both ends is a half-bastion and in the middle is a bastion ('punt') – on those humble strongholds the soldiers on duty stood guard. Behind the rampart lay the house and office of the *Dessave of Matara* (the VOC administrator over the local population), some smaller houses for other European personnel, a church, barracks for the garrison – including warehouses and a 'combuijs' (galley) – and a few huts lodging local personnel who worked in the elephant stables; there was also a warehouse for the cinnamon bark. From the list we learn that there also

¹⁷ Wagenaar and Beumer, 'Esaias Bourse's 'Tijkenboeck'', pp. 312–331.

Table 2.1: 3040 Company slaves in Ceylon, 1681

	Man fit ¹	Women fit ¹	Men above age 50	Women above age 50	Children aged 6–14 fit ¹	Men not fit ¹	Women not fit ¹	Children not fit ¹	Children aged 2–5 ²	School children	Totals
Colombo & District	471	539	31	44	281	84	149	2	213	179	1993
Galle ³	172	122			90 ⁴	4	35	55	35		511
Matara ³	13	23				6			2 ⁵		44
Jaffna ⁶	50	8			7	3	1		1 ⁷		70
Mannar	54	28			7 ⁸	6	6	19 ⁸			120
Kalpitya	37	7				2	2	10 ⁹			58
Trincomalee	57	37			33		4 ¹⁰	17 ¹¹			148
Batticaloa	68	24					1	3			96
TOTALS	922	788	31	44	418	99	204	106	249	179	3040 ¹²

Notes:

1. Fit: in the Dutch text one reads 'tot dienst(en) onbequaam' (incapable of service).
2. In the Dutch text one reads 'zuijgelingen', which can refer to babies or to young children ('kleene kinderen'), 2–5 years old.
3. The 1681 summary list of Company slaves gives figures for Galle and Matara together but have been split here.
4. The 1681 summary list for Galle & Matara gives 90 children of the category 6–14 years old, unspecified by sex. The separate list of Galle & Matara mentions 81 'opkomende jongens' (growing boys) in one place and 62 'meijsjes' (girls) elsewhere. After some calculation I suppose that of these 62 girls 7 can be assigned to the category of children aged 6–14 years and fit for service, and that the 55 children in the section 'kinderen onbequaam' (in the table 'Children not fit') must be girls.
5. In the separate list of Galle & Matara, two girls in Matara are mentioned 'who are still of little service'. The age group is not specified.

6. The separate file from Jaffna lists two different groups of slaves, e.g. overkust slaven (slaves from the Coromandel Coast) and hierlandtse slaven (persons born as slaves in the Commandment of Jaffna).
 7. The separate file from Jaffna lists in the group of 'overkust slaven' a mother with her child 'nog zuijgende, 't laaste in 't hospitaal' (a mother with her child still suckling, the last in the hospital) – possibly a wet-nurse in the hospital fed the baby so that the mother could work.
 8. The separate list of Mannar speaks of '26 kinderen als 7 groote en 10 kleene' (26 children, being seven big kids and nineteen small ones). The 'kleene' children are further specified as 2, 3, 4 and 5 years old. The big kids will have fallen into the category of under-fourteen.
 9. The separate rol or lijst (list) of Kalptiya speaks about 'kleine kinderen die niet doen' (young children who are doing nothing [that is: doing no service]). Their age is sometimes mentioned as being 2, 3, 4, 5 years.
 10. In the separate list of Trincomalee one reads about 4 women 'oude en tot wercken onbequaam' (old and not fit for service).
 11. The separate file of Trincomalee lists 50 children, 17 of whom are still (in Dutch: nog) unqualified to work and reports 4 children as 'impotent' (disabled) – these four are not included in this general overview.
 12. This number approaches the number of permanent paid servants of the Company, Europeans and Eurasians, in 1694: 3026.
- Source:** National Archives (NA), The Hague, 1.04.02 (VOC), inv.nr. 8902, Copies of missives and reports received by the Governor General and Councilors in Batavia, 10 July 1681, 567–568: 'Corte sommarium der voorensstaande Comp^s liffjeigenen op 't geheele Eijlandt Ceijlon' (1681). The preceding pages contain the detailed overviews of the Company slaves in Colombo & Colombo district (555–558), in Galle & Matara (559–562), Jaffna (562–563); Mannar (563), Kalptiya (564), Trincomalee (564–565) and Batticaloa (566).

was a small hospital – I know no map or print mentioning this. The hinterland of Matara was economically important, for in this part of Company territory most cinnamon trees could be found. Many elephants were also caught in that area. The wild elephants were tamed immediately after capture and then transferred to the stables on the Matara Peninsula to await further transport to northerly Jaffna for sale to South Indian customers.

In Matara the Company had 44 slaves at its disposal: 13 men and 23 women who were qualified ('bequaam') for work; 6 women who were 'onbequaam' and two very young girls who did not yet have to work. Four men worked elsewhere in the district, as well as two women.

The mention of a basket maker is interesting. On drawings by the aforementioned Esaias Bourse, made in 1662, we see women at work at the fortifications of Colombo. They are most likely Company slaves who use baskets of local design to transport earth, lime, etc. The baskets will have been destined for the same purpose in Matara but could also have been used for other purposes. Four Company slaves working as masons were sent elsewhere, two to Galle and two to Katuwana (*Catoene*) – there a new fort was under construction. Given the still difficult relationship with Kandy, completion of that fort at the frontier was considered a priority.

The division of duties of Company slaves was as follows:

Table 2.2: 44 Company slaves in Matara, 1681

Males 13		Artisans	General Services	Daily Work	Care	No service/ Not fit
2	Worked with the carpenter	2				
4	Masons (2 > Katunawa, 2 > Galle)			4		
1	Basket maker	1				
1	Worked in the (cinnamon) warehouses		1			
2	Worked in the hospital				2	
1	Attendant in the Company horse stable		1			
2	Empty the poop barrels of the bastions		2			

Females 31		Artisans	General Services	Daily Work	Care	No service/ Not fit
23	Transport of roof tiles, bricks, clay, loading & unloading of the shallops			23		
(1)	Works in Fort Katunawa with the masons]		(1)			
(1)	Works in gunpowder mill in <i>Billigam</i> (now: Weligama)		(1)			
6	Old and not fit, no service					6
2	'Girls, not yet able to do much service'		2			
Totals		3	6	27	2	6

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, p. 559–562.

2.3. Galle

Galle (the English name since the British took over the administration in 1796) was the administrative centre of the Commandment of the same name, consisting of the Gale Korle and the Dessavonie of Matara.

Table 2.3: Company slaves in Galle, 1681

Males 176		Artisans	General	Daily Work	Care	No service/ Not fit
12	With the boss blacksmith ¹	12				
8	With the carpenters, 1 of them as apprentice	8				
8	Masons, '5 who already doing good services'	8				
8	5 Stonecutters ('steenpickers'), 1 with the blacksmith, 1 'fire blower', 1 charcoal burner	8				
2	1 <i>mocquedon</i> (supervisor) and 1 spinner at the wick workshop ²	2				

2	Aids in drilling and blowing up cliffs	2				
9	At the gunpowder mill ³	9				
4	In the warehouses (rice, salt, food, textiles)		4			
6	(‘Nederlands’) hospital				6	
2	Work in the kitchen, get firewood				2	
1	In the orphanage, gets firewood				1	
4	Attendants in the horse stable		4			
4	Attending/ milking of cows		4			
2	Emptying poop barrels of bastions, serving the military at the Corps de Garde				2	
1	Work with the sexton/church				1	
3	Kaffirs with the fiscal ⁴		3			
1	Tamil (‘Malabar’) clerk ⁵		1			
4	<i>Mocquedons</i> with the prisoners at the Public Works				4	
4	Not fit, sewing rice bags, doing light work					4
7	6 cliff drillers in Katunawa, 1 oil burner in Billigam (now: Weligama)	7				
84	Daily Work (‘Dagelijksche arbeit’) <i>subtotals</i>	56	16	88	12	4
Females 157		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
1	Midwife				1	
2	Kitchen, serving meals				2	
3	Slave hospital, general help for the sick				3	
1	Orphanage, gets drinking water				1	

1	Brings drill bits from cliff drillers to and from the blacksmith		1			
5	Mocquedons 'dagelijksche arbeijsdt' (Daily services)			5		
109	'Dagelijksche arbeijsdt' (Daily work)			109		
19	Too weak, still with children, wick making					19
11	10 pick oakum, 1 <i>mocquedon</i>					11
5	Blind people					5
	<i>subtotal</i>	-	1	114	7	35
Children 178		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
<i>Jongens 81</i>						
1	With boss carpenter	1				
1	Apprentice basket making	1				
8	With the masons	8				
3	With stone drillers	3				
1	Makes handles in the 'materiaalhuis'	1				
1	Son of a Dutch father ('van een Hollandse vader')		1			
44	'Kleen en groot' (small and big children) who bring lime and stones/bricks to the masons			44		
22	Not yet serving, get some training in transporting lime and bricks					22
<i>Meisjes 62</i>						
31	Transport lime and bricks			31		
31	No service, trained to transport lime and sand					31

<i>Infants</i> 35					
male	23				23
female	12				12
<i>Children subtotal</i>	14	1	75	–	88
TOTALS	Artisans	General	Daily Work	Care	Not Fit
511	70	18	277	19	127

Notes:

1. At the smithy three of them are cleaning several weapons ('het geweer' in the armory, five 'slaan voor' (that is: prepare the finer work of the blacksmith), the other four operate the bellows ('trekken de blaasbalgen').
2. The *mocquedon* not only oversees the wick makers but also is responsible for 'in en uijt sluijten der gecondamneerde swarten en Hollanders, en andere dingen meer' (responsible 'for putting on and taking off the shackles of condemned blacks and Hollanders, and much more'). 'Blacks' here refers to local Sri Lankan people, such as unwilling cinnamon peelers, thieves, or other locals who in the eyes of the Company showed criminal behaviour.
3. The entry reads: '9 at the gunpowder mill: 2 of these are used at the millstones to push the made gunpowder under again and again, and the others carry, sift and bring gunpowder, etc.'
4. The word *kaffir* (Dutch *kaffer/ caffer*) is now generally regarded as an ethnic slur. At the VOC *rakkers*, assistants of the *fiskaal* ('fiscal' or public prosecutor and maintainer of public order) were called *kaffer* ('kaffir'). Although they were often enslaved persons, they were not necessarily of African descent.
5. Born Jaffna serfs (see further 2.6 Jaffna), were not allowed to be transferred outside the province. Therefore, this enslaved 'Malabar' must be a Malabar speaking person, or himself enslaved at the Coromandel coast (now: Tamil Nadu, India). He might have functioned as a *trait d'union* between the VOC and the Muslim population in and around Galle, or as a translator of documents, of witnesses, etc.

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, p. 559–561.

Galle was especially important as a port city. The large VOC ships on their way to Batavia (Jakarta) made a stopover there, while some of the 'return ships' (retour-schepen) from Batavia sailed via Ceylon to load the precious cinnamon and textiles imported from South India. Some large VOC ships sailed from the Netherlands to Galle to return directly to the Netherlands. In the months of October and November the large ships from the Netherlands and Batavia arrived; in principle they first anchored in Colombo and then sailed on to Galle. The ships left Galle for the Netherlands in February and November, while March and April were suitable for sailing from Galle to Batavia (or returning). Therefore, the busiest periods in the ports of Colombo and Galle were October–November and February–March (sometimes in these months the ships sailed back and forth between Galle-Colombo and Galle-Matara). In addition to loading and unloading, ship repairs also had to be

carried out – an extensive inspection was required before the ships were allowed to return to the Netherlands.

Galle was also an important destination for the small chialoupes, cargo sloops, which sailed between the VOC places along the Ceylonese coast, as well as connecting Ceylon to various places in South India – notably with Tuticorin, to which the administration resorted under the governor of VOC Ceylon.

In the 18th century, the fortifications at the sea side were considerably expanded. In 1681 the emphasis still was on the huge bastions with connecting walls on the landward side. Of all the VOC forts, this was the only one that had the shape of a walled town. The capital of Colombo and the administrative centre in the north, Jaffna, consisted of a large fortress both called ‘Castle’ (‘Kasteel’), and outside a very small town, in the documents called ‘Oude Stadt’ (Old Town). There stayed the Eurasians and Muslims, with a large number of private slaves – though I have no details of the amount of private slaves in Ceylon in 1681, the average may have been c. 4 slaves in every household of Burghers (Eurasians) and European personnel (only military officers had private slaves, most soldiers did without), so in 1681 it might have been a total of c. 1000. Outside Galle Fort lived only a small group of people who were directly affiliated with the VOC.

Notable among these (and other lists) is the work of ‘cliff drilling’, in which numerous individuals were involved. Blacksmiths had to make special drills to drill holes for the explosives. Some slaves (often older women, or children) had the task of returning blunt drills to the blacksmith and collecting updated ones. Special wooden tubes were made by the carpenter to get the gunpowder deep enough into the relevant rock. In one of Galle’s entries it says: ‘two at the “klipspringers” (who blow up the cliffs), one of them carries the “kruijsack” (powder bag) and assists them in breaking the clips, the other as *mocquedon* overseeing the cliff drillers’. This was how they organised natural stone building material for the construction of the fort. There were also numerous cliffs in Galle Bay, some of which were dangerously submerged and therefore buoyed with warning flags. As far as I know, these cliffs were only removed with explosives in the 19th century.

Some entries provide special information that I had not found before. I give two examples. The first is about the slaves who took care of the cows (‘koebeesten’): two apparently stayed with them outside the city, did the milking and looked after them; two others carried the milk to the fort. Unfortunately, it is not stated who or what the milk was intended for, but the daily delivery may have been intended for feeding young children (for most adults are lactose intolerant), perhaps also for use in the bakery. The second example concerns the entry ‘kind van een Hollandse vader’ (child of a Dutch father). That almost calls for a separate article! What is going on here? In Roman-Dutch law, the rule was: ‘the fruit follows the mother’, that is, in the case of an out-of-wedlock birth, a child has the status of its mother:

free/non-free. This father, possibly a soldier (not necessarily coming from the Dutch Republic, he could also have been a German or Scandinavian soldier) had apparently had an affair, short or long, with a 'slave girl' of the Company, which had resulted in a child. That child must have looked no different from other children resulting from a relationship between Europeans and Asian women (mostly descendants of previously freed slaves), but this boy had the status of non-free attached to him. If the slave girl in question had been privately owned, such a kin would have had a chance of being manumitted by his father. Now that the mother was owned by the Company, emancipation was out of the question. The boy will have remained a slave all his life.

In every town/fort there was a 'Nederlands' hospital, and usually also a smaller hospital for the slaves. Galle's list provides useful information about the surgeon's work in such a hospital. One of the slaves, for example, fetched firewood for the still ('distilleerhuijs') as well as for the 'Berberij gasten' (the fellows in Beruwala who were burning lime from the coral stones. So, we learn the hospital had a still; however, it is not known what has been brewed, perhaps arak, perhaps special medicines. That requires further investigation. We have, however, an interesting drawing of such a still in an album (c. 1679) by Paul Hermann, surgeon at the hospital of Colombo (1672–1679), so we know how it looked.¹⁸ Another slave helped the surgeon 'with pounding', so with making medicines with the mortar, and was further charged with sweeping, sanding, and more.

2.4. *Kalpitiya*

The fort was strategically located at the estuary of the bay, making it easy to block trade from the port town of Puttalam on the opposite side. This was the only port on the west coast possessed by the king of Kandy, but the VOC prevented the sailing from Puttalam as much as possible. To this end, it had a number of patrol vessels that operated off the coast to detain 'Moorse' (Muslim) ships that maintained illegal – in the eyes of the VOC that is – trade contacts with South Indian ports on behalf of the King of Kandy. Officially, a Company pass was required for this, but these were rarely issued to them. This was one of the diplomatic points of contention between the VOC and the King. The latter, however, had two trump cards: 1) it could refuse to use the coastal route to bring elephants to Jaffna from the south – which hindered trade with Indian merchants; 2) he could refuse to let the cinnamon peelers cross the border to peel cinnamon in the King's Land – it was on his territory that the best cinnamon grew.

¹⁸ Natural History Museum, London: Herbarium by Paul Hermann (1646–1695), c. 1679, *Icones*, Vol. 5, f. 307.

Table 2.4: 58 Company slaves in Kalpitya, 1681

Males						
39		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
1	Apprentice with the blacksmith	1				
1	Apprentice with the carpenter	1				
3	Sawing planks, also loading/unloading	3 ¹				
2	Charcoal burners	2				
1	Works in the warehouse		1			
6	Work at the elephant stables		6			
1	Gets water for smith & carpenter		1			
2	Gets water for general labourers		2			
2	Work in Company's garden		2			
1	Works with the surgeon				1	
2	Sick, doing no services					2
17	General services, loading/unloading			17 ²		
Females						
9		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
2	Sick, no services					2
7	Work in the new coconut garden		7			
Children						
10		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
	small children, no services					10
Totals		7	19	17	1	14

Notes:

1. These persons could also be placed under Maintenance/Daily Work.
2. Presumably, these people do the so-called 'Daily Work', which also includes work on the fortifications.

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, p. 564.

The following comment could also be made in connection with the other forts, but the isolated position of Fort Kalpitiya makes it clear once again how dependent such a military fort is. Of course, in case of war and siege, wells, gardens, etc. outside the fort in question are inaccessible, but for strategic stockpiling and for daily use, the gardens outside the fort are indispensable. Vegetables, herbs, and especially coconuts were essential for existence. Every Sri Lankan household had a 'thuijn', that is, a yard with coconut trees and fruit trees. You picked the necessary vitamin C in the area, everyone knew what leaves were needed for your daily meal, so the Company here had its own yard, and managed to survive that way.

2.5. *Mannar*

The fortress and settlement of Mannar were modest in size but played a strategic and economic role of some importance. The fort controlled the coastal road, along which elephants from the south were transferred to Jaffna every year for sale. *Choya* roots (*Oldenlandia umbellata*) were collected there, which were used to dye red cloth from India – the roots were also exported. The area was most famous for pearl fishing, but this happened only after long intervals. When inspections showed that there were enough oyster shells in which pearls had formed, specialised fishermen from far and wide came with their vessels to the Gulf of Mannar, near the Dutch fort of Aripo (now: Arippu). This was normally only manned with six soldiers, but during the pearl fishery their number was considerably increased. Then a hundred or more soldiers were posted along the coast to keep order – entire villages were built along the beach with hundreds of temporary huts.

Table 2.5: 120 Company slaves in Mannar, 1681

		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General Services</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
All slaves: 60 males, 34 females, 26 children (of which: 7 children aged 6–12 19 children aged 2–5)						
serve in various places 20:						
1	Warehouse		1			
2	Armory	2				
1	Smithy	1				
2	Masons	2				
2	Apprentices carpenter	2				
1	Hospital				1	
1	Horse stable		1			
10	Get drinking water for fortress, house of the Chief, for the hospital		10			
12 sick not fit for work						12
19 small children age 2-5						19
7 Children age 6-12						
62 Males & women						
69				69		
Total 120		7	12	69	1	31

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, p. 563.

This list is special because the information clearly shows what the workforce was really about. It first summaries: 60 male and 34 female slaves, and further ‘26 kinderen, als 7 groote and 19 kleene’, a total of 120. From that number three categories of Company slaves are subtracted: 20 slaves (exceptionally not specified by sex) who served at different places; 12 ‘siekken en onbequaam tot den arbeijdt’ (not fit to do any labour), and finally 19 children aged 2, 3, 4, and five years. Then the text of the list continues: ‘51 [subtracted] from 120, remainder is 69, who work at the fortress’. After which the author goes on to state that four chained prisoners also worked at the fortifications – that also happened in other places. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the subject of this kind of forced labour in more detail, but it would be useful to do some more research to determine the extent to which the Justice Department took into account the need for this type of forced labour by convicts.

Be that as it may, the compilation of this list of Company slaves in Mannar clearly shows how important the share of slaves was in the construction and maintenance of the fortification works. That would also be the case in later years. For example, a 1694 list gives Mannar a total of 104 Company slaves, 38 of whom serve on the Common Works – a relatively smaller number, but still significant.¹⁹

2.6. *Jaffna*

Table 2.6: 70 Company slaves in Jaffna, 1681

46 'Overkust' Slaves (from Coromandel)		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General Services</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
<i>Males 40</i>						
3	2 Dyers, 1 weaver	3				
2	With the cooper	1				
1	Basket maker	1				
5	At the carpenter's yard	5				
5	With the blacksmith	5				
1	Sail-maker	1				
11	Masons	11				
1	Warehouses	1				
4	Horse stable		4			
3	Hospital				3	
2	Old and not fit					2
2	'Caffers' with the Fiscal ¹		2			
1	Assists masons	1				
<i>Females 6</i>		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General Services</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
1	Brings meals to the masons		1			
2	Old woman & daughter in garden		2			
2	Mother with suckling child				2	
1	Old woman sweeps Slave Lodge		1			

¹⁹ National Archives, The Hague, VOC 1544, p. 1218 verso: List of Company slaves in Mannar in 1694.

24 'Hierlandtse' (local) slaves 24		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General Services</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
<i>Male 16</i>						
5	Apprentice blacksmith & armoury	5				
4	Work in the warehouses	4				
3	Works in the horse stable	3				
2	Children of 10, with the mother					2
2	Blind father & son of about 10, work in silkworm garden					2
<i>Female 8</i>		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General Services</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
1	hospital					
7	3 old women, 4 girls 5–10, cleaning <i>Corps de Guardes</i> & bastions		7			
TOTALS		41	17	–	6	6

Note:

1. See Galle 2.3, Table 2.3, note 4.

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, pp. 562–563.

The first line of the list is interesting because of its division into two distinct categories of slaves, namely 'Overkust slaven' – slaves from the Coromandel coast – and 'Hierlandtse slaven' – persons born as slaves in the Jaffna commandment. It is quite possible that not all of the Overkust slaves originated from the Coromandel (also called Textile Coast) – some might have transferred from other parts of South India, possibly also from regions stretching along the Bay of Bengal such as Arakan,²⁰ and many even could have been transferred from distant islands of the Indonesian archipelago.

Be that as it may, the division is clear: one group consisted of persons from outside the island, the others were indigenous inhabitants of the Jaffna district. Traditionally, three categories of non-free groups lived in this province: the Covia (Koviyar), Nallua (Nalavar) and Palla (Pallar), slaves held only in the Jaffna district. Only the Covia were used as domestic servants. Most of Nallua and Palla slaves

²⁰ During its apogee the kingdom of Arakan, now Rakhine State in Myanmar, covered half of what is now Bangladesh, the whole of present day Rakhine State and part of Lower Burma. The VOC opened a first office in 1608, and established a permanent factory in the capital Mrauk U in 1635 – that was closed in 1675.

worked in the fields, and like the Covias, they were prohibited from being sold and allowed to leave the district. Therefore, their status is seen as a kind of serfdom, comparable to the serfs in medieval Europe.²¹

Another document, also drawn up in 1681, shows that the *Hierlandtse* slaves may have been recruited from the *Nallua* cast. The relevant document listing the 257 local servants working for the Company in Jaffna mentions a 'hooft aratchie [chief aratchie] van de 's Compag^s Nalluas' who heads this group of non-free servants. It is not entirely clear to what extent the Company, as 'Lord of the Land', believed that it could dispose of these non-free workers. A detail in the heading of the list of Company slaves of Jaffna seems to confirm this. The headline reads: 'Indication of the Comps. serfs, slaves and female slaves on the closing of the books ult^o. February 1681 in Jaffanapatnam; still well and alive and for what tasks they were used in the service of the Lord ('Heer')'. Sinnappah Arasaratnam writes: 'The documents of the period [i.e. the 17th and 18th centuries] repeatedly mention slavery, but give no practical details about the exact nature of slavery (...). When the *Thesawalamai* was codified [the customs of the Tamil inhabitants of the Province of Jaffna, 1707], the rights of slaves were carefully written down (...) There were many who were listed as state slaves and required to work for the state. After a few years, the Dutch gave them a monthly wage, the savings from this enabled them to buy their freedom'.²² The activities of the Company slaves were also very diverse in Jaffna. Three men were engaged in work related to the textiles imported from Tuticorin or other places at the 'Overkust'.²³ One of them was a weaver, the other two were listed as dyers who finished the white cloth imported from

²¹ Sinnappah Arasaratnam wrote about them: 'Encouraged by the ambiguities in Dutch law, which interpreted *adimai* or bonded status of landless labourers as slave labor, *vellalar* landowners claimed ownership of these landless labourers similar to western slavery,' in Arasaratnam, 'Sri Lanka's Tamils: Under Colonial Rule', p. 38.

For an ample discussion on the Nallua and Palla slaves, see: Schrikker and Ekama, 'Through the Lens of Slavery', pp. 188–191. See also Wickramasinghe and Schrikker, 'The Ambivalence of Freedom', pp. 497–519.

Arasaratnam, 'Social History of a Dominant Caste Society', 387, writes that 'It is possible that the bondage of the Koviari, to the extent that it existed, only extended to ritual purposes such as their obligations at funerary sites of the Vellalar and their temple festivals'. About the Pallar he writes that they were 'probably the only caste performing bonded service to the Vellalar in any long-term subjection and they were agricultural labourers.'

²² Sinnappah Arasaratnam, 'Historical foundations of the economy of the Tamils of North Sri Lanka', Chelvanakam Memorial Lectures, Jaffna 1982, p. 18. Reprinted with same title and pagination in Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600–1800*.

²³ Tuticorin (*Tutucorijn*), now called Thoothukudi, and the other minor coastal outposts of Madurai (*Madure*) were administered by the Governor of Ceylon, hence his title Governor and Director of [Dutch] Ceylon and its Dependencies' (underlining LJW).

India using natural dye extracted from the *chaya* roots. Twenty-five slaves were employed in the Company workshops: two in the cooper's workshop; two in the carpenter's yard; five in the forge; two worked with the sail-maker and eleven assisted the mason in the fortification works. Interesting is the addition about the last mentioned slaves, that they 'learn this trade'. It is a confirmation of the fact that the Company always tried to economise, and training slaves to get skilled workers avoided the costly transfer and maintenance of personnel from Europe. It also reduced the number of local artisans to be hired (who, of course, earned less than their European colleagues). The High Government in Batavia wrote to the directors in Patria on 29 April 1681 that the authorities of Ceylon had selected the most able and fast-learning slaves to be trained for the various trades. This was approved by the High Government, who responded that 'his was generally a useful exercise', and therefore the training of Companies slaves had to be followed in the other VOC establishments.²⁴

The Company in Jaffna owned only six female slaves. One delivered meals to the masons working at the fortifications, while an 'old and decrepit' woman worked in the gardens with her daughter. Another woman had a baby and worked in the hospital. This is difficult to interpret. Do we see some kind of compassion here? Or are we witnessing a pure profit mentality, which forces vulnerable and dependent people to be exploited to the limit? The last mentioned female slave in the list was of old age and did cleaning work in the prison ('tronck') and in the slave lodge ('slaven huijs') – the mention of the slave lodge is special, since legends of maps of Jaffna make no mention of such accommodation. In most forts, the Company housed its slaves in the *materiaal* huis (storage for tools, equipment and the like). In Colombo, the large number of Companies slaves were initially housed below the wall of one of the strongholds, later in the barracks of the *Slaaven Quartier* (Slave Quarters), located on a peninsula in the Lack of Colombo: it is still called Slave Island.²⁵

The above list shows that the Company slaves in Jaffna performed the same work as the slaves elsewhere in coastal Ceylon. Of the sixteen men, five were apprentices in the smithy and armoury; four worked in the Company's warehouses and three others worked in the stables. Two children aged '8 tot 10' lived with their mother in the fort, usually referred to as the Castle. A stone-blind father lived with his 10-year-old son in the silkworm garden ('sijdeworm thuijn'), where he took care

²⁴ *Generale Missiven* IV, 1675–1685, p. 455.

²⁵ See the website 'Virtual Slave Island (Kompanna-veediya) – Contested Space and Everyday Life in Colombo, 1650 – Present' (June 5, 2024) – URL: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/15a22827013b-439782f13a9d2edb812f> (accessed 28-5-2025). The 'StoryMap' is the result of a project started in 2020 and initiated by Dr. Alicia Schrikker, associate professor at Leiden University (History Department).

of the mulberries and the silkworm breeding – this was quite a new Company enterprise! One of the female slaves worked in the hospital, while seven women did cleaning in the various guard rooms (*Corps de garde*) and on the bastions – this group consisted of three older women and four girls between the ages of 5–10.

It is striking that nowhere in the list are Company slaves mentioned who worked on the Public Works. The VOC archives of Jaffna have largely been lost and data cannot always be found in the reports sent to Colombo (and eventually forwarded to Batavia and the Netherlands). Fortunately, we do have data from 1697, which appear in the ‘Memorie’ (‘Memoir’) prepared by Commander Hendrick Zwaardcroon, which he left behind for the administrators in Jaffna when he left for Cochin at the Malabar Coast to solve some problems there. He wrote: ‘The Company’s slaves here are few in number, consisting of 82 individuals, including men, boys, women and children. But no more are required, as the *Oeliaars* perform many of the duties for which slaves would be otherwise required. They are engaged in the stable, the warehouses, the arsenal, the hospital, and [work] with the ship-builders and masons. The only pay they receive is 3 *fanams*, and a *parra* of rice per month, except some of the masons [who got higher payment, 4–6 *fanams*].’²⁶ Earlier in his Memorandum, Zwaardcroon wrote about the conscript ‘Oelias’ (who had to do *Uliyam* service, also named *oeliammers*). He called them extremely lazy in the performance of their services, even though it was only 3 days a month, or 12 days a year. Apparently, many were in a position to buy off this duty (2 pence a day or one rixdollar for a whole year. In 1695 2,001 rixdollar and 9 *stuivers* (penny) in fines were paid by 24,021 persons who were registered for Uliam service, and in the following year the amount for the months of January–August was 1,053 rixdollar 9 *stuiver* for 12,640 men, with the result that the Company had to miss the work of 36,661 men. It is therefore expected, writes Zwaardcroon, ‘that the work on the Castle [the fort] will be significantly delayed, and idem with regard to the loading and unloading of the ships, the work at the wharf, at the powder mill, at the quarry of San Pedro, at the lime-burning, at the cutting of wood at the border with the area of the Wann, the digging and breaking of coral stone near the islands, the burning of charcoal for the smithy, etc.’ That is why the buying-off of the Uliyam service was not always allowed by the Company, with serious consequences for the population, as J.C. Wolf shows in his book ‘Travels to Ceylon’. It contains a report from 1764 in which the then Dessave of Jaffna protested against the endless labour of the forced *corvée* at the fortifications of Jaffna by the inhabitants of the district.²⁷

²⁶ *Memoir of Hendrick Zwaardcroon, commandeur of Jaffnapatam*, p. 78.

²⁷ In a memorandum to the governor of VOC Ceylon (I.W. Falck, 1765–1785) the Dessave of Jaffna, Noëll Anthonij Lebeck, describes how, during a working visit to the country, a large crowd of residents ‘with bitter cries’ requested to be released from ‘the arduous work at the fortifications (...) and again

2.7. Trincomalee

In 1639, the VOC captured this fort built by the Portuguese (1622), but when relations deteriorated after the initially workable cooperation between the VOC and Kandy, the fort was handed over to King Raja Sinha II (r. 1635–1687), who then had it demolished. When the alliance between the king and the VOC fell apart, the Dutch built a new fortress in 1665 at the beginning of the sea-piercing peninsula. The VOC area on the land side of the fort was small, but this settlement still had economic significance because in the hinterland, King's Land, wood was cut for the other VOC places on the island. Large warships could safely moor in the bay, making Trincomalee a good springboard for actions towards the Indian mainland. That was the reason for the French to try to get this fort under control, which succeeded briefly in 1672. More than a century later, in 1781, an English fleet managed to take Trincomalee – that was during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–1784). Then Trincomalee could only be recaptured with French help.

Table 2.7: 148 Company slaves in Trincomalee, 1681

Males		Artisans	General Services	Daily Work	Care	No service/ Not fit
57						
3	Work with the blacksmith	3				
3	Coal burners for the blacksmiths ¹	3				
1	Work with the 'Hollandse timmerlieden' (Dutch carpenters) ²	1				
14	Carry coral stone for the lime kilns ³			14		
1	Works at the bakery ⁴	1				
1	Works in the warehouses		1			
1	Works in the ['Nederlands'] hospital				1	
1	Works in the slave hospital				1	
3	Chop fire wood for the Commander, minister and military captain ⁵		3			

to be reinstated with the usual services of the Lord, otherwise they would have to perish in poverty and misery'. In: Wolf, *Reizen naar Ceilon, nevens een volledige beschrijving van dat eiland en van Japanapatnam: gedurende een verblijf van zestien jaaren (...)*.

3	Work in de <i>Clappus</i> -thuijn (coconut garden)			3		
3	Work in <i>Groente thuijn</i> (vegetable garden)			3		
3	Work in the Company horse stable			3		
1	Attendant of cows			1		
1	Elephant stable ⁶			1		
12	'Dagelijkse arbeidjt' (Daily Work) ⁷				12	
1	<i>Mocquedon</i> [overseer <i>Gemeene Werken</i>] ⁷				1	
4	Sick					4
1	Works elsewhere			1		
Females 41		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General Services</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
23	'Dagelijkse arbeidjt' (Daily Work) ⁷			23		
6	Work at Erckelencheene (<i>NB: location not found</i>)		6			
8	Sick					8
4	'Oud en tot het wercken onbequaam' (old and not fit for services)					4
Children 50		<i>Artisans</i>	<i>General Services</i>	<i>Daily Work</i>	<i>Care</i>	<i>No service/ Not fit</i>
22	'dagelijckse wercken' (Daily Work) ⁷			22		
1	Attendant of cows		1			
1	Attendant 'Clappus thuijn'		1			
1	['Nederlands'] Hospital				1	
1	Cooks for the overseers of the slaves ⁸		1			
1	House of the 'commandeur' ⁵		1			
4	'Impotenten' (disabled)					4
17	'Tot arbeijden nog onbequaam' (not yet qualified for services) ⁹					17

2	Work for two 'Europaanse op Erckelencheese' (NB: <i>place not located</i>)					2
Totals		8	26	72	3	39

Notes to Table 2.7:

1. Nowhere is it stated who cuts and supplies the wood used for this purpose.
 2. Apparently there are also hired local carpenters.
 3. As near Kalpitiya, Mannar and Jaffna, there were coral reefs near Trincomalee where coral could be broken. This was about burning coral, not breaking coral to saw 'kraalsteen' (coral stones).
 4. The wheat needed for the bakery came from the Cape Colony in South Africa.
 5. The 'Commandeur', actually the 'Chief', the minister and the military captain all had slaves of their own, but the services of the Company slaves were available to them as emoluments to their position.
 6. It is not clear whether these are elephants brought from 'King's Land', as payment by Kandy of war debts or otherwise.
 7. A *moquedon* served as overseer of the Public Works or overseer of the slaves – these terms coincide because the slaves usually laboured at the fortification works. Those activities never stopped, hence the name 'daily work'.
 8. The list mentions 'sitters' – plural, also called *moquedon*. The other sitter(s) were probably of European or Eurasian descent.
 9. These are probably 'little children', aged 2–5 years.
- Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, pp. 564–565.

2.8. Batticaloa

In 1602, the first two merchant ships under the command of Joris van Spilbergen visited the east coast of Sri Lanka. King Vimala Dharma Suriya I (r.1592–1604) received him warmly when it appeared that the Dutch could possibly play a role in expelling the Portuguese from the island, because Spilbergen posed as a representative of Prince Maurice of Holland (stadtholder 1585–1625). This first meeting became famous through the travelogue 'Historical Journal' (1605). A year after Spilbergen, Sebald de Weert, vice admiral of the first VOC fleet sent to Asia, arrived to inquire whether the king would keep to the agreements. His mission failed due to misconduct of this Dutchman. The king felt insulted and threatened and had him executed. Thirty years later, King Raja Sinha II asked the now powerful VOC for help against the Portuguese. As a test of their skills, Fort Batticaloa was captured in 1638. Economically, the place was only important because of the logging in the

hinterland – building materials were essential in the first expansive years of the VOC's establishment in Ceylon.

Table 2.8: 96 Company slaves in Batticaloa, 1681

Males 68		Payment ¹ p/m in rixdollars	Artisans	General Services	Daily Work	Care	No service/ Not fit
3	Work in the smithy	1/6	3				
1	Blacksmith	1/2	1				
6	Coal burners for the smithy ¹	1/6	6				
12	Sawing timber	1/4	12				
2	['Nederlands'] hospital	1/6				2	
2	Work in de Compagny Garden	1/6		2			
1	Attendants of cows	1/6		1			
36	'Gemeene wercken' (Public Works)	1/6			36		
5	Sick	1/6					5
Females 25		Payment ¹ p/m in rixdollars	Artisans	General Services	Daily Work	Care	No service/ Not fit
24	'Gemeene wercken' (Public Works)	1/10			24		
1	'Blindt en onbequaam tot eenige dienst' ((blind and not fit for service)	1/10					1

	'Door jonckheijdt nog onbequaam' (because of young age still not fit)	1/15				3
TOTALS		22	3	60	2	9

Notes to Table 2.8:

1. Who cuts and supplies the wood used for this purpose is not mentioned.
2. For information on this payment, see Arasaratnam's comment in 2.5 (Jaffna). The blacksmith and his assistants will have worked, as in the other forts, to make hoops for barrels, various ironwork for gun carriages, locks and doors, chains and fetters for prisoners, etc. The list also states that all slaves received two 'chelas' (sarongs) given 'to cover their body'. In addition, each man received 1 *parra* (40 pounds) of rice per month, plus salt & pepper. The women received $\frac{3}{4}$ *parra* rice, plus salt & pepper. There were also 'condemned persons', who performed forced labour at the Gemeene Werken (Public Works): 1 'European' and 3 'inboorlingen' (natives). They each received 2 *parras* of rice per month, also 2 *chelas* (cloth, or *sarong*). The first received a monthly allowance of $\frac{3}{5}$ rixdollar, the other three each received $\frac{1}{6}$ rixdollar.

Source: NA, Den Haag, VOC 8902, p. 566.

2.9. Colombo

After the capture of Colombo in 1656, the VOC administrators realised that the size of the Portuguese stronghold could not be successfully defended. It was therefore decided to separate the core area, which they called the Castle, from the residential area. Due to the war with Kandy, the full demolition of the ramparts of the 'Oude Stadt' (Old Town) had to be postponed until the end of the 17th century. Seventy years after the British takeover, modern warfare made the ramparts of the old 'Castle' obsolete. Therefore, between c. 1869–1871 Colombo's defences were almost completely demolished.²⁸

The specific list for Colombo gives a figure of 1993 Company slaves. The German VOC soldier Christopher Schweitzer gives the following short description before his departure for Amsterdam in January 1682: '(...) without the walls, between them and the sea, are the huts where nearly four thousand slaves, belonging to the Company, lye at night. They are of different nations, and are constantly kept at work: their huts are very little, made up with nothing but straw and leaves. There

²⁸ Mendis, 'The Fortress of Colombo', pp. 56–69. See also the pre-publication at Academia. edu of Chryshane Mendis, *Colombo. The History of Its Fortifications*. URL: https://www.academia.edu/109341973/COLOMBO_The_History_of_Its_Fortifications_Preprint, visited May 28, 2025.

are Dutch men to look over ‘em, who are called Mucadons [moquedons]; each of them have 70, 80, or 100 to oversee, and must give an account of ‘em’.²⁹

A small Slave Gate (‘Slave Poort’), known in the British Period as Postern Gate, provided access to this stretch of beach – the gate still exists, but is inaccessible to the public as it is located on the grounds of the Navy Headquarters near the Port. Schweitzer exaggerates the number of Company slaves, but the stretch of beach became too small to accommodate them all and so before 1692 a piece of land was designated south of the Castle that could be well guarded and remains known as Slave Island (*Slaven Eijland*).

Table 2.9: 1993 Company slaves in Colombo in 1681

Males, Females & Children	Admini- stration & Justice	Artisans	General Services	Daily Work	Care	No service/ Not fit
Working for the office of the Governor (15), of the Commander (4), in the secretariats (13), in the prison (2).	34					
Working with the sail-maker (4), carpenter (47), cooper (3), blacksmith (16); in the armoury (15); as stone-cutters (7), matmakers (65), masons (4).		161				
Collecting drinking water (7), Stables (15), Washers (38), gunpowder mill (16), tile factory & herding (159), equipment house (11), several jobs at different places (17). ¹			263			
‘Daily work’: maintenance of fortress, loading/unloading of vessels.				1015		

²⁹ Schweitzer, ‘A Relation of a Voyage to and Through the East-Indies from the Year 1675 to 1683 by Christopher Schewitzer [Schweitzer]’, p. 343.

'Malabar' Apothecary (7), hospital (21), midwives (5), orphanage (6), schoolmas- ter (4)						43
Pregnant women (13), women after giving birth (7), patients in the hospitals (59), blind & lame persons (17), infants (198), runaways (13), one old Tupas (1), schoolchildren (169).						477
1993	34	161	263	1015	43	477

Note:

1. One person, at the moment of the listing, is 'a black sexton' being 'not fit'. Perhaps he can be connected to the large Christian Chitty community in Colombo. A few others work at the several warehouses.

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, p. 555–558.

The data on the Company slaves in Colombo are organised in the same way as the general overview ('corte sommarium') on pp. 567–568 of the relevant NA, VOC 8902. (see Table 2.1). In order to present the large amount of data clearly and somewhat comparable to the other tables, a different arrangement has been chosen compared with the original document. As a result, the data for numbers of men, women and children are not included in the new table, therefore commentary will be provided on a selection of these data. Also, not everyone's workplace or nature of work has been specified, this will be partly covered by a further explanation below. However, the reader has already been able to get an impression of the different workshops and types of work from the treatment of the other places.

The addition of the 'Administration and Justice' category is intended to draw attention to Colombo's special position as the capital of the VOC Government Ceylon. The enslaved workers at the offices of the Governor and Commander were all men, while the secretariats employed five men, one woman and one child aged about 10–14. In Colombo, female slaves were in the majority (732 against 586) – the document does not provide a definitive answer about the sex of the children.

A 'black' surgeon worked in the slave hospital. His origin is not stated, but the fact that six slaves were working in the 'Malabar' apothecary suggests that he was a Tamil, as were his three assistants. Striking is the mention of a man and a boy (aged 10–14) who applied bandages at the work sites – apparently quite a few accidents occurred during the heavy work days at the fortifications. Ten men and two women

worked in the Dutch Hospital, reserved for European employees, mainly soldiers and sailors. Among the Orphanage staff, women outnumbered men 4 to 2.

As was the case at the other places, several boys aged 10–14 were apprenticed to European craftsmen, entirely in accordance with the instructions of the Company's management to train as many slaves as possible in order to save on European staff. A number of 281 children were put to work, almost fifteen percent of all Company slaves.

The Colombo list adds a few interesting details to what we already learned from the other lists. For example, there were 41 women who wove mats, with the following comment: 'In the mat-house women worked who recently had delivered but were sick and had small children, [and also other] women who in all honesty made mats and were used for all kinds of services'.³⁰ The mats were certainly intended to be used in the ship's holds to cover the several layers of transported goods and spices.

Two entries should not be left without comment. The first is the mention of 159 people who worked at the tile factory ('pannebackerij') and also acted as shepherds: 76 men (eighteen 'not fit' and ten over fifty years old) and 41 women (six 'not fit' and eight over 50 years old); they worked together with seventeen children.

The last comment concerns the 179 schoolchildren. We don't know much about young enslaved persons, but the large number who received education is remarkable. In Galle and Colombo there were 'Mallabar' schools, where slave children probably also went to learn to write and read Tamil, maybe to become moquedons (supervisors) or clerks in one of the offices. I found no information about enslaved girls going to Malabar school. However, orphans, boys and girl (most of them of Eurasian descent) went to school together, like in the Netherlands).

The list of Company slaves in Colombo is extremely rich in information. Not only does it show the large and diverse amount of tasks assigned to the slaves, but we also learn a lot about the goings-on in the various workshops through the many details. Workshops have been greatly changed by mechanisation for a century or more, with the result that many readers will not understand what old documents are telling. A few examples.

What happens in the armoury of a fortress? Apparently, there was a blacksmith shop there, because two Company slaves worked at the bellows: the charcoal (later coal was imported from England) had to burn well to get iron red hot, otherwise you couldn't do anything with it. There were also two 'turning the stone' – this informs us about the large whetstone, an indispensable tool for blacksmiths and carpenters. Then there were two sawyers who among other tasks helped making gun carriages. And

³⁰ The entry reads: 'Vrouwen in 't mat hujs, sijnde sieckelijke uijt de craam comende en kleene kinderen hebbende, [en]vrouwen die eerlijk matten maacken en tot allerhande diensten worden gebruikt'.

finally, there were nine whose task was ‘to keep the gun clean’ – under gun one should think of all kinds of weapons: not only firearms, but also stabbing weapons, etc.

And how did things go at the carpenter’s yards? Carpenters were divided into two groups: the housecarpenters and the shipwrights. Twenty-two Company slaves worked for the ‘boss of the Dutch carpenters’ (being the shipwright). Two of them worked at the whetstone, but apparently it was used less often than the one at the forge, because the two slaves also did other work: pecking tar and boiling resin (‘harpuijs’).³¹ Then there were no fewer than eleven sawyers and seven ‘who learn ship carpentry’.

Colombo was also an important VOC port: ships from the Netherlands or Batavia often moored there first and the vessels that maintained the connection with other places in Ceylon or South India were also maintained there. It is therefore not surprising that we read in the list of Colombo that numerous slaves were trained. This did not only apply to the carpenter’s yard. The sail-maker had four, the cooper had three apprentices – these are recorded as boys (‘jongens’), they may have been young people, from the age of 12 and onwards, but often the word ‘boy’ was used for any male slave. To come back to the carpenters: 24 slaves worked with the ‘baas van de swarte timmerlieden’ (boss of the black [Sinhalese] carpenters) who learned the job of the ‘huijs timmerlieden’ and worked on all kinds of ‘daily work’ – they were supervised by a *mocquedon*, an old man who apparently couldn’t do anything else. From this information we also learn that the slaves in the shipyard mainly worked together with Dutch people or other Europeans and that the staff of the ‘huijs timmerwerf’ (the other yard) mainly consisted of people with an Asian background.

Sixteen slaves worked at the forge (‘smitswinckel’), one turned ‘the stone’; three made the three metre long sticks for the ‘pick lance’, the weapon of the pikemen (*piekenier*); two were especially engaged in making crowbars and cliff-drills (necessary for rock-drilling; one worked with the ‘fine blacksmiths’, another at the coppersmith (‘coperslager’) and five stood at the bellows.

Also interesting is the information about the washers of cloth (‘lijwaat’). Vessels from Tuticorin on the ‘Overkust’ unloaded the purchased textiles in Galle or Colombo. There it was sorted, counted and checked for quality; then washed and bleached, and finally repacked for further distribution – a lot of them were sold in Ceylon, or annually given to the cinnamon peelers and Company slaves, while an unknown quantity was shipped to Holland. Washing and bleaching was done by ‘the Sinhalese washers’, assisted by a retinue of Company slaves: six men, six women and thirteen children. This entry is a good example of the cooperation between Company slaves and free local labourers. Incidentally, the slaves themselves apparently had a

³¹ *Harpuijs/resin*: *harpuijs* is a fused mixture of boiled linseed oil, rosin and stearin, to protect wooden surfaces, such as masts, yards, etc.

number of items of clothing, as thirteen of them (two men, four women and seven children) are recorded as doing the washing of all the slaves' clothes.

3. Some more commentary on the employment of Company slaves

Classifying the tasks as they are described – often summarily – in the lists of Company slaves turned out to be no easy task. Let me give one example: should someone who collects water for the workers at the fortification also be included under the relevant heading ('Daily work'), or under the heading of 'general services'? I don't think the answer interferes with the final results. Most of the entries speak plain language, as the table (2.9) makes clear. The number of slaves in the category 'Maintenance/Daily Work' of all forts together, 1536, is just over half of the total number of Company slaves in Ceylon (3040). I will therefore comment on that section first.

3.1. *The 'Daily Work'*

In the lists of Company slaves in 1681, the terms 'Daily Work' and 'Public Works' are mentioned several times in direct connection with reports of activities such as 'loading and unloading'. It shows how the rhythm of the year unfolds in Company life, that considered the protection of the monopolised trade in the precious cinnamon above everything else. The maintenance and renovation of the fortifications were Task One everywhere. Its implementation was only interrupted when ships or smaller craft had arrived or were about to depart. Then the relevant group of Company slaves was taken from their work on the (dry) ditches, the ramparts, etc. to take cargo off board or, conversely, to bring cargo on board. This work they executed in cooperation with the personnel of the Maritime Service ('Zeedienst') and the crew of the ships and vessels. When that job was accomplished, work on the fortifications was immediately resumed. Of course, stopping water collecting, emptying poop barrels, etc., etc. was not an option. That is why a separation was maintained between the 'Daily Work' and other work, the 'general services', which we see from the dichotomy between these two categories in all lists, albeit not always explicitly expressed.

This way of organising the jobs is confirmed by the instruction issued in 1681 by the Governor, asking the Commander of Galle not to start new projects at the fortifications until the start of the so-called 'quiet period' ('leedige tijdt'): during the busy time of the arrival and departure of the large ships the Company slaves

were much needed for loading and unloading, and the like.³² Some sources indicate that the Company had problems acquiring enough slaves for employment on the defence works. In 1686, Hendrik Adriaen van Rheede – sent to the Dutch East Indies as Commissioner General in 1685 to combat corruption by Company officers – instructed Jacob Jorisz. Pits, governor (1681–1686) of the Company’s settlements in the Coromandel ‘to buy as many male and female slaves as could be had’.³³ He also had to issue an ordinance prohibiting Company personnel from buying slaves for their own account and thus preventing the Company from acquiring enough slaves itself. This could jeopardise the work on the fortifications, while the VOC not only had to fear European competitors, such as England and France, but also faced problems with the kingdom of Kandy. Although the VOC was initially seen by Kandy as a useful ally against Portugal, the relationship between the unequal allies had quickly deteriorated after 1658. As said before, around 1680 the Company tried to establish a policy of appeasement, but this did not immediately lead to success, and the forts and their garrisons remained the main instruments for safeguarding the exploitation of the country.

3.2. ‘General Services’ (*Diverse Diensten*)

There is certainly a strong argument for labelling the work at the fortifications and the so-called ‘Daily Work’ as the essential activities to be executed. Nevertheless, there is much more to be said about it. The Company had seized a large part of the coastal strip of the island by force of arms (expanded to the entire coast after the war in 1766), and had managed to establish itself in a short time as ‘Lord of the Land’ in the occupied territory. But the VOC remained an outsider in many respects. Enterprises in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe could make use of existing migratory labour or could profit from existing labour markets; however, such was not the case in Asia. Although the population on the coast was more varied than in the interior, the coastal strip was also mainly agricultural area – only the new, large coconut tree plantations formed a new phenomenon. In the villages, life mainly remained as it was, which meant that the Company itself, and in an exceptional way, had to organise its necessary workforce. Local craftsmen could be hired, but it was clear from the start that slaves brought in from outside were essential to the existence and survival of the new colonial power in Ceylon.

³² *Generale Missiven* IV, p. 452.

³³ National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8814, Copies of missives and reports, received by Governor-General & Councillors in Batavia, from the respective VOC-offices: Coromandel, p. 29v-30r: ordinance issued by Governor & Councils of Coromandel, 23 January 1687.

When we look at the different tasks, as shown in the various tables, this is very clear. Buffaloes moved the powder mills, so you need herders to watch them, cut grass, etc. The same goes for the horse stables. The governor and the commanders used the carriage in the – space-limited – urban areas, and high envoys were also picked up from the ‘gravets’ with these carriages. Understandably, no staff from the home country could be brought in for the horse stables. A variety of tasks, often of a very simple nature, had to be performed: these are included in the section ‘Various Services’. Hospitals were a new phenomenon: Their own staff (surgeons of various ranks) had to be supplemented with local surgeons, nurses, food preparers and distributors, etc. These were mainly slaves. They are included in the ‘Care’ section, including a few helpers who worked in the various orphanages – another new phenomenon. As can be seen in the lists, slaves also worked in the separate slave hospitals.

The number of apprentices with the blacksmiths and at the carpenters’ yards is striking. It soon became general policy of the Company to train as many craftsmen as possible to supplement the personnel brought in from Europe. This is taught by an example from sources about the wharf island of Onrust (Pulau Onrust) in the Bay of Batavia (Jakarta): Company slaves were trained there by the ship’s carpenters through simple odd jobs.³⁴[1]

To make watertight criteria is difficult: should charcoal burners be included in the group of craftsmen, or elsewhere? As much as possible the short descriptions in the lists are kept, which helps the reader to make their own judgment.

Another striking phenomenon emerges in the section ‘No services/ Incompetent’ (‘Geen diensten/ Onbequaam’). Extensive commentary is not necessary. It is clear that very small children did not yet perform services, that young children already had to cooperate, though to a limited extent (‘learning to carry lime and sand...’), but children aged 12–14 years already fully participated – as was the case everywhere in the past, also in the Netherlands.

Table 2.10 gives a different approach of the total number of Company slaves than I expressed in Table 2.1. This makes it easier to make a comparison with the number of ‘Local Servants’. And more: the original list of Colombo is quite different from that of the other forts (more similar to Table 2.1), and will be updated later. That has little consequence for the final interpretation of the data.

³⁴ Van Dam, *Beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie, Boek 3*, pp. 177–178, 202.

Table 2.10: Company slaves in Ceylon, 1681

	Totals	Admini- stration	Artisans	General services	Daily Work	Care/ Hospital	No service/ Not fit
Matara	44		3	6	27	2	6
Galle	511		71	17	277	19	127
Kalpitiya	58		7	19	17	1	14
Mannar	120		7	12	69	1	31
Jaffna	70		41	17	–	6	6
Trincomalee	148		8	26	72	3	39
Batticaloa	96		22	3	60	2	9
Colombo	1993	34	161	263	1015	43	477
TOTALS	3040	34	320	363	1537	77	709
percentage	100 %	1.1 %	10.5 %	12 %	50.6 %	2.5 %	23.3 %

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, pp. 559–568.

4. A greater picture: Indigenous servants, European & Eurasian personnel and Company slaves

Table 2.11 shows the paid workforce of ‘Inlandse dienaren’, something like ‘indigenous’ servants. Nowadays the term ‘local’ is preferred, but it is actually inaccurate, because it would also include Ceylon-born employees of Eurasian descent. The VOC listed the ‘Oosterlingen’, the military from Java and the Moluccas (capital Ambon) as ‘inlandse dienaren’. They were no Ceylonese ‘inlandse’ soldiers, but they were viewed from the VOC’s position as ruler in the Indonesian Archipelago: there these soldiers were of course ‘indigenous’.

The so-called *lascorines* (the term for indigenous soldiers taken over from the earlier Portuguese administration) are mentioned in a separate list inserted in the documents of VOC 8902. Their main task was maintaining order in the villages; they also surveyed the cinnamon peeling (the peelers had their own *lascorins*) and stood guard at the sentries of the outposts and gravets (sometimes under the authority of a European sergeant or corporal). They were also used by the village chiefs or *majorals* to give the villagers certain orders, for example when it was time to hand over the prescribed part of their harvest, etc. This all took place far beyond the forts, but the Company administrators had a lot to do with this, especially the *dessaves*, the European chiefs at the top of the native governance pyramid.

Table 2.11: *Indigenous Company personnel Ceylon, 1681*

	Tupasses	Javanese, Ambonese soldiers	Sinhalese soldiers	Tamil soldiers	Interpreters	Local surgeons	Local artisans	Sailors	General services	Schoolmasters	Totals
Galle, Matara	17	-	-	-	5	1 ¹	5	16	16	74	134
Colombo	26	41	6	-	4	1	40	-	47	39	204
Kalpitiya	-	-	-	24	1	1	2	28	4	1	61
Mannar	2	-	-	45	4	2	-	1	4	-	58
Jaffna	20	-	-	204	10	2	-	5	6	10	257
Trincomalee	-	-	-	36	3	1	8	-	16	1	65
Batticaloa	5	-	51	-	3	1	9	-	82	-	151
TOTALS ²	70	41	57	309	30	9	64	50	175	125	930

Notes:

1. The surgeon is listed as a Tupas.
 2. The list also mentions the VOC settlement in Madura, South India (main place Tuticorin), with 183 persons.
- Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, pp. 553-554: Corte sommarium van 's Comp^s. inlandtse dienaaren op 't geheel Eijland Ceijlon op Ult^r. februarij 1681 in weesen geweest.

Table 2.11 shows that local people were hired for a variety of tasks. In view of what was said above, the columns 'Local surgeons', 'Local artisans' and 'General services' are the most relevant here. Employees of various origins therefore worked side by side, especially in the craft quarters – in most places Asians formed the majority.

Table 2.12: European Company personnel Ceylon, 1681

	<i>Military</i>	<i>Sailors</i>	<i>Surgeons</i>	<i>Artisans</i>	<i>Commerce, Administration Justice</i>	<i>General Services</i>
Colombo	1061	202	16	73	61	16
Galle & Matara	453	86	7	23	30	10
Jaffna Mannar Kalpitiya	441	78	8	10	36	7
Trincomalee & Batticaloa	261	99	6	20	21	7
Totals	2216	465	37	126	148	40

Source: National Archives, The Hague, VOC 8902, pp. 537–538: Corte sommarium van alle 's Comp^s. dienaaren Ult^o. februarij Anno 1681 op Ceijlon bescheijden.

It is clear that the Company in Ceylon relied heavily on slave labour and on that of hired local labour. If we want to show which groups walked and worked together, we better subtract the soldiers and sailors from the total of European servants (2216), and also subtract soldiers, sailors and schoolmasters (who worked in the villages outside, sometimes far away from the forts) from the indigenous servants (930). Then there remains island-wide 251 'European' personnel who had more or less daily dealings with Company slaves, and some 278 hired indigenous personnel idem.

This however does not complete the picture, for in the households of European and Eurasian personnel an average of about four private slaves worked as domestic personnel engaged in cooking, cleaning, going to the market, emptying the poop barrels, etc. Although I have no precise data on the number of these private slaves, an estimate of about a thousand is not an exaggeration. Table 2.13 gives an impression of who was walking around, within and nearby the VOC forts. However, these numbers exclude a few categories of inhabitants (particularly concerning the population of the larger settlements of Colombo, Galle and Jaffna), namely the family members of the Burghers and other servants of Eurasian origin, and family

members of Muslims and Chetties living in the Old Towns of Colombo and Jaffna, or who lived within the walled town of Galle. Their number is difficult to estimate (500?) and is therefore not included in the overview below.

Of course, the situation in the several fortresses varied. Colombo, for example, had the most local craftsmen and its Old Town also housed the greatest number of Muslim and Chitty residents. Nevertheless, the following calculation may give a good impression of what the daily situation in the VOC settlements in the coastal area of Ceylon looked like:

Table 2.13. VOC settlements in the coastal areas.

Company slaves:	3,040	(66.5 %)
Private slaves	1,000	(21.0 %)
Indigenous servants (without soldiers, sailors, schoolmasters)	278	(6.1 %)
European and Eurasian personnel (without military and sailors)	251	(5.5 %)
Total	4,569	(100 %)

These are the people who interacted with each other on a daily basis. If we could travel through time and take a walk in and around the VOC fortifications, we would become acquainted with a coloured society whose character was determined by the way in which the Company managed to realise its profit motive. Wherever you lived, in or around the VOC forts, or in the countryside: the essence of the exploitation colony was seen everywhere.

CHAPTER 3

Coolies of Shimla: Modern Slavery as Relic of the British Raj

Priya Kapoor

Abstract

Nineteenth century Coolie labour made it possible for the British Raj to establish Shimla as a sanatorium for their colonial functionaries and as summer capital in 1864. Coolie labour during the period of British governance can be traced to 16th century *baegar* labour practices in Himachal Pradesh which the British sought to modify for furthering the colonial project, rather than to eliminate, as archaic and exploitative. This chapter explores how Coolie labour practices transformed in the late 20th century. The Khans of Kashmir, seasonal migrant labour who work for lower wages than local residents have replaced the colonial coolie contemporaneously. Through archival, ethnographic, media and literature research, the chapter raises the question of why this practice, in its various forms, has been so durable. That is, from the time of colonial capitalism to neoliberal capitalism.

Keywords: *baegar*, British India, coolie labour, Shimla, modern slavery, colonialism, postcolonial, unskilled labour



Figure 3.1–2. Contemporary load bearers performing daily Coolie labour. Photos by author and Sunaina Arora during multiple trips to Shimla, from 2016–2022¹:

1. Introduction: From Baegar to Coolie

Since the 16th century, the princely kingdoms of the Hill States of Himachal Pradesh, known also as the Shimla Hill States in 1859–1860 once Shimla became the British summer abode, employed *begari* and *bethu*, indentured and forced forms of labour. *Begaris* and *bethu* performed almost every quotidian activity required to maintain the agricultural lands of their kingdoms, from load bearing to tilling the land. They were called on demand, unpaid, with the exception of gratuities in the form of grain and other essential commodities. *Bethu* were given land owned by landlords or ruling princes to cultivate on their behalf. *Begaris* with meagre material means and high caste bought themselves out of this practice as it disrupted their own

¹ The pictures curated here are of Kashmiri Khans who work in Shimla as coolie labour. From the goods they are carrying on their backs, the Khans have managed to remain relevant during a globalising world order, stemming from the neoliberal capitalist order. Modern day coolies, the Khans are carrying commodity goods such as name brand (all multinational industry-produced commodity goods) TVs, refrigerators, Skechers sports goods, large steel almirahs or cupboards, ostensibly to store more commodity goods. The coolies also carry essential goods, a constant from the time of colonial capitalism, the demand for which has not varied since colonial times: water storage tanks, vegetables, potatoes, coal, ply wood, timber, household goods, scrap etc. The Khans carry these commodities on their backs.

farming cycles of sowing and harvesting. Those who were low caste, with no material means, were subsumed under forced labour practices known as baegar and bethu. This chapter will discuss the social history of the baegar institution that lingered through the British colonial period until the present day despite multiple local reform movements to eradicate it. Coolie labour, a clever modification of begari labour became the backbone of the Empire, emerging from the forced labour practices of the existing Rajas and princes of the Hill States.

The princes of the Hill States – the Barah Thakurais (Twelve Chiefships) and Atharah Thakurais (Eighteen Chiefships) – ceded to the British colonialists on the promise that they be protected from the Gurkhas who were in control of the cis-Sutlej region from 1803–1815.² The British colonialists defeated them in a series of skirmishes known as the Anglo-Gurkha Wars³ from 1814 until 1816. The British, having blocked the power of the Gurkhas in the Hill States, in turn demanded loyalty and cooperation from the vanquished princes drawing upon their resources of begaris for their armies and for sundry, although persistent, labouring needs such as road construction in extreme terrain or load bearing at high altitude. When a series of local protests began against the practice of baegar, the British demand for domesticated⁴ unpaid labour was unfazed. They created conditions whereby both migrant and local labour would be paid nominally, and the now racial term, coolie, came into use for this type of labour practice that seemingly bypassed extant laws against slavery. After a series of protest movements for democratic participation in the princely states, the begari and beth system only found their end in 1948, a year after the sun set on the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent. By that time, the practice of coolie labour was transnational and ubiquitous in the economic transactions of the British administration.

² Thakur, 'The Genesis of Suket Satyagraha and the Birth of Himachal Pradesh', pp. 231–252.

³ The Gurkhas, primarily of the Nepalese Kingdom, had been blocking the British from entry into Tibet for trade therefore the British colonial army had a special animosity against them.

⁴ I am made aware of 19th century colonial parlance by Ezra D. Rashkow's 'Wilding the Domestic: Camp Servants and Glamping in British India', pp. 361–391. The word of note in frequent colonial use is 'domesticated' — in terms of civilising untamed or tribal (barbaric and savage) people who were willing to become part of new modern forms of social organisation — willing to become domestic servants, on the way to becoming civilised. Rigorous domestic service would guarantee a chance at civilised living and acceptance in the new world order.

2. Reasons to historicise and politicise coolie labour

Marked by indentured and forced forms, India was and is a hub of labour in contemporaneous times, as during British colonialism⁵, slavery having been abolished notwithstanding. Historical accounts ascertain that coolie labour was evaluated similarly to slavery as their contracts, considered voluntary, ‘did not spare them from being treated as chattels’.⁶ India continues to promise cheap labour as a keen participant in the circuits of global capital.⁷ This may seem like significant transformation to move from unpaid, colonial, indentured, baegar⁸ labour, since the 16th century in Himachal Pradesh and its capital Shimla, to colonial and neo-colonial forms of coolie labour. Although along with the historical, we need to understand the political-cultural-economic conditions under which such labour becomes available so as to advocate for their rights and visibility in the public and political sphere of the modern postcolonial nation-state. I believe there are connections to wage distribution among unskilled low-waged labour in India with low-waged labour across the world. I also believe that conditions, coercive recruitment patterns, low wages for the most extreme forms of labour, such as loadbearing, construction, etc. have not improved. In many if not all cases, workers in the global economy are almost always migrant or undocumented, from the Global South. This mobile labour is dependent upon waged work to eke out a living and a status in the host society because they are unable to do so in their own home-states, due to custom, caste, religion, war, violence or climate change. Given these connections between the local and global, scholarship on coolie labour must be recognised as global and essential, and more particularly, colonial. An unacknowledged and insufficiently documented form of modern slavery.

⁵ After the Gurkha war, 1814–1816, the British subsumed the administration of the Shimla Hill States under imperial jurisdiction; and while condemning 16th century baegari practices, slowly directed baegari labour for their purposes. Their goal was strategic dominance of the region and to make trade and commerce thrive (Prakash and Sharma, 2014). They needed the baegaris services. For instance, the Shimla-Tibet Road, a treacherous stretch of the upper range of the Himalayas was carved out manually by baegari, coolie labour.

⁶ Tappe and Lindner, ‘Introduction: Global Variants of Bonded Labour’, p. 9.

⁷ Chenoy, Ghosh & Shukla, ‘Skill Development for Accelerating the Manufacturing Sector’; Kalwade, ‘Can Make in India Make India a Manufacturing Hub?’.

⁸ Baegar (pronounced-bay-gaar).

3. The Baegar System in the Shimla Hill States during British rule, 19th–20th Centuries

Scholars of the Indian hill states claim that ‘the begar [sic] system... which had existed in this region since feudal times, was corrupted and made even more oppressive during the colonial rule’.⁹ Shimla Hill States comprise mountainous land lying between two rivers, Tons and Sutlej. British rule would influence the division of this land where the number of the Shimla Hill States would be ‘reduced to twenty-seven.’¹⁰ The baegari system of labour was established for some of the following reasons: one, the extreme geography of the land made this human labour a necessity;¹¹ two, for political power, such as for marriage, death or other communal ceremonies. Negi surmises that with both practical and political necessities of this type of labour force, there were multiple manifestations of baegaris. Athwara baegaris took care of personal service; Hella baegaris were designated for public works; Gaonsar baegaris were allotted for political endeavours, such as carrying people, carrying personal belongings, aiding in tours, etc. There was also the Beth System for serfs/baegaris on the lowest social rung – a system of indentured labour, where people were transferred from one person/family to another ‘like cattle’.¹² Once the British won the Hill States in battle, the demarcations of baegari labour did not hold as the priorities of the Raj were expansionist and extractive-ist.

The subsequent growth and development of Shimla would result in a rise in demand for labour.¹³ The local Rajas or chieftains, in return for their titles and lands, provided their baegari labour for all development ventures to build Shimla and its environs as the summer capital of the Raj. The baegaris, under British rule transitioned to *coolies* for projects that were on a large scale and binding in nature. The Gurkhas, vanquished residents from the 1814–1816 wars with the British, also served as labour during the construction of the Hindustan-Tibet Road. The construction project, sanctioned in 1850 by British Governor-General Lord Dalhousie (1848–56), of the Shimla-Tibet Road¹⁴ (known too as the Hindustan-Tibet Road or

⁹ Negi, ‘The Begar System in the Shimla Hill States During the British Period’, p. 693.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Surefooted non-human options to cart goods have always been few for the Himalayan region. Some alternate means of transport were ponies, asses and mules; inflated skins and rafts were made for crossing rivers; Bhardwaj and Sharma, ‘The Old Hindustan Tibet Road and Kotgarh: 1815–1947’.

¹² Negi, ‘The Begar System in the Shimla Hill States During the British Period’, p. 695.

¹³ Bhardwaj and Sharma, ‘The Old Hindustan Tibet Road and Kotgarh: 1815–1947’.

¹⁴ This roadway was carved for the longest stretch out of rock through the Himalayan range – all labour was provided by indentured baegaris, coolies or the Gurkhas. Several construction workers fell to their death or died in road-making pursuits. The roadway was re-constructed during India’s war with China in 1962 where both life and money were dearly expended. Blogger Harish Kapadia, who

Highway) became an important venture, as an artery connecting several trading routes in the Himalayan region. Importantly, commerce and exchange were further facilitated through its existence as routes to connect Himachal with Tibet were solidified. Many *coolies* lost their lives carving out the highway from Himalayan rock in harsh weather conditions.

At the same time, political and grassroots opposition to indentured and forced labour began to gain momentum in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Kashmir, as a result of political awareness and the establishment of various 'regional, social and political organizations.'¹⁵ The British Indian Government would respond primarily with the Model Policy¹⁶ which introduced reforms to the *baegar* and *beth* systems. Eventually, in May 1948, after Independence from the British (citing Development Profile of Himachal Pradesh, 1985) the *baegar* system would be abolished in its original form. On the face of it, the British supported the abolishment of *baegar* but they maintained *coolie* labour which was a type of reform of *baegar* as the *coolies* would be paid nominally for their work. *Baegar* essentially lived on, even after its public condemnation, as a binding variation, during colonial times.

4. Research rationale: Institutionalising the term *coolie* and *coolie* labour

This chapter is driven by an interest in the *baegar* system endemic among agricultural communities in pre-British India, with a particular interest in Himachal Pradesh, although *baegar* labour practices were equally prevalent in the adjoining mountain states of Uttarakhand and Kashmir, in the early 16th century. What had remained a singular regional practice for a few centuries caught the eye of the colonial master for the benefits it would bring to the labouring needs of the Empire. The problem was that the custom of *baegar* had begun to gather the ire of protesting local populations in the Himalayan region in the 19th century under the leadership of several reformers such as J.E. Stokes, other prominent citizens and local leaders. Juxtaposed to this uprising were urgent and attendant labour shortages in England, which gave way to institutionalisation of *coolie*-labour in the Shimla Hills during

trekked through the Himalayan road, writes that at 'Jeori-where a fork leads to Sarahan-lies a memorial to the 122 men who died [emphasis mine] during its construction' (<https://www.harishkapadia.com/short-articles/hindustan-tibet-road/>).

¹⁵ Negi, 'The Begar System in the Shimla Hill States During the British Period', p. 696.

¹⁶ The 'Model Policy' was adopted by the rulers of Shimla Hill States after its approval by the Crown Representative in October, 1944. With its adoption, all forms of unpaid forced labour were abolished forthwith. Nothing really changed in practical terms until India formed anti-*baegari* legislation in 1948, a year after the ousting of the British.

British colonisation. This leads up to the modern practice of *coolies* or unorganised load bearers called Khans¹⁷ of the 20th century in late modernity (see footnote and photos at the start of the chapter).

After global decrees to ban Trans-Atlantic slavery, it became especially attractive for Empire to sustain a domestic and transnational coolie labour pool, not yet scrutinised for its morality by other sovereign nations. Consequently, coolie labour, emergent from *baegar*, could uphold colonial power for the British Empire. Colonial labour entailing building of railroads, plantation agriculture, sea-faring Trans-Atlantic slavery was banned due to global pressure, although coolie labor was not yet banned.

Labour historians can be credited with drawing our 'attention to the historical shifts within low status work, also 'stigmatized' labour as among Dalit castes and practices that remain un-scrutinised and neglected such as certain forms of undocumented slavery.¹⁸ The understanding of slavery as global, dynamic, and discursive moved labour scholars' scrutiny from trans-Atlantic slavery (1501–1867) as the only form of slavery to be studied, to varied forms of servitude and entrapment in parts of the colonial and postcolonial world.¹⁹ Given this reality, labour historians now eschew the established social science models derived from studying slavery in 19th-century America. The Shimla *Coolies* are a 'micro-spatial history'²⁰ that has domestic particularities but connects with multiple instances of global slavery that is a consequence of Empire building.

For this study, I refer to those who worked as unskilled labour, and specifically as load bearers during British times, as *coolies*, a term still in use today in Shimla although considered taboo, racial, and uttered by locals with caution lest certain castes take offense. The term *coolie* when spoken uncritically and without irony, often betrays the user's class standing and privilege.²¹ I refer, in this chapter, to unskilled, load bearing work as *coolie labour* while referring to the Kashmiri migrants, who are known as Khans and work as primary load bearers in Shimla. Here, *coolie* is used as an adjective while labour is the verb marking coolies' role and function of performing back-breaking work on the Himalayan terrain.

Institutionalising, and in the process complicating, this racial appellation is the presence of the Shimla Municipal Authorities²², one of the oldest Municipal, civic

¹⁷ Khan in Hindi and Urdu is an honorific for a chieftain, landlord or nobleman.

¹⁸ Jha, 'Doing 'Coolie' Work in a 'Gentlemanly' Way', p. 6.

¹⁹ Burnard, *Writing the History of Global Slavery*; Bales, *Disposable People*; Bales, 'Unlocking the Statistics of Slavery'.

²⁰ Burnard, *Writing the History of Global Slavery*.

²¹ Most upper castes were exempt or able to buy out their bondage from *baegar* work. The *baegaris* then were mostly recruited from lower castes or Dalit castes.

²² The Municipal Corporation of Shimla was founded in 1822 after the first British colonial home was constructed in the hills in 1822. The first form of civic governance that emerged was policing. Water

government offices in the country, charged with registering unskilled labour that seasonally migrates to Shimla. Certain paperwork is filled out to formalise their migrant load bearing status. One of the required forms is titled *Coolie Registration* with a small fee to earn *coolies* a badge, and the other form allows anyone asking for coolie status for access to Labour Hostels built during the time of the British Raj. Both forms are attached to the end of this chapter. A recent change in governance of migrant labour now requires load bearers to report to the Police offices in Shimla. The fall of Babri Masjid in 1992, followed by a Hindutva nationalist central government, triggered the monitoring of the movement and migration of all Muslims leaving Kashmir to work seasonally in Himachal Pradesh (Irfan, blog 2013). Whereas in colonial times, the Shimla Municipality would register coolie labour, primarily Muslim male Kashmiri labour, today registers are with the Shimla Police authorities.

The durability and transformability of forced or near-forced labour from century to century, through different economic regimes: the Feudal, the Colonial and the Neoliberal, despite changing world politics, time periods and context, is worthy of examination. How has the practice changed and endured over the years despite global condemnation of all forms of slavery, active civil society institutions' advocacy for human rights and equitable labour laws in the country? Does unorganised labour in free trade (read: neoliberal) economies become invisible?

5. Method of data gathering

The data gathering process involved excavating extant archives at the State headquarters in Shimla from 2011–2013 and archives downloaded from online historian-led archive projects. In addition, the study excavates communication and media artifacts – a novel, films, blogs, photographs and fieldwork by visiting Shimla on many occasions, and conducting informal and ethnographic interviews to understand current labour relations between the *employers* of commercial businesses and services and the waged, *employed* load bearers – the Kashmiri Khans or *coolies*. The blogs are valuable narratives of ordinary folk. Blogs are the only freely accessible citizen accounts by those who have associations with Shimla, and the Himalayan mountains, having resided there for some formative years of their lives.

sources, an essential civic matter, became regulated in 1830 when William Bentick, the Governor-General was on a visit. The constitution of the Shimla Municipal Committee was formalised in December 1851 making it the oldest Municipal body in pre-independent undivided Punjab. (Municipal Corporation Shimla, retrieved Feb 10, 2024, <https://shimlamc.hp.gov.in/News/Index/33>)

6. The Municipal Archives in Shimla, 2011, 2012, 2013

Archives open up a world of contextual clarity to understand how varied and difficult the job of forced labour was in the Shimla Hills. The Municipal Archives in Shimla are located in a residential area downhill near the Chief Minister's official residence in Shimla and next to a flowing creek that brings down the garbage carelessly tossed in by residents and passersby, as well as the effluents from open sewage lines in the town. The flowing water creates a dampness that makes the files vulnerable to damage. These precarious, stacked and ordered files are documents to disputes between local village folk, trying to talk back to colonial functionaries. In addition, the archives yield information on the extraction of goods and forest resources out of the Shimla Hills: timber, trees lining highways, petroleum, railway services for passengers and carting goods, in particular potatoes and coal. Archival municipal files date from the early 1900s until the 1940s when colonial rule in India was well established. Ferment and dissension among citizens and disparate religious communities was evident through communal references in the archives. The officers for this archive repeatedly reminded me that the British took away the 'records of value' to Britain after 1947 and that I should visit the British Archives in London. I persisted in plumbing the content of the provincial archives after the exit of the British Raj in 1947, and the sort of story I could glean from the files remaining. Therefore, my piecing together of imperial history may come across as an assemblage, inconsistent and discontinuous, often overcoming the strict protocols of history as a seamless discourse.²³

7. Colonial Commodities in the archives: Petrol, coal, timber, potatoes, raw materials

British involvement in fossil forms of fuel is marked by references to early British fuel companies that made the transportation of raw materials efficacious from their point of origin to a maritime port such as Mumbai, Kolkata or Chennai (known in the 19th century as Bombay, Calcutta and Madras respectively). Establishment of companies with names widely recognised today served several roles for the Empire – they helped with marketing the colonial as a 'brand' that spelled reliability ('*British business as reliable*') and generated revenue from selling fuel. Establishing some of the first public 'multinational' companies for commodities from colonies around the world also became the hallmark of the Raj's form of control and colonial rule. References in the archive holdings, to Burmah Shell, to major roadways and

²³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; Kale, *Fragments of Empire*.

railway lines, in the hill states of Northern India, are noteworthy. Key resources from the hills, namely coal and potatoes needed transportation, fuel and railroads. Echoing contemporary times, the emergent transnational (Burmah Shell) could not exist without the domestic and the local (coal extraction and potato cultivation).

A letter exchange between two British engineers in-charge of the Hindustan-Tibet highway plays out an explosive scenario where the villagers stake their claim to the fallen trees and timber along the path of the intended highway. The people of the village did not ask for a highway to be built nor for the vegetation to be felled for the sake of road construction. The administrators and engineers did not want to honour their request, and lay their own claim on the timber, reflective in their dictate – ‘labour and land were placed free of remuneration at the disposal of the British Government’. The particularities of what should be paid or not in the process of building the roads are quibbled in this note between the engineers who are superior and the junior engineers respectively. They both agree on the lack of British liability in this process. That is, the securing of the trees and the cost of labour ought to be defrayed by another party, namely the residents of the villages settled between the stretch of highway from Shimla to Solan. There is mention of the stately deodars, native to the Himalaya, that were disproportionately felled during this time, in the nineteenth century. Coniferous varieties were being planted in their stead. This has been a devastating British legacy as the transplanted non-native varieties of pines, that reminded the colonial expatriates of their homeland, decimated the native oak and deodar varieties leading to grave environmental consequences for the 21st century. The file is dated September 28, 1873 so it is in consonance with the time that coolie labour was being sought to clear-fell old growth trees. In reading between the lines, coolie labour was most likely employed to facilitate the transportation of the trees and the construction of the roads.

There is a stony silence maintained in the municipal files about any form of human agency mobilised for the coal that is to be transported, the roads that are to be built, or the deodars that have to be cut for timber, replantation of trees, hauling timber to be floated on the river and the labouring bodies it takes to be connected to the railroad. This silence about how labour happens, or human agency, further piques my interest in the persistence of coolie labour in Himachal. The scenario of the deodar trees and the sparring engineers displays the role that bureaucracy played in provincial lands such as Shimla as British interests in the region became more keyed on commerce and development of infrastructure to facilitate the movement of goods from the Shimla Hills to chief national ports. A story of the Hill states Rajas vanquished by the British reveals itself. The archived municipal files bring to life, the rule and vanquishment of Rajas, and the hapless denizens of Himachal villages as they assert agency in times of brute suppression, and the

sly encroachment, through bureaucracy, of British authority. British governance always overtook local resources, rather than share them with indigenous communities, at each step of the way of developing the state when they laid rail tracks, or roads, or any form of transport. The British functionaries couched their inroads into native owned territory as their 'right to be there'.

8. *Coolie* as a linguistic portal for all subaltern populations

The term *coolie*, now understood as a racial slur, came to be a common way to refer to entire subaltern populations, subjects of the British Empire, whether or not they served as unskilled labour. The origin of the term emerges from a quest for labouring needs in the colonial era. *Coolie* mainly served as a linguistic construct as coolies were ruled and governed by labour laws and policies imposed by a colonising regime in the 19th and 20th centuries. Like scholars before me, in particular Balachandran (2011),²⁴ my reference to coolie pulls together the traditional forms of labour that is indentured but also the forever mobile and unregulated labour of the modern *coolie* who still walks in search of jobs of portage on the streets and alleyways of the Shimla hills, suggesting a certain 'un-freedom' that has lingered in contemporary life.

One can gauge the ubiquity of the term *coolie*, as being a colonial subject was grounds enough to be known as one. In the 19th century, Chinese and Japanese labour in America were also considered *coolies*. Abraham Lincoln, in 1862, signed into law that 'all Chinese subjects leaving China' were regarded as *coolies*, embodying 'labourers in oriental countries, whatever may be their condition'.²⁵

The coolie labour of chief interest to me had been local and indentured within India during Empire. The literature suggests that *coolie* or *coolies* were a linguistic portal which named a colonial practice that helped the British transport heavy loads and perform back breaking labour for no cost at all in all their colonies, not just in Shimla, the urban locality of this research study and summer capital of the Empire from 1864 until 1947. The term coolie then does not signify one community, or ethnicity of a person but it works as a floating signifier for an owner or an employer, a template that takes the shape of a task, a place, or a moment in time. Whether the Raja of a small kingdom pledged the lives of their subjects, at the behest of the colonial rulers, or a middle-man rounded up their fellow villagers to sail on a ship to or from the islands – the West Indies or the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius, Malay peninsula, others, that the British needed to build on or grow plantations

²⁴ Balachandran, 'Making Coolies, (Un)making Worker'.

²⁵ Cited in Balachandran, 'Making Coolies, (Un)making Worker', p. 270.

on, for the purposes of subjugating people, they were universally known as *coolies*. As such *coolies* then became an established institution, and presence, to forward the project of Empire so as to fulfil all its infrastructural needs of building roads, railroads, cutting down forests, and as plantation labour growing cash crops like sugar cane, coffee, cocoa and tea. The domestic *coolies* serviced the country from the inside whereas the transnational *coolies* sacrificed their homes, families and communities to obey the rules of setting up colonies.

Those who were coerced or persuaded to leave home shores were unaware of their position and identity, and of India as a British colony, a recruiting ground for coolie labour. Historical records reveal: ‘the conditions under which the coolies leave India, the terms of the indentures, the legislation of the Colonies, combine to wean the coolie from his Indian home: consequently, the fittest not only survive but settle down to live in the colony, ultimately competing successfully with both the whites and indigenous natives’.²⁶

9. In the Literary Imagination: *The Coolie* by Mulk Raj Anand

Popular culture, especially literature and film have immeasurable impact upon us such that these culturally impacted memories embed in us to inform our desires, beliefs, and a cache of stereotypes. Furthermore, these memories shape our tastes and offer us a sense of who we are or want to be. Intercultural Communication scholars Martin and Nakayama (2011) believe we must be sensitive to the influences of cultural artifacts because ‘for so many of us, the world exists through popular culture’.²⁷

Despite colonialism and its attendant detractors in the literary world, there weren’t many novelists²⁸ or poets who dealt with the figure of the coolie or their treatment at the hands of the imperial functionaries and their families in the 19th century or early 20th century. In that respect Mulk Raj Anand, an Indian-Anglian writer is a unique literary figure who brings out the pathos, struggle, irony and

²⁶ Pradhan, *Empire in the Hills*, p. 2.

²⁷ Martin and Nakayama, ‘Intercultural Communication and Dialectics Revisited’, p. 202.

²⁸ Saloni and Deshingkar, ‘Book review: Praveen Kumar Jha, *Coolie Lines*’, 324–326. A recent novel, Praveen Kumar Jha’s, *Coolie Lines*, 2019, written in Hindi, is a reminder contract coolie labour, the *Girimitiyas* (a corruption of the English ‘agreement’) of Bihar, was taken to other colonies of the British Empire, the Caribbean, Mauritius, Fiji, Surinam, East Africa, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, North America and the Netherlands. Despite the recency of this book published in 2019 beginning with the sentence that translates as—travellers on a ship who never returned—literary critics do not label the migration as slavery related. They describe *Girimitiyas*’ treatment (physical and mental torture by employers), poor conditions of travel and ultimate abode as ‘feudal’, ‘contractual migration’, and slave-like’ (Saloni).

pathetic reliance of the colonial state and Empire for mobility of its personal and commodity goods on a mere mortal – the coolie, in his novel of the same name. During Pre-partition India, coolies were seamen, plantation workers, factory workers, hand-pulled rickshaw bearers, highway construction workers and load bearers. The next popular cultural artifact that dealt with similar cathartic tropes was ‘Coolie’, the Hindi language film in 1983 that became an instant blockbuster. The director, Manmohan Desai and protagonist, legendary actor, Amitabh Bachchan, named Iqbal Aslam Khan in the film experienced a sharp rise in their popularity as the working class and a newly emerging middle-class saw the corruption of the post-colonial state that worked very much like Empire in not being able to provide each citizen with equal rights, dignity, status and *roti-kapada aur makaan* (the basics of food-clothing-shelter) essential to a democracy. Amitabh Bachchan (Iqbal Aslam Khan) who embodied the *angry young man* provided a way for the contemporary viewing public to attend to their own anger toward corrupt politicians and the state that could not control inflation nor establish institutions that upheld the rights and desires of its citizens. Desai, the producer and director of the film, provided all the elements of a *masala* film, a genre he represents well, in his oeuvre.²⁹

The box office achievement of *Coolie* was followed by a copycat 1995 version with actors Govinda and Karishma Kapoor, better known for their dance moves than method acting. A 2020 version of the film titled *Coolie no. 1* was released by the director David Dhavan, of the 1995 version, who decided to cast his own son, Varun Dhavan, as the lead actor in the later 2020 version with actor Sara Ali Khan. Some of these films held a slim social justice message, and built upon a formulaic comedy of errors employing popular actors. Another film to be released in 2025 in the Tamil language, also titled *Coolie*, starring superstar from South India, Rajnikant, tackled the theme of long-term vendetta, departing completely from India’s colonial history.

Anand wrote the iconic novel ‘Coolie’ (1936) at the heels of his first novel, ‘Untouchable’ (1935), foregrounding ills of colonial capitalism such as exploitative labour, the plight of the downtrodden, the treatment of lower classes and castes, that had seeped into and exacerbated the already deep differences in Indian social, cultural and economic life for the urban and rural working poor. Scholars have called the novel practical fiction.³⁰ Anand is often compared for his social realism with Charles Dickens and John Steinbeck. Anand and Dickens effectively employ a telescopic view to capture the social ills of colonial Indian society, and colonial capitalism that it seemed to have willingly adopted. Anand’s childhood was rocked too when he witnessed the momentous and monumental incident of the Jallianwala

²⁹ Pendakur, *Indian Popular Cinema*.

³⁰ Shende and Deshmuk, ‘Portrayal of the Marginalized Class in Mulk Raj Anand’s Novel *Coolie*’, p. 165.

Bagh massacre, by British troops in Amritsar where he was arrested for cutting a curfew. 'A strong feeling of indignation against the British was stoked by all these events'.³¹ We see in Anand a distaste for colonial power and how it corrupts relations among social classes within the fabric of a country. This form of fractured social relationships presages how free labour regimes of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism would cannibalise modern social hierarchies, already in the throes of inequality, class wars and race/caste/religious riots in contemporary India.

Coolie (1936) takes us through the different horrors and trials of an adolescent boy, who at the young age of 14 and unschooled, is bequeathed to his chaprasi (errand do-er) uncle's office supervisor on the appeal that he would be well taken care of and given plentiful food. Neither promise was kept. As a long list of broken promises and poor treatment by a rich family that want a young domestic servant to take on the burden of *all* housework, the novel-form sets the tone of the story, set in different locales, all of which are known for exploitative labour practices representative of different colonial modern industries and walks of life that needed scrutiny and reform.

Munoo, the newly orphaned boy from Kangra (located in the state of Himachal Pradesh), moves to the city as domestic help. Kangra, an ancient valley of the Himalayas is known well for the flight and migration of its young productive-aged men to the plains. His uncle entrusts him to an accountant who gives him the corner portion of his kitchen to sleep on and does not treat him with respect. Munoo finally runs away after he is mercilessly beaten because he mistakenly bites the accountant's daughter while imitating a monkey in child-like play. Munoo is taken in as a worker by a kind man Prabha Dayal who owns a chutney factory. Munoo is again left to fend for himself, homeless and hungry when Prabha is defrauded by his business partner. Munoo secures a job at a large cotton mill owned by a British expatriate. The foreman of the mill treats the workers or coolies cruelly, and we hear the term coolie used as a pejorative for all unskilled workers. The author completes the cycle of horrors that Munoo faces by transporting him to the foothills of the Himalayas in the employ of Mrs. Mainwaring as her personal rickshaw puller. Having contracted tuberculosis, Munoo dies seeing familiar mountains as in his birthplace, Kangra, at the ripe young age of 15. Mulk Raj Anand hastens Munoo's death while he is still an adolescent but that does not mean that Munoo gathers fewer experiences than a grown man. He, after all, lives the life of a coolie – a man who must work hard unquestioningly, to die penniless. Anand's empathy for the lives of the underclass in colonial times is quite remarkable. In the novel we finally get an insight into the life and identity of a coolie. Munoo is not nameless and hapless but he is human and given that precarious vulnerability, doesn't survive the onslaught of colonial capitalism. He died of TB at 15.

³¹ Kumar Jha, *Coolie Lines*.

Dewsbury (1936), a critic of Anand's novels, and a contemporary, writes enigmatically, 'it is obvious that present evils must be corrected – evils of exploitation and graft'.³² As a colonial critic and writer, Dewsbury too is not able to name the ever present 'evil,' the problem of poverty, colonial depravity and the custom of coolie labour and one feels that it's almost an act of courage that Anand does. Anand observes, indeed presages, a new society of Indians who are fast emerging as elite and are proxy of colonial officers who create their own arbitrary rules for governing people and gathering labour for menial and other domestic tasks. A society of dual class categories of rich and poor exist, where the rich depend on the poor for essential labour. The poor are hopeless outcasts with lives they have no control over.

In this vein, there is a well circulated oral rendition of a pall bearer who carried a Lady of high social standing to a City Ball in Shimla, and waited in the Himalayan snow to transport her back to her abode. The Lady of high status stayed longer than planned and the coolie froze to his death, waiting for the evening festivities to end, outside the ballroom on a cold winter night (retold to me by a longtime resident in Shimla, July, 2015). This tale is narrated by more than one old timer in Shimla reminiscing on the gaping wide chasm in the socio-economic stature between the coloniser and the local serviceperson. Some documents show that load and pall bearers were from Sirmaur, a rugged mountainous district of the state of Himachal Pradesh. The Sirmauri coolie was deemed to be tougher, stronger, than the men from the lower lying regions in the state. These qualitative evaluations of coolie labour changed with availability however.

10. The *Coolie* and Shimla: Intertwined past and present

Coolies in this day and age might seem an anachronism³³ but I grew up in the presence of this institution as a young person, in the 1980s and 1990s as indispensable load bearers and porters abounded in postcolonial Shimla, my parents' hometown. During our summer break from school the family travelled to Shimla from Delhi, the capital of modern India. My maternal grandfather, Ram Nath Malhotra, practiced

³² Dewsbury, 'A Review of The Coolie', p. 22.

³³ During the British Raj, the figure of the *Coolie* was ubiquitous as the load bearer, the indentured labourer who could not refuse service to the colonial Master. Today they are replaced by migrants who are not recognised as a diaspora, a displaced people from a state, Kashmir, that has seen violent border crossings and military action severely disrupting civilian life in the Valley since 1989. The Kashmiri Khans contribute to the need of transporting goods within mountainous locales, more particularly within this postcolonial *hill station* city of Shimla. With the passage of Article 370 Kashmir, a contested state for which India has locked horns with Pakistan since the Partition of 1947 their migration and participation in the hill economy is important to document.

law in the British High Court in Shimla, pre-independence and post-independence, where he³⁴, on occasion, employed coolie labour to transport law books from the High Court to his office study at home, back and forth several times a day. At the age of 44, he moved the family, wife and seven children, to Shimla, from Lahore (now in Pakistan), after the Punjab was rent in two during India's partition and freedom from British Rule in 1947, a bitter-sweet triumph for all warring sides. Even before India was partitioned violently and without citizen consent, in August, 1947, my grandfather had frequented the Shimla High Court, traveling there from Lahore, the capital of undivided Punjab. Although a swift, energetic walker, he sometimes hired hand-pulled rickshaws if he ventured further and higher than his usual ambit, on the sharp Himalayan inclines until that painstaking service slowly died out in the late 1970s. Childhood recollections return me to Shimla's past, accompanying a feeling of disconnect that determines how its urban status as a modern city does not inhere.

The foundation of Shimla derives from a sense of colonial British wonder at the picturesque Himalayan³⁵ landscape, its likeness to British topography and a chance to escape the scourge of the heat wave in the plains, a certain desperation to find solace and regain their health. Pradhan (1997) calls the clever foundation of hill stations in different parts of India, a 'liminal zone' as the colonials negotiated extreme differences, colonial seclusion, and the centre with the marginal.³⁶ Observing the flora namely, holly, ferns, mint, analogous to the Northern Hemisphere made it seem like Europe, not Asia. Localities on the hills were named in the image of known environs, Snowdon, Shrubbery, Wenlock, and Annandale'.³⁷

The likeness of Shimla to the European landscape did not automatically render it a desirable or strategic locale as an extension of the Empire. Kennedy has written, 'The picturesque was an interpretive mechanism that allowed the British to infuse an unfamiliar geography with meaning'.³⁸ Physical interventions by the British were needed before the Himalayan landscape could be moulded and shaped as a

³⁴ All commercial and business interests employ coolie labour. Housewives shopping for household goods will employ them too, on a casual basis. In the neoliberal economy, as during colonial times, Shimla's reliance on coolie labour is normalised.

³⁵ While the British were indeed wonderstruck by the majesty of the Himalayas and how akin to the European landscape it was, the British also marked their presence by honouring key buildings with the names of the colonisers, the Governor-Generals – the iconic post office in Shimla retained the name of Lord Combermere, the Bentick Castle, Shimla, retains Lord William Bentick's name, Trevor Tank in Mount Abu and Wenlock Downs in Ootacamund are 'some of the leading imperial representatives who governed these places and played important roles in spreading the imperial hegemony' (Pradhan, 2017, pp. 6–7).

³⁶ Pradhan, *Empire in the Hills*, p. 2.

³⁷ Pradhan, *Empire in the Hills*, p. 6.

³⁸ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, p. 40.

picturesque English town for liveability. Studies show that Shimla's status gradually elevated in three stages; first, as a sanatorium for the British expatriate as 'high refuge,' then as hill station, and as summer capital of the British Empire in 1964.³⁹ 'Though these towns [Shimla and other hill stations] were located at elevations of six to eight thousand feet, the appellation 'hill station' indicates 'an etymological effort to minimize the disturbing implications of the sublime.... To speak of hill stations rather than mountain stations rhetorically scaled back the overwhelming force of the landscape.'⁴⁰ In this way, Shimla never reached its potential of 'sublime' during its otherwise strategic position as summer capital for the British Raj.

Shimla, initially popular for the temple of Goddess Deity Shyamala Devi, was founded by the British in 1819 after the Gorkha war, 1814–1816. Scottish civil servant Charles Pratt Kennedy constructed the first summer home in 1822 (Govt. of HP, 2023). Once Shimla became the summer capital in 1864 the need for moving goods from the plains to the mountains and from the mountains to the plains and back to England became regular and acute. Labouring Himachalis deemed *strong*, such as from the mountainous regions of Sirmaur district, were recruited in adherence to baegar laws, by the local Raja to work for free when the need arose. This recruitment pattern, aided by extant baegar laws, made the mobility of labor more facile. These baegar laws that gave the small village town of Shamala Devi nestled in the Shimla Hills the status of a British governed hill station – one of multiple hill resorts that gave respite to the British from the heat of the plains. In Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, the old man introduces himself at Kim's behest. "I came by Kulu – from beyond the Kailas [mountain known as Lord Shiv's abode]...From the hills where' – he sighed – 'the air and water are fresh and cool.'⁴¹ The gaiety and revelry of the mountains is fabled in known and quotidian literature from the 19th and 20th century, in particular Rudyard Kipling's classic *Kim*. Shimla was known as the Queen of the hill stations. Balls, picnics, theatre productions and late-night parties easily found their place there so the Europeans could mingle. Shimla's many social activities served as a highlight to thrill the expatriate British who came there for respite and recreation.

³⁹ Banerjee, 'Not Altogether Unpicturesque'.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, pp. 46–47, in Banerjee, 'Not Altogether Unpicturesque'.

⁴¹ Kipling, *Kim*, p. 4.

11. Intrusions, welcome and unwelcomed

As Shimla grew in its urban spaces, the officers of the Raj came to rely increasingly on services that they brought from the plains, such as their retinue of ‘servants, traders, mercantile groups, artisans, clothiers, tailors...lower-level officials...’⁴² Over time, the summer capital could no longer uphold the nostalgia of a congestion-free location and ended up looking less like their hometown in Britain.⁴³ The service economy grew along with the urban spaces and domestic labour was drawn from the neighbouring hill stations and stations at lower altitude but further away from Shimla such as Dalhousie, Darjeeling, Mussourie, and more:

The seasonal influx of visitors created a heavy demand for domestic servants, including khitmatgars (butlers or head waiters), khansamahs (cooks), malis (gardeners), dhobis (washermen), bheestis (water carriers), jhampanis (coolies [sic] who carried sedan chairs and later pulled rickshaws), mehtars (sweepers), and others. While many visitors brought personal servants with them from the plains, all but a few depended on local peoples for menial tasks. According to Charles Dilke, a “small family” in Simla [sic] required the services of “*three body servants, two cooks, one butler, two grooms, two gardeners, two messengers, two nurses, two washermen, two water-carriers, thirteen jampan-men, one sweeper, one lamp-cleaner, and one boy . . . or thirty-five in all* [emphasis mine].” When the *Times* war correspondent William Howard Russell and a friend rented a house in Simla, they felt obliged to employ thirty servants [emphasis mine], including ten wood-cutters. Even transport within the station had surprisingly large labor ramifications. Mrs. Robert Moss King marveled at the sight of *two hundred dandies (hammocklike vehicles), six hundred coolies (to carry the dandies), one hundred ponies, and one hundred syces (grooms)* [emphasis mine] crammed together outside the Anglican church in Mussoorie on Sunday.⁴⁴

The above quotation shows that reliance on labour for maintenance of the hill stations was clearly perceived as a necessity but their presence and their physical residence in Shimla and other exclusive mountain towns was unwelcome. Shimla’s urbanisation provided the opportunity to exploit indigenous labour, but to also bring labour from adjoining villages, from other hill stations and the Himalayan states of Kashmir and Uttarakhand. Carrying heavy loads on their backs or portage became the most sought-after service. The labourers lived in close quarters in tiny tenements around the commercial spaces of Shimla. The administration constructed just a few labour hostels in Shimla and coolie labour had to apply

⁴² Pradhan, ‘Empire in the Hills’, p. 89.

⁴³ Pradhan, *Empire in the Hills*.

⁴⁴ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, p. 177.

for residence using the form titled *Annexure B, Form of Application*, attached at the end of this chapter (Fig. 3.3). Their habitations were perceived as vectors of disease, crime and revolt, presumably due to overcrowding, close-in and shared living arrangements. Kennedy (1996) has referred to Rudyard Kipling's description of the Shimla bazaar as a 'rabbit-warren' where anyone could give the police the slip which suggests 'the sense of disorder and danger they evoked.'⁴⁵

While Shimla never became a home to the British colonial administrators, the coolie labour from adjoining areas and from Kashmir made Shimla a convention of work, a 'habit' or 'tradition of migration' that was passed down from generation to generation. Raja Hari Singh, the controversial Kashmiri king at the time of partition, finally ended his reign in 1952 when his son Karan Singh was appointed the head-of-state, and later Governor, as monarchy was abolished after 1947. Karan Singh's mother, Hari Singh's wife, was from Kangra, a district in Himachal Pradesh. Between the 1930s–1950s, several agriculturalists escaped baegar laws of Hari Singh's rule. Given the many cultural links between the Himalayan states it was no surprise that Kashmiri labour found Shimla to be a home.

12. Social Capital Theory as conceptual framework for coolie migration from Kashmir

Social capital theories work in this project as migrants move to destinations that can provide networks and links for waged work. While social capital provides an overarching framework to understand coolie labour there are other reasons too that draw Kashmiris to Shimla. The aspects that contribute to making Shimla a conducive destination are: liveability of the city, the notion of 'what it takes to survive' due to second or third generation familiarity and the ability to get a job without an in-between contractor. Simply 'a habit' or family convention of leaving native homes to move to another state or country also contributes to an easy passage for migrants.

A blog on Shimla mentions how a currently practicing coolie's grandfather found it liberating to leave Kashmir at will, thereby escaping the indentured labour, baegari, owed to the reigning monarch of the state. The ability to reside without expense, and to follow one's religious practices gives a migrant great support and comfort.⁴⁶

Ten thousand Kashmiris from one district of Kashmir, Zawalgham, have made the important link between Kashmir and Shimla over two generations since the Maharaja of Kashmir practiced the baegari system. Ironically, coolie labour originates in the practices of the baegar system. They had an incentive to maintain the

⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, p. 177.

⁴⁶ Kashmir Life, Blog, 25 November 2013.

link due to the increasing militancy in the Kashmir valley that all young people wanted to avoid. Together they raised money to buy and bring back in use two mosques that had been turned into stables over the past few decades. As workers the Khans feel safe even at night, unlike in Kashmir, and they are able to vote during elections. Of late, given the disturbances in Kashmir and being Islamic, the local police have asked them to come in and register at the police station. This non-voluntary registry is unlike anything the Kashmiri migrants have seen before in Himachal Pradesh. This new Hindutva-inspired practice does not seem to perturb them overtly, for now.⁴⁷

Bruslé's (2008) research on migration from the hill districts of Nepal to the plains of India yields a certain understanding about the conditions under which the Kashmiri Khans travel to neighbouring Himachal Pradesh to perform coolie work.⁴⁸ The transnational social spaces between Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh are not new because the persistent, continual comings and goings of Kashmiri labour (porters and load-bearing) and merchants (dry-fruit, woollen shawls, embroidered artifacts and other specialty arts and crafts) has been firmly rooted for generations in the lives of Kashmiris looking for jobs in the lower stretches of the varied range of the Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh. There are many bustling cities and towns in the Himalayas, especially in the state of Uttarakhand, but my focus remains Shimla. DFID (2002) describes the sustainable livelihood approach as 'the range and combination of activities and choices that people make / undertake in order to achieve their livelihood goals.'⁴⁹

Bruslé notes in his research on Nepali coolies in Uttarakhand that coolies often move from simple coping strategies as newcomers in a foreign location to more ambitious pastimes such as opening their own shops or owning agricultural land which he terms accumulating economic and social capital.⁵⁰ In line with Bruslé's research, my ethnographic interviews in Shimla demonstrate that Kashmiri migrants display ambition by going into the tourism business, or shop keeping, but never abandon the key vocation of coolie that they primarily came to Shimla for. The destination of Shimla for Kashmiri Khans, as for the Nepalis in Uttarakhand, gets entrenched as customary.

⁴⁷ Kashmir Life, Blog, 25 November 2013.

⁴⁸ Bruslé, *Choosing a Destination and Work*.

⁴⁹ DFID, cited in Bruslé, 'Choosing a Destination and Work', p. 241.

⁵⁰ Bruslé, 'Choosing a Destination and Work'.

13. The Coolie Cosmopolite, the itinerant, and the migrant: Shifting power relations

This study asserts that the coolie has always been a cosmopolitan figure, a citizen of the world given the nature of their work. The reference is to coolies' communication patterns when it came to their struggles for freedom from *baegar*, and their desire to modernise and participate in everyday commercial life, although not recognised as such. The term cosmopolitan is often associated with an educated traveller of means and not necessarily associated with a displaced minority migrant or a labourer indentured into servitude. The literature that exists today pays undue attention to the contracted and indentured coolie who was dislocated from their home turf to work on plantations, in mines, on railroads, or at sea performing the crucial labour that made the British, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and Belgian great Empires. Coolie seamen were recruited by a broker or headman of the crew and provided family allotment, or a part of their wages were paid by the ship-owners to their families. A steady stream of recruitment of coolie labour for the mid-19th century ship-owners meant lower potential for pay rises for the British seamen.

The cosmopolitan nature of coolie labour is important to consider to understand how tasks were accomplished during the Empire. Despite the British colonial understanding of waged versus unwaged work, the hill folk developed a quick understanding of money, transaction, exchange and business.⁵¹ Railway lines and highways leading out of and into the agricultural state paved the way for interaction among different statuses and hierarchies, as also for a greater sense of modern citizenship (a rise in social consciousness while colonial subjects), even entrepreneurship, laden in power dynamics related not just to menial and physical tasks but also commercial instincts. Passenger suitcases needed to be lifted, as in the case of the domestic Shimla coolie. Trees⁵² had to be felled as roads and highways were being metaled and carved out of the scraggy mountains, maritime work needed to be performed, railroad tracks were being laid, to siphon goods from coal, mineral and metal mines, or transport food such as potatoes harvested from their [agricultural] home to the nearest sea port.

Lord Sanderson's committee (Antislavery International, 1910) put together to examine the human and social cost of recruiting labour from India explains how the Raj's shortage of labour was fulfilled in the 18th and 19th centuries. The *coolies*,

⁵¹ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, p. 179.

⁵² Native varieties such as old growth deodars were used for lumber and coniferous English varieties were planted in their stead. This unthinking replacement of native flora has, in the long run, undermined efforts at curbing wild fires in the Himalayas and other forest conservation efforts to maintain native varieties.

simple villagers, were sent overseas to British colonies and more importantly, the coolie ‘handlers’ a genuinely disliked category abhorred by all parties because they often coerced or lured village folk to leave behind their spouses, most often women. The lack of family solace and the absence of a partner uncharitably earned them the title of ‘coolie lunatics’ in the Caribbean. Carrying ganja or marijuana from their villages and its use in times of despair was later attributed to their lunacy, as revealed by the several court cases they were indicted in, for misdemeanours and murders. The archives say that the herb could be used both as ‘sedative and a stimulant’⁵³ assuaging the gross imbalance in the numbers of women and men who were indentured to the Caribbean. Not enough attention was paid to the harsh, often unjustified sentences meted out to them via the justice system accessible to *coolies*.

Migrancy and mobility of the *coolie cosmopolite* has constantly changed structural power relations, as also the power relations that defined coolie labour. For instance, the cosmopolitanism of the load bearer and the cosmopolitanism of the colonial employer differed, and are rooted in the pecking order of race, gender, nation and class. Similarly, ‘migration is linked in complex ways to class, gender, generation, ethnicity and other social cleavages, which are embodied in hierarchies of power and social status, in positions in home and host communities, and in work and domestic relationships – all of which may be transformed in the course of the migratory process.’⁵⁴ I argue, then, that the figure of the coolie must be seen as cosmopolitan for their mobility and forced movement coded as migration. It is precisely the *coolie cosmopolite* as the domestic or the displaced expatriate who becomes endemic to a larger pattern of migration entailing servitude, fomented by colonial labour needs and interests.

14. Emerging arguments

There are two arguments that find salience here. One, labour from countries of the South have become inextricably linked with labour practices of the Global North⁵⁵ since colonialism, 16th century onward. The practices of labour control and labour exploitation are co-terminus with extant labour practices in the West, in terms of wages, recruitment and treatment of migrants from the Global South. Shortages of labour during colonial times solidified the practices of recruiting *coolies* from disparate countries under the Empire – usually from China or India.

⁵³ Gallagher, ‘Dealing with Distance from the Archives through Digitization’.

⁵⁴ Van Hear, ‘Theories of Migration and Social Change’.

⁵⁵ Balachandran, ‘Making Coolies, (Un)making Workers’.

Secondly, scholars have noted that emergence of coolie labour during the Empire created a drop in wages among labour in the Global North. Southern migrant coolie labour and their meagre remuneration became the yardstick with which wages were measured in order to give raises or stagnate the wages of the working class in the countries of Empire.⁵⁶ Scholars believe that the practices of colonial labour encompassed in the figure of the *coolie* are coterminous with, or mirror, contemporary informal labour practices. Colonial capitalism enforced rural populations tethered to the land to be plucked out from their habitat and become indentured in labour that served the capital accumulation and commercial purposes of the Empire – railroads, mines, road construction and load-bearing. This same institution modified due to time, labour needs and practices has persisted in maintaining the different roles of coolie labour in neoliberal capitalism. The question at the end of this chapter remains: what is it about this form of labour that has transformed so easily between these seemingly different time periods, political ideologies and regimes of capitalism? Studying an imperial form of labour is essential to understand the new economic order and globalisation in contemporaneous times. Imperial coolie labour sheds light on the trajectory of a similar lack of labour regulation and human rights toward unskilled labour in nation-states that are experimenting with democracy, establishment of rule of law, are beleaguered with debt⁵⁷ and other regional political-economic exigencies.

Studying *coolies* and Khans tracks the fissures in modernity that create the same labour needs, and I argue similar poor conditions, as a hundred years ago. Archives show that an aerial railcar project had been envisioned to carry goods to and between mountainous regions and plain terrain in the early 1900s. This idea would relieve *coolies* of arduous labour and over time obliterate the need for this form of labour, but it never got off the ground. The costs of materialising this project were never set aside, and the political will was never there to fulfil a project that would equally benefit local and colonial subject populations. Today, the technological fixes to urban problems are not sufficient. One such central government program is the SMART⁵⁸ city movement that does not account for rural

⁵⁶ Balachandran, 'Making Coolies, (Un)making Workers'.

⁵⁷ For instance, 'in 2022, public debt in Africa reached USD 1.8 trillion. While this is a fraction of the overall outstanding debt of developing countries, Africa's debt has increased by 183% since 2010, a rate roughly four times higher than its growth rate of GDP in dollar terms' (<https://unctad.org/publication/world-of-debt/regional-stories>).

⁵⁸ The Smart cities mission was launched by the Govt. of India on June 25, 2015 and Shimla was selected for the third round to be implemented during June 28, 2017. Under this initiative Shimla is to become more modernised with easy citizen access to all urban amenities. 'The main objective of the Mission is to promote cities that provide core infrastructure, clean and sustainable environment and give a decent quality of life to their citizens through the application of 'smart solutions' [Ministry of

or urban unemployment, youth empowerment and migration patterns that link cities with other regions in the country that are in crisis due to military movement, cross-border terrorism or poverty and the lack of development.

15. Concluding thoughts

While the history of the coolie is replete with stories of the cross-continent traversing colonial coolie, it is the homegrown (Khan) migrant from the neighbouring hill states or baegari from the Shimla Hills in pre-colonial times (16th century onward) that fell prey to the designs of the British Raj's needs of labour for loadbearing and portering. The time span of this practice ranges from the 19th century right until contemporary neoliberal capitalist times where the global economy ironically still hinges upon the availability of cheap labour while relying on both free and unfree labour practice. The coolies and Khans of SMART Shimla are equally *coolie cosmopolite* as those *coolies* who were forced to cross the seven seas in the 19th century. The literature of Mulk Raj Anand and films of Manmohan Desai, and the references to coolies in current press, raise a cry for justice but also normalise the image of the coolie in our everyday consciousness. They inure us to the plight of the person who carries our bags and loads that we are not able to. Both the literary imagination⁵⁹ and research scholarship⁶⁰ has portrayed an all too sorry image of the coolie who cannot control their fate nor wages. Preliminary ethnographic interviews conducted with coolies right before and during the COVID pandemic in 2019 and 2020 yield a somewhat different picture.

Through their savings and labour, *coolies* and Khans turn their 'isolated helplessness'⁶¹ into a strategic marginality that both Miller (2012) and Burnard (2023) have theorised but in the context of the master-slave relationship. While the Khans have many who wield power over them, they are still able to work toward their goals of saving earnings for their family, educating their children, and performing seasonal agriculture in Kashmir to keep their farms fertile. My interviews in Shimla yield that the Khans, the coolies from Kashmir, save money from their wages to remit to family members, are fully aware of job opportunities outside of Himachal and still choose Shimla as their work destination. Khans are active in the mosques in Shimla and may reside there. Their children often seek

Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India]. Coolie labour or transportation of goods has not been a priority nor discussed as part of the plan.

⁵⁹ Anand, *Coolie*.

⁶⁰ Breman, 'Coolie Labour and Colonial Capitalism in Asia'.

⁶¹ Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History*, p. 31; Burnard, *Writing the History of Global Slavery*.

jobs in government posts such as the army despite the army's chequered record in dealing with the insurgency in Kashmir. Several mosques in Shimla had closed down due to lack of funding after the collapse of the Empire and the abatement of active recruitment of *coolies*, but the new-found mobility of Kashmiri migrants to Shimla has revived those mosques and made them available for worship and refuge. Kashmir is contested and embattled territory between India and Pakistan therefore the Khans' passage to Shimla and their reliance on hard work to establish their identity as trustworthy, reliable workers is essential to the business owners who buy their labour cheaply.

It is equally significant to acknowledge women's role⁶² although my work is on the male, Muslim, migrant coolie in the Shimla Hills. The Lord Sanderson committee report on indentured immigrant labour (Antislavery International, 1910) makes a note about women comprising a minimum of one-third of all indentured *coolies* being recruited for labouring jobs outside of India.⁶³ Some of the connections between the homegrown coolie and their multiple local histories have not been the centre of research for scholars who have worked on migrant labour. Moreover, interdisciplinary scholars interested in labour practices in democratic, neoliberal economies need to continue to make historical connections between current abusive, trafficked, meagre waged and forced labour practices lest the fault lines and historical slippage from the discourse of fair employment practices is not glaring. In this way, historical scholarship can enter the service of advocacy for elimination of the ills in the contemporary neoliberal labour laws and traditions of work locally and globally.

⁶² Research on women coolies has burgeoned in recent times. The work of Gaiutra Bahadur (2014, 2016) on indentured labour in Guyana is well known; Bahadur, 'How Could I Write About Women Whose Existence is Barely Acknowledged?'; Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*. Other writers are Madhavi Jha, 'Doing 'Coolie' Work in a 'Gentlemanly' Way'; Arunima Datta, 'Immorality, Nationalism and the Colonial State in British Malaya', Ashrufa Faruquee, 'Conceiving the Coolie Woman'. While the coolie woman was seen first as harnessing male coolie energies, and secondarily as a worker, they were often denigrated for their morality. Their share of coolie work is often misreported and misrepresented. Faruquee (1996) surmises that by the 1930s coolie women formed 30–40% of the workforce on colonial rubber estates in Malaya.

⁶³ Antislavery International, *Coolie Labor, the Indian Recruiting Ground*.

Annexes

COOLIE LICENSE

Any person can apply on an application form which can be taken from the office of estate branch on payment of Rs 5/. The application form should be recommended and verified by the area inspector. Two copies of recent photographs duly attested by a competent authority should be submitted along with the application form. A token and license card is issued to the applicant. Token if lost can be issued again on the payment of additional fee. The license is issued for a period of one year. It is renewed every year on the payment of requisite fee

The license fee is as under:

Coolie license fee Rs 120/

Coolie token fee Rs 100/

Coolie Card fee Rs 1/

Coolie card cover fee Rs 6/

ANNEXURE B

FORM OF APPLICATION

Cost Rs. 0-25 P.

N^o 006204

From :

.....

.....

To

The Commissioner,
M. C., Shimla.

Subject :- Application for grant of permission to stay in Labour Hostel.

Sir,

I am casual labourer working..... (Locality) and
I want to stay in Municipal Corporation Labour Hostel located at.....
from..... to..... my permanent address is

I undertake that I shall abide by all the condition of the permission an any other direc-
tion of the Municipal Corporation authorities. I shall be grateful if necessary permission is granted
to me.

I Certified that :-

1. I do not own any House within 5 k. m. from the outer boundaries of Shimla City.
2. I am not suffering from a loathsum, contegious or infections deseases.
3. I am not below the age of 12 years.
4. I have not been convicted for committing the offences of theft, gambling drinking in public place of or any other offence of moral turpitude.
5. I am not addict to drugs or other intoxicents.

Yours Faithfully

(Name & Address of the Applicant)

Village.....

P.O.....

Teh.....

Dist.....

Date

Indicate three Labour Hostel in order to perference.

1.
2.
3.
4.

Figure 3.3: Annexure B Form of Application

Slavery in the Shadow of the Plantations: Colonial and Indigenous Slaving in Early-modern Maluku

Hans Hägerdal

Abstract

The study focuses on structures of coerced labour in Maluku, eastern Indonesia, and investigates how the local understanding of slavery met and was co-opted by European (in particular VOC) demands for enslaved manpower in the early modern era. While the slave economy of the Banda Islands is well known, other parts were also involved in slaving activities. This is highlighted by a detailed case from 1684, the verbose Dutch report of a punitive expedition to the Aru Islands that describes slavery in the colonial-indigenous intersection. Scrutinizing the sources about local society, one can discern a continuum from an impersonal work-intensive slavery to a personal household-oriented one, even in an area characterized by relative externality and non-hierarchical social relations.

Keywords: VOC, Maluku, Aru Islands, enslavement, colonial violence

1. Introduction

As a geographical convention, Maluku comprises the easternmost parts of present Indonesia minus New Guinea, corresponding to the modern provinces Maluku and North Maluku (see Map 4.1). The usage of the term has changed significantly over time. In the early-modern era it was defined as the northern islands, Ternate, Tidore, Makian, the Bacan Group, and Halmahera. The southern islands of the Banda and Arafura Seas were only included under this term in about the 19th century, as a result of Dutch colonial dispositions. The economic opportunities that offered themselves to the Europeans also gave rise to the term Spice Islands, since clove, nutmeg and mace made the region an early priority for explorers and colonisers. The struggles of the Portuguese, English, Spanish and Dutch to control the spice trade has been told many times, and the turbulent history of Ambon and the Banda Islands is partly well-researched; however, the social consequences have

been less elucidated.¹ The colonial communities that were constructed in these places by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the course of the 17th century had global implications since some 15 percent of the Company profits in the Netherlands came from the spices.² Counted after the gold value, a returning VOC ship in the mid-17th century would on average have a cargo worth 250 million Euros, of which 18 percent were spices from Maluku and elsewhere.³

At first the nutmeg and clove trees grew in the wild, but with the emergence of trade-based polities they were increasingly cultivated. With the arrival of the VOC, the spice trade demanded a comprehensive apparatus of tending and harvesting the trees, and thus a specialisation of work that used coerced labour in various forms. The nutmeg and mace of the Banda plantations were worked by slaves after the infamous Dutch genocide of 1621⁴. In the Ambon Islands, villages were responsible for delivering cloves to the Company, though slaves did much of the work here, too. This went on until the abolition of the spice monopolies in 1864 and the formal abolition of slavery in directly ruled areas in 1860.⁵

Since the 1990s, new published research about the plight of slaves in Banda and Ambon has detailed questions of acquisition, demography, work deployment, and cultural factors.⁶ However, hardly any work has collated slavery regimes in the larger region that is today known as Maluku. A quick survey of the published sources reveals the existence of substantial slave populations in Kisar, Aru, Kei, Ternate, Tidore, Ceram, and so on.⁷ Not all of these were ‘slaves’ in the European and Muslim legal sense, but they were termed as such in the written sources and were clearly in a heavily subordinated and bonded position vis-à-vis the majority population. The present chapter will look into structures of coerced labour in the larger Malukan region and investigate how the local understanding met European demands for enslaved manpower in the early-modern era. This will be elucidated through a detailed case from 1684, namely the verbose Dutch report of a punitive expedition to the Aru Islands that includes numerous references to slavery in the colonial-indigenous intersection.

¹ For studies of Malukan history, see Van Fraassen, ‘Ternate’, Vols I–II; Leonard Y. Andaya, *The World of Maluku*; Gerrit Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*; Tristan Mostert, ‘Spice War’. For eastern Indonesia, Sutherland, *Seaways and Gatekeepers*.

² Els Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, p. 37.

³ Van Pagee, *Banda*, p. 7.

⁴ Hanna, *Indonesian Banda*.

⁵ Van Fraassen, *Ambon in het 19e-eeuwse Indië*, pp. 291–294.

⁶ Loth, ‘Pioneers and Perkeniers’, 13–35; Winn, ‘Slavery and Cultural Creativity in the Banda Islands’, pp. 365–389; Carlson and Jordan, ‘Visibility and Power’, 213–43; Hägerdal, ‘A Slave Economy in the East Indies’, pp. 78–95; Knaap, ‘Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire in Southeast Asia’, pp. 499–516.

⁷ See in particular the useful ethnography of Riedel, *De sluike en kroesharige rassen tusschen Selebes en Papua*.



Map 4.1. The main geographical features of Maluku

2. Malukan slaveries

Maluku, in the more extended sense of the word, is a crossroads of Austronesian and Papuan elements and was only fleetingly affected by the Hindu-Buddhist cultures of central Indonesia. The dispersed geography of innumerable minor islands and limited arable land was not conducive to larger polities. Societies were based on kinship groups, villages, and ritual inter-village bonds, and did not primarily live from rice cultivation; rather, the economy was based on individual *kebun* (gardens) and the extraction of food from forest and sea. Slaves are actually mentioned as far back as we have textual sources: a Chinese account from c. 1350 says that

the Bandanese exported spices and ‘small black slaves’ in exchange for textiles, ceramics, and musical instruments.⁸ These slaves were presumably Papuans, perhaps also from Ceram and Aru. Given the prevalence of coerced labour almost everywhere in premodern Southeast Asia, this comes as no surprise.⁹

Despite recent advances of archaeology, a fathomable history of persons and events only emerges with the coming of Islam in the 15th century. This was initially an elite project where local leaders bonded seafarers from Java and the Malay World and developed the spice trade. As such, Islam gave preconditions for a more integrated society, ushering into the extensive sultanates of Ternate and Tidore in the north, and emerging hierarchies in Ambon and the Banda Islands. This process was overlaid by European attempts of Christianisation and control of the spice production. Still, large swaths of Maluku remained autonomous since European control was patchily enforced, and the colonisers had little interest in changing the internal structure of local societies. When it came to slaving (the acquisition and allocation of slaves), nothing in either Islam, Christianity, or local customs, forbade such practices, although the two world religions formally denounced enslavement of co-religionists (Muslims of North Maluku enslaved each other anyway).¹⁰ Three factors made eastern Indonesia a hub of slaving in the early-modern era, approximately the 15th to 19th centuries: the small-scale and vulnerable nature of local communities, the non-Muslim and non-Christian nature of many island societies, and the need of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) for tightly controlled manpower. Adding to this, raiders from various parts of maritime Southeast Asia, such as Raja Ampat, South Sulawesi, and Sulu, captured people on their own accord until at least the second half of the 19th century.

The actual conditions of slaves are described in some detail by European observers. António Galvão stated in about 1546 that slaves called *ngofangare* worked the fields and groves of the North Malukan rulers; this included the planting of trees and the extraction of wine and foodstuff, in particular the important sagu.¹¹ Thus, slavery was already central to the maintenance of the early state. However, other sources make a clear distinction between two categories where *ngofangare* were ‘proverbial’ slaves or people in a subservient position, while *falalom* were the actual chattel slaves who could be bought and sold.¹² The *falalom* belonged either to the court or privately to members of the elite. Being either inherited or prisoners

⁸ Rockhill, ‘Notes on the Relations and Trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the Coast of the Indian Ocean during the Fourteenth Century: Part I’, pp. 256–257.

⁹ For the variants in the larger region, see Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*.

¹⁰ Van Fraassen, ‘Ternate’, Vol. I, p. 81.

¹¹ Jacobs, *A Treatise on the Moluccas (c. 1544)*, p. 133.

¹² Van Fraassen, ‘Ternate’, Vol. I, pp. 79–80.

of war, they tended their master's plantation, were fishermen, and were sometimes rent out. Large retinues of *falalom* increased their master's prestige.¹³

The VOC official Artus Gijssels wrote a comprehensive ethnographic account of Ambon in 1621 which, however biased, is grounded in years of first-hand observations. Slaves in Ambon were ubiquitous and were owned by *orangkayas* (chiefs) as well as individual households. Debt slavery was common; the *orangkayas* are described as kleptocrats who forced the villagers to purchase goods, and failure to pay was eventually punished with enslavement. The Ambonese kept their slaves in the houses where they were disorderly as cattle. When the slaves had served their master a long time, they might be upgraded to a half-free condition and allowed to start a household of their own. The slaves of the *orangkayas* would frequently fornicate with the female slaves of the villagers, even in daytime. When such a relation had been going on for some time, the female slave was made to join the master's household, to the great resentment of the villagers, who sometimes proactively sold the girls to the *orangkayas* for half the price, so they would at least get something out of it. In sum, Gijssels considered the conditions of an Ambonese slave as quite tolerable; for sure, he was treated much better than the slaves owned by the stern Dutch.¹⁴ Gijssel's description partly accords with an 'open' system of slavery as defined by anthropologists: an inclusion in the work of the family and successive incorporation into local society.¹⁵ Data from the late 17th century suggests that slaves often constituted 10–15 percent of the populations of the Ambon Islands and were mostly owned by the elite.¹⁶

Another piece by an 'A.G.' (apparently the same Artus Gijssels) discusses the society of the nutmeg-producing Banda Islands before the intrusion of the Dutch in the early 17th century. The population of Banda was a mixture of people from near and far and had developed a remarkable monoculture system where available land was largely used to cultivate nutmeg trees and food was imported. As a seafaring community it undertook long trade journeys over the Southeast Asian archipelago. Here Gijssels found a system where slaves were used even more extensively than Ambon but also allowed for some circulation within the social hierarchy. An island community might even be inhabited by slaves in the first place, and the slaves may preserve their own beliefs and practices in the otherwise mostly Muslim society:

Another island, Gunung Api or Fire Mountain, is mostly inhabited by the slaves from Neira and Lontor, who maintain their gardens of *sayur* or vegetables. The slaves, which mostly come from Timor, Solor, Surabaya, Kei, Aru and Buton, live ten to twelve families by each

¹³ Van Fraassen, 'Ternate', Vol. I, p. 81.

¹⁴ Gijssels, 'Grondig verhaal van Amboyna', pp. 397–444, 450–494.

¹⁵ Reid, 'Closed' and 'Open' Slave Systems in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia', pp. 156–181.

¹⁶ Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en christenen*, p. 167.

other. They are still mostly heathen. Sometimes they catch wild boars who were there a hundred years ago before the Bandanese took the Mohammedan religion. The slaves may catch and eat the boars without knowledge of their masters.¹⁷

Gijssels also outlines the slaving circuits that existed in eastern Indonesia. The various settlements of Banda all had their favourite destinations. Thus, the village Sammer on Lontor went with 5–6 large *perahu* (vessels) to Ceram each year, to purchase slaves, turtle-shell, rice and beans. The example of Gunung Api, referred above, also indicates a wide array of origin-points that was not restricted to East Indonesia. Gijssels refers in some detail the customs that regulated who was a slave or a free person. For example, if a free man fornicated with another man's slave, and she became pregnant, he might keep the child as his own if he paid a sum or provided a new slave to the other person. On the other hand, if a free woman was made pregnant by a slave, she would have to negotiate with his master, otherwise the child would also be considered a slave. There were complicated rules for when a person or family could claim someone as a slave, with issues that apparently spanned several generations. Among the roots of this plethora of customary regulations lay the fact that especially the chiefs (*orangkaya*) and their sons commonly held slaves as mistresses, with numerous children as the inevitable result. According to (selectively followed) Muslim principles, these should be considered free when begotten by free fathers. Finally, Gijssels found that many Bandanese were in fact descended from slaves, who had escaped from other places or gained liberty when their merchant masters had died. Despite all the circulation, slaves had no 'persona' since they could not bear witness in public.¹⁸

In sum, the early European reports suggest a rather wide application of coerced labour in the Malukan region. They could be systematically used for agricultural labour by the elites but were also incorporated in individual households. The distance between 'free' and 'slave' was often small, and social circulation occurred, which gave rise to numerous customary regulations to determine who was the one or the other.

3. European interventions

The establishment of Europeans in Maluku after 1512 initially seems to have had a limited impact on the extent of slaving and slavery. Portuguese sources of the 16th century frequently mention slaves as a self-evident matter, being the property of both Europeans and locals, but the newcomers were mainly interested in

¹⁷ G[ijssels], 'Beschrijuinge van de eijlanden Banda', p. 76.

¹⁸ Gijssels, 'Beschrijuinge van de eilande Banda', pp. 80–83.

acquiring cloves and nutmeg cultivated by local means. Large-scale circulation of slaves for use in economic production was not their concern, although many purchased slaves in Maluku privately.¹⁹ One group of consequence, however, were the Merdekas (Dutch; Mardijkers) of Ambon, who were or descended from slaves converted to Catholicism and had a role as soldiers who defended the Portuguese positions.²⁰ Some of these were in due time re-enslaved by the Sultan of Ternate in North Maluku and assigned to row his *kora-koras* (war vessels).²¹

The situation changed with the build-up of the Dutch positions after 1599. Up to 1663, when the Spanish left Maluku, the VOC made itself the overlord of the region, although its control over economic activities was never perfected. Widespread enslavement accompanied the conquest process, as prisoners of war were reduced to unfree status and defeated enemies forced to yield slaves as punishment.²² Most notoriously, the genocide in the Banda Islands in 1621 was followed by the construction of a new plantation economy where a mostly imported body of slaves toiled on the nutmeg plantations – a system with interesting parallels to the slave economies of the West Indies.²³ With hundreds of port cities, factories and fortresses spread from South Africa to East Asia, the VOC had capabilities of quite another order than the Portuguese to transport enslaved labour over large distances.

The need for tightly controlled workers and servants in the VOC establishments meant that suitable sources of enslavement must be identified. Early reports of scouting voyages regularly mention interesting items of trade, but also the availability and prices of slaves. These reports were then digested by the Supreme Government in Batavia, and to a less degree the Gentlemen XVII in the Dutch metropolis and were the basis for strategic decisions. Distinct slave circuits soon emerged, as outlined by Marcus Vink: South Asia was the most important provider up to the 1660s, after which Southeast Asia became the more prominent source. A smaller amount arrived from Africa, Madagascar, and the Mascarenes.²⁴ However, slaves from eastern Indonesia were in fact important for the VOC establishments at all times. A look at the published contracts and agreements made with Asian rulers during the 17th century discloses that 115 out of a total of 612 diplomatic instruments actually mention slaves in one context or another. Thus, slaving was a prominent concern for the VOC diplomats and certainly not a marginal part of the Company activities. Now, about half (55) of the instruments with slave paragraphs refer to

¹⁹ De Sá (ed.), *Documentação para a história das missões Padroado portugues do Oriente*, VI, p. 126.

²⁰ Lobato, *Política e comércio dos portugueses na insulíndia*, p. 129.

²¹ Lobato, *Política e comercio*, p. 134.

²² Mostert, *Spice war*, pp. 208–209, 403.

²³ Loth, 'Pioneers and Perkeniers'; Winn, 'Slavery and Cultural Creativity'.

²⁴ Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', pp. 140–146.

eastern Indonesia, meaning the islands to the east of Bali. A lot of them relate to Ambon, Banda, and the islands of North Maluku, sometimes detailing conditions of slave trade but more often aiming at capturing runaway slaves. Judging from the contracts, maroonage was a large 'problem' for European as well as Asian society since the paragraphs detailed the conditions for mutual restitution of runaways.²⁵

Generally, the Banda Islands were at the centre of the slave circuits in eastern Indonesia and beyond. The *perkeniers* dependent on the Company needed thousands of slaves to work the *perken* (plantations) that dotted the main islands of the Banda group and gave the Company astronomic profits. As I have discussed in another study, we possess some proto-demographic data that gives information on the profile of the 17th-century slave population.²⁶ In 1638, the Banda Islands housed 3842 persons over the age of twelve, thus maybe 6000 all in all. Of these the majority, 2190, were slaves.²⁷ In the early decades of the Banda colony, the VOC made great efforts to transport enslaved people from South Asia the long way to Banda, since famines and warfare often provided a large supply in South India and the Bay of Bengal.²⁸ Later in the same century, manpower from Sulawesi, Timor, Papua, and southern Maluku became increasingly important. All these areas were the subject of warfare and raiding, mostly by Asian groups from the region, which generated large amounts of slaves. On the contrary, Balinese and African slaves were rare although they were frequently used in other VOC settlements. The turmoil in South Sulawesi after 1667 and the small-scale wars that regularly affected the societies around the Banda Sea fed into the colonial slave economy.²⁹

4. A case: the Aru Islands

Now, how did the European society, with the Atlantic slavery as its base of reference, meet the local slaveries that existed throughout the world of Maluku? Part of this has been explored by Gerrit Knaap in a study of Ambon, a multi-ethnic spot that harboured both European, Ambonese and other Asian settlers who all kept numerous enslaved workers and servants.³⁰ However, much less is known about the surrounding island societies which were under VOC suzerainty but remained autonomous, partly due to geographical inaccessibility: Wetar, Kisar, Buru, Ceram,

²⁵ Data compiled from *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, I–IV.

²⁶ Hägerdal, 'A Slave Economy'.

²⁷ Wurfain, *Reise Nach den Molukken und Vorder-Indien 1632–1646*, pp. 106–107.

²⁸ *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, I, p. 414.

²⁹ Hägerdal, 'A Slave Economy'.

³⁰ Knaap, 'Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire in Southeast Asia', pp. 499–516.

Leti, Moa, Babar, Damar, Aru, Kei, Tanimbar and dozens of others. Some of these insular groups were subjected to ethnographic studies in the 19th and 20th centuries, when slavery was either on the decline or formally abolished.³¹ These studies usually depict societies which, for all their smallness, still were markedly hierarchical and genealogically orientated, with a rough division in three or more social estates. These would be nobles, freemen, and slaves if we use the approximate Western terms. Still there were considerable differences between the islands. For example, Kisar and the Kei group observed a much larger social distance between social estates than the Aru Islands which had a 'flatter' society with strong Papuan features (though speakers of some fifteen Austronesian languages).³² Aru is in fact an interesting example of the effects of coloniality on a low-technology society with dispersed power structure. An early perceptive although heavily biased Dutch report from 1670 introduces the Aru Islands in the following way:

The land of Aru consists of a fragmented land and is divided in many islands and islets, which are almost beyond counting. The foremost are called Ujir, Wasir and Wamar; these three are to the west. Those in the east we can hardly tell of, but those that are inhabited with *negeris* are the following: Conganvani [Komfane?], Batuley, Aduar, Mariri, Balatan, Waijukur, Celirea, Waroublay [Warilau?], Baun, Wrakkan, Woor, Barakai and Krey or Karwan. On some of these are three or four *negeris*, well populated.

The population of Aru are robust people who are not industrious. They are heathen but not at all religious, and they do not have idols like in Kei or Tanimbar, and no public gathering places where to hold *bicara* [deliberation]. However, in Ujir a part has turned Moors due to the shipping that the Makassarese previously conducted there. Generally speaking, the land is a flat and fertile one. All sorts of provisions may be obtained there. However, they do not have large livestock or oxen, deer, etc. but have good quantities of pigs, chicken, cassowaries, and other animals. Thus, as nature has provided these people, they do not work much, and the easterners mostly live from robbing slaves whom they then sell; for the land in itself has no slaves, but they are obtained through warfare since anyone captured in war becomes a slave, and those are the ones they sell.

Concerning the easterners, they are a fickle people, and we shall not speak much of them as they have no shipping. Rather, they come to those who conduct petty commerce and go to Banda. That is, first, those from Trangan where one finds the *negeris* Soli, Laaba, Fatural, Ngaiguli, Feruni, and Wattovani, as well as the 12 *negeris* situated in Serwati. These *negeris* have an excess of livestock such as pigs, chicken etc., and also *kacang* [grams], beans and a

³¹ De Jonge & Van Dijk, *Forgotten Islands of Indonesia*.

³² Hägerdal, 'On the Margins of Colonialism: Contact Zones in the Aru Islands', p. 558; Rodenwaldt, *Die Mestizen auf Kisar*, p. 45.

little rice. Sagu is abundant there. This is the best place in entire Aru from where to obtain provisions.

[...]

The trade of Aru is in slaves, turtle-shell, and a bark called *kau*, which can be best obtained by the easterners when there is peace. Small pearls are found; however, it is still unsure what quantities can be obtained.³³

We get a picture of a small-scale and religiously discreet set of societies where agriculture mixed with the gathering of sea and forest products, some of which had a global demand (pearls, turtle-shell, later complemented with trepang). External commercial and religious influence had a role via Makassar and the VOC. The captive manpower that resulted from internal volatile conditions was profitably linked to the Banda-centred slave trade that was needed for the spice production. Intimate and less personal variants of slavery existed side by side. The sources note that masters allowed slaves to live in other settlements, and the murder of a slave, if not compensated, could lead to war between villages.³⁴

But who were the people called slaves or serfs (*slaven, lijfeigenen*) in the Dutch reports? Some details of Arunese society can be culled from the VOC sources but the first true ethnographic accounts are from the 19th century. The official and ethnographer J.F.G. Riedel made some perceptive observations in 1886. As he says, social hierarchy was divided into roughly six estates. These were the *tamata guli jinjine* (the highest nobility), the *tamata guli* (those that have a certain socially respected position), the *tamata jinjinei* (the rich), the *tamata pangar duoie* (land-owners), the *tamata reagaga, tamata panuabali, or gagaja* (common people), and *kabean* (slaves). In former times the elders of the households (*tura anasi jaeai*) held authority together with the *gul* (the 'first among equals'). After the arrival of foreigners from Ternate, Tidore, Seram and Gorom, leaders arose who bore the titles *Gul Ursia* and *Gul Urlima*, referring to the usual ritual division in Maluku between the *Ulisiwa* and *Ulilima* moieties.³⁵ Malay or European titles such as *raja, orang kaya* ('wealthy man'), *kapitan* and *mayor* were also used, at least in communication with foreigners.³⁶ However, there was room for social circulation since the various estates were mixed by intermarriage. Papuan slaves were usually bartered with the Ceramese for gongs and elephant tusks but were not permitted to marry Aruese

³³ VOC 1275, Report, 20 March 1670, f. 379v-380v. Most of these names can be identified on modern maps; I have used the modern forms when known.

³⁴ VOC 1287, Dagregister Banda, sub 28 November 1672.

³⁵ For which see Van Fraassen, 'Ternate', II, pp. 460–512.

³⁶ It should be noted that persons known as 'raja' in the late colonial era were not monarchs over substantial territories, but rather village leaders similar to the *rajas* of Ambon and Seram.



Map 4.2. Approximate route of the Dutch expedition to Aru in 1684.

women. Murderers, arsonists, and adulterers also fell into slavery when they were unable to pay the fine that had been determined by the elders. By paying double the amount of the fine, one could later acquire freedom from slavery.³⁷

When Riedel wrote his ethnography of the South Malukan islands, the Dutch slave trade had not been operational since the early 19th century, which likely changed the incentives of slaving. Nevertheless, Aru society was still not deeply affected by colonial control, which was only implemented in the following decades along with the great upsurge of pearl-fishing around the coasts.³⁸ For all the difficulties in translating the slave concept to non-Western languages, there was clearly a social estate defined by the loss of personal freedom of movement, although it was also possible to regain it. The sources make it clear that the *kabean* had existed since the 17th century and probably much longer, although the *kabean*-ship may have been strengthened by the great demand for slave exports (and affected by the subsequent slump).

5. The Aru expedition of 1684

In 1684, 25 years after the first permanent VOC post was established on Aru, the Company decided to send a military expedition to the islands (see Map 4.2). Several incidents had irritated the Dutch in the past few years, especially the killing of two merchants who travelled along one of the many natural canals that divide the Aru Islands. Among the grievances were also issues relating to slaves.³⁹ From a Dutch point of view, the culprits belonged to the villages of the south, interior and the east side (Backshore) which were almost inaccessible to large Dutch ships and considered more uncivilised (*woest*) than the pro-Company and partly Christianised villages of the west side. As it was, a small Dutch detachment of 70 soldiers under Captain Jan Jacobsz Heyssebergh sailed over from Banda in April and bought up auxiliaries from the western villages Wamar, Wokam, Ujir, Wasir, Fangabel, Maikoor and Karanguli, who had suffered slave raiding at the hand of the easterners. In the following two months the VOC fleet of seventeen *sabir* (local ships) devastated much of the human habitation on the islands. Villages were burnt as the terrified inhabitants fled into the rainforests that cover the islands. A very detailed *dagregister* (log) allows us to follow the expedition blow by blow.⁴⁰ Two villages at the coast of Trangan Island, Feruni and Ngaiguli had received slaves who had escaped from their harsh predicament in Ambon and Banda. After a spate of burning, killing and enslavement in another part

³⁷ Riedel, *De sluik- en kroesharige rassen*, pp. 251–252.

³⁸ Giay, 'The Other Side of a Maritime Frontier', pp. 69–86.

³⁹ VOC 1401, Instructions for the expedition to Aru, f. 737–745.

⁴⁰ Included in VOC 1401, f. 861–928.

of the island, the VOC fleet closed in on 19 April, finding that the population of Feruni had fled since they had been warned by their neighbours. Captain Heysselbergh tried to arrange a meeting with the village chiefs to settle the case:

In the afternoon we saw some of these *negeri* inhabitants at a distance. We then sent the *krankbezoeker* from Wokam, Ernst Kuyper, and the *orangkaya* Elias of Maikoor, saying that they need not fear but assuredly come to us, and that we wanted to ask them about some slaves who had fled to Banda and stayed in this *negeri*. They then said to our errands that they knew that we came for the slaves, and that they would provide us others instead. They then fled to the forest again.

Towards the evening some of these people returned to their old place, bringing a small boy, so thin and sick that he could hardly stand on his legs, covered with scars. Through the *orangkaya* Elias, whom we had sent to them, they presented him as restitution for a slave. The other one would be brought from another *negeri*. We sent back this sick boy who was really not worth 6 rixdollars, and said that we did not ask for such, but able and sound slaves, like they had from us.⁴¹

In the end the Dutch did not get their slaves back despite repeated threats. The war council took the decision to simply destroy the villages of Feruni and Ngaiguli and the adjacent groves of trees from which the inhabitants extracted their food. Ngaiguli was first to suffer:

Sunday 23rd [of April]. In the morning, as the headstrongness and disregard for the Noble Company and its envoys could no longer be tolerated, we ordered (after many warnings and threats) our white and black soldiers to cut all their coconut trees. When, towards the afternoon, we had accomplished that and put the *negeri* on fire, we went to the *negeri* Feruni [that was treated in the same way].⁴²

In all its ferocious aspects, the story (of which we only have the Dutch version) is interesting due to the locked positions from both sides. The refugees from the VOC hubs of Banda and Ambon were kept by the villagers at great risk, suggesting bonds of friendship and honour. The Arunese villages were small with perhaps some hundreds of inhabitants, and mainly used bows and arrows as weapons. One by one they were almost chanceless against a well-organised European-led force but still refused to extradite or replace the ex-slaves when their meagre livelihood was threatened with ruin. Perhaps the refugees had skills useful for the rather low-technological society, raising their social status. On the other hand, the Dutch

⁴¹ VOC 1401, Dagregister Captain Heysselbergh, sub 19 April 1684.

⁴² VOC 1401, Dagregister Captain Heysselbergh, sub 23 April 1684.

expeditionary force did not hesitate to wreak full vengeance on two otherwise inoffensive villages ('sacrificing the *negeri* to Vulcan', as Heysselbergh himself writes) for the sake of a few runaway slaves. With large numbers of slaves being used in the economic system of the VOC, a strain of white anxiety is discernible in the documents. The system must be kept in place and routes of escape eliminated. Much of this can be seen in the contracts that were made with Malukan villages and rulers, where paragraphs about the restitution of runaway slaves are frequent.

After a brief rest in the VOC post at Wokam in the east, the fleet proceeded to traverse one of the canals and reached the Backshore, where some of the villages were hostile to the VOC-affiliated eastern settlements (figure 4.1). The main village of Barakai Island was attacked and destroyed after considerable bloodshed – the only real battle during the expedition. The fleet then steered to the north where Mariri was likewise reduced to ashes. After these feats, Captain Heysselbergh engaged in deliberations with Kobroor, a coastal village on the island of the same name, which had a history of trouble with the Company's close ally Wamar. The background of the conflict was carefully disentangled. However, the Dutch peace brokering was not for free.

As these people, without exceptions on either side, were inclined to a new peace, we asked what the most forceful way would be to make this happen. They said that it was done by the drinking of blood mixed with *saguer* [an alcoholic drink]. However, before this was done, the costs of the Noble Company for dealing with them and other rebels were stressed, [asking] what quantity of slaves they could provide to the Noble Company. They mumbled among themselves a little, and then presented a slave and two gongs as a gift, which we politely declined. For the second time they presented two slaves and two gongs. We then claimed 24 good slaves on the condition that they would then be accepted as Company friends and receive a letter of alliance. If they were subsequently bested by the people of other *negeris*, they should come to our garrison keeper in Wokam or to the Governor in Banda, who would give them a helping hand.

They said that they did not have that many slaves in their land but promised to obtain four of them. Finally, we put the amount to 18 slaves, to be delivered in three terms: six now, six next year, and the same amount the next year again. On this statement they asked to go back to their people in the *negeri* to hold a *bicara* [deliberation] with each other.⁴³

Again, the Dutch never got their slaves. Despite the ostensive agreement, the inhabitants stayed in the nearby rainforest to wait out the Company troops. On the next day, Heysselbergh ordered his men to burn Kobroor, then steering his fleet northwards for more devastation.

⁴³ VOC 1401, Dagregister Captain Heysselbergh, sub 11 May 1684.



Figure 4.1. A village on Barakai Island, Aru, illustration by A.J. Bik 1824.

The expedition so far had failed to reach any result further than burning villages and killing some people, apparently leaving the populations enraged – two men from Tanimbar Islands who followed the Dutch were attacked and killed in revenge by the Koproorese on the same day as the burning took place. When a peace agreement was finally at hand with an important settlement, the Dutch tried to make the expedition pay by meting out a penalty or ‘gift’ that was far in excess of what the village could yield. For want of other valuable items, human bodies became the measurable wealth; again, a closed, impersonal slavery meeting a relatively open one with disastrous consequences.

The fleet proceeded to burn the settlements Batuley and Kumul, since men from the area had recently killed a Dutchman during a visit to the VOC hub in Wokam with the fake purpose of selling slaves.⁴⁴ The vessels then sailed the Sisirwatu Canal to reach Wokam where the soldiers were allowed some rest, while the boats captured along the way were divided among the VOC-allied villages. However, there was still the northernmost island of Aru, Warilau, to deal with. Some years ago, the people of Warilau had robbed a sloop with VOC traders and were thus the object of chastisement. As the Dutch soon found out, the island was filled with morasses and difficult to traverse, while the inhabitants disappeared in the rainforests with their valuables.

Around mid-day the shipper Jan Mayer returned, bringing an old man, a woman, and two small children. He related that still some houses had been found in the forest, however

⁴⁴ VOC 1401, Dagregister Captain Heysselbergh, sub 13–14 May 1684.

without any people. We asked this old man via the *orangkaya* Oumar, where the goods from the sloop, that was taken by the people of this *negeri* some years ago, was situated, showing him a Dutch saw that we found in one of these houses. We asked if he did not know about it, or where the goods of the sloop were housed. He said that there was still a grapple at the place where he was captured that they used as an anvil. They had traded most of the other goods to the Ujirese.⁴⁵

That was startling news since Ujir was a VOC ally, although the Muslim population (in an otherwise mostly animist group of islands) was considered unreliable by the Dutch. Finding it difficult to stay in the unhealthy morasses of Warilau, the fleet returned to Wokam where the captives, six in all, were brought aboard a Company yacht to be sent to Banda as slaves. As common in insular Southeast Asia, indiscriminate enslavement during raiding expeditions was seen as unproblematic, also by European colonisers. Apparently, it was yet a small effort to make good for the costs of the expedition.

6. Adjudication and slave issues

The expedition had hardly been a success. The VOC allies on the west side were terrified for the revenge that the *Timur* (Eastern) people, the inhabitants of the burnt villages, might exact. The populations in the ravaged areas had usually made a good escape with their movable valuables before the Dutch avalanche and made no signs of submission. However, the Dutchmen had yet a role to play before leaving Aru. The Company took the role of a stranger king that mediated in local disputes and kept the VOC-led system on the islands in place.⁴⁶ Thus, the *orangkayas* of the western villages were gathered in Wokam and questioned in turn about possible grievances. The chiefs of Ujir were in particular castigated for their murky affairs with the Warilau robbers. For the rest, the minutes of the meeting give an idea about the issues that simmered in local society, and it is interesting that most of them were related to slavery.

An *orangkaya* of Wokam called Harmen was the first to voice a complaint. An *orangkaya* from the nearby village Fangabel, named Bolboey, had accused him of fornicating with his wife and demanded seven ivory tusks, an imported item that was a status marker and served as bride wealth. Although Harmen claimed innocence, he had paid out of fear, since Bolboey otherwise threatened to kill either him or one of his kin. Now the Company officers investigated this.

⁴⁵ VOC 1401, Dagregister Lieutenant Rosenburch, sub 21 May 1684.

⁴⁶ For the stranger kings syndrome, Henley, *Jealousy and Justice*.

When *orangkaya* Bolboey entered, we asked what proofs he could bring. He said that he had no other proof than what he heard from the mouth of his sister. According to the witness of other *orangkayas* he beat her so long with rattans and so on, that she acknowledged to have fornicated with this Harmen. Since Harmen did not deserve this fine but paid out of fear, we helped this innocent man to what was his. We also asked Bolboey why [...] he had said to our errands that he did not want to come, and that he had nothing to do with the Noble Company. We told him that all this was very ill done. Thus, we condemned him, as an example for others, for his insult against the Company commissioners who represented the Noble Company itself, to pay three slaves for the Noble Company.⁴⁷

In a similar case discussed on the same day, the *orangkaya* Boysilla from Ujir was accused of ‘unbecoming actions and hurtful cursing words’. When confronted with this, Boysilla declared that he had been very drunk and argued that this excused his behaviour – in spite of being Muslims, the Ujirese consumed alcohol like other Arunese. The Company officer retorted that one had to pay when sober for what one did when drunk. Boysilla was fined one slave, two gongs and two ivory tusks, and was to be detained until all this had been paid. The terrified *orangkaya* immediately provided a slave who was placed with the others, in the yacht bound for Banda.

Other issues concerned runaway slaves. *Orangkaya* Jonas from Wokam complained that two of his slaves had escaped to Wamar, a small island and *negeri* a few kilometres away. On closer inspection, it turned out that the slaves had rejoined their old master. The Dutch ordered to bring them back and sent a vessel to effectuate this. In another case, the *orangkaya* Carbou declared that one of his slaves had gone missing and asked for assistance to track him down. Now, however, it turned out that the refugee had killed a *mardijker* (freedman in European service) from Ujir with an arrow. If found, he would therefore be sent over to Banda for due punishment. In a third case, a slave had fled from Fangabel to nearby Ujir, from where he was to be extradited. The VOC officers found the frequent maroonage disturbing for the stability and tried to counter it.

Furthermore, we considered the complaints by these people concerning their slaves escaping, which happens in this and that *negeri*, yearly and daily, which brings great discomfort and injury to the owners. Thus, to prevent this, we have in general announced to the *orangkayas* that if anyone is found who has harboured another man’s slave for three months, he must pay two slaves. If this goes on for a year, there is an increase to four items.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ VOC 1401, Dagregister Lieutenant Rosenburch, sub 25 May 1684.

⁴⁸ VOC 1401, Dagregister Lieutenant Rosenburch, sub 25 May 1684.

Thus, the ownership of slaves loomed large in inter-village relations. Although the *kabeanship* of the Aru Islands might have been comparatively household-oriented and open, enslaved people were not necessarily integrated in their masters' families, but frequently took any opportunity to escape from their predicament. In the case of the slaves of Jonas of Wokam, they apparently felt more security or affinity with their old master on another island, for reasons that we can only guess.

At the end of May 1684, the Dutch sailed from Aru with their small cargo of enslaved people, leaving a situation that was more unstable than ever. In their missive to the metropolitan hub in the Netherlands, the Supreme Government in Batavia complained about the poor judgment of Heysselbergh who had severely overstepped his orders.⁴⁹ It was only in 1691 that the VOC was able to achieve a semblance of peace, which was nevertheless disturbed by new incidents in the coming years.⁵⁰ The rising demand in trepang during the 18th century, as well as the prospects for pearling, made Aru an important link in the seascape managed from Banda. Enslavement had a large role in this; proto-demographic figures from the last years of the 17th century show that about a sixth of the slave population on Banda originated from Aru.⁵¹ The majority of them were women, presumably since they were more likely to survive a raid and somewhat easier subjects of coercion. Paradoxically, therefore, the Dutch needed both stability and instability to get something out of Aru; stable economic circuits to obtain sea and forest products, but also continuous slaving that went on beyond the Dutch pale in Wokam. The situation offers certain parallels to other parts of Southeast Asia such as Timor, as well as European footholds along the coasts of Africa. In fact, the precarious balance broke down with a bang in 1787 when the VOC establishment on Aru was violently overturned and the whites were either killed or enslaved under spectacular forms.⁵² Although the Dutch eventually returned, it was only around 1885–1907 that local resistance was quelled, and a new administrative order built up.⁵³ In the process, the colonial state made efforts to suppress the slavery they had been so instrumental in encouraging in the old days.

⁴⁹ *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, IV, pp. 712–713.

⁵⁰ *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, V, p. 446.

⁵¹ Hägerdal, 'A Slave Economy in the East Indies', p. 85.

⁵² Hägerdal and Wellfelt, 'Tamalola', pp. 430–456.

⁵³ Giay, 'The Other Side of a Maritime Frontier'; Spyer, 'The Eroticism of Debt', pp. 515–538.

7. Conclusions

A look at coerced labour in the Malukan Islands, in the extended sense of the geographical term, provides a rather differentiated spectrum of unfreedom even in pre-European times. In North Maluku, where we actually do have some indigenous texts to compare with the European records, the *ngofangare* served their masters on various levels, and the line is blurred between them and the sellable *falalom*. Both were essential components in the political economy of the sultanates before the onset of European control.⁵⁴ The precolonial societies of Ambon and Banda were based on villages and alliances rather than state structures, but also kept numerous slaves and give proof of a continuum from household tasks to large-scale productive work. At the same time, social status seems to have been in a steady flux in economically dynamic places like Banda, so that well-to-do people might have had a slave background. The Atlantic Portuguese and Dutch sea powers might have impacted on this, both through the warfare they created and the steady demand for enslaved people for Banda and other places. However, they also adapted to some of the features of the East Indonesian societies they coopted: the prestige of having and displaying a multitude of slaves, the lending of slaves against payment, the patterns of raiding warfare, and so on.⁵⁵

Much less is known about slavery outside the hubs of Ternate, Ambon, and Banda. Serious ethnographic descriptions of Wetar, Kisar, Leti, Kei, Tanimbar, and so on, were made when slavery was already officially abolished or on the decline.⁵⁶ Here, the Aru case is instructive for understanding how slavery worked in a low-technology society which was mostly beyond colonial control. The biased but detailed relation of 1684 provides a window that highlights the slave-related issues that arose in the confrontation between European expansion and local agency. The value of slaves as chattel is shown by the cases where they were payment for fines or forced tribute, a choice made over other products of the islands. Moreover, slave raiding occurred on both sides. The VOC promptly kept captives as slaves (although this was not in the written instructions for the punitive expedition), while on the other hand indigenous raiding was among the causes for the chastisement. Certain sources of Maluku society, for example, Gijssels in his writings about Ambon, appear to condone the image of a relatively benevolent and intimate slavery, but this is complicated by the issues reported among Arunese chiefs. Many of these issues were about maroonage, as slaves frequently tried to escape their predicament. This

⁵⁴ Van Fraassen, 'Ternate', I, pp. 79–82.

⁵⁵ Boomgaard, 'Human Capital, Slavery and Low Rates of Economic and Population Growth in Indonesia, 1600–1910', pp. 83–96.

⁵⁶ Riedel, *De sluik- en kroesharige rassen*.

is reminiscent of the European-governed places in Asia, as well as the sultanates of North Maluku: where there was slavery, there would be runaways.⁵⁷ But there were also signs of inclusiveness and social solidarity, as villages refused to give away slaves or ex-slaves to the whites, even when facing terrible consequences. The micro case of Aru speaks to the general Malukan pattern of a continuum from an impersonal work-intensive slavery to a personal household-oriented one, although it was an area characterised by relative externality and non-hierarchical social relations. A systematic study of the Malukan islands beyond the European pales will no doubt increase our knowledge of acquisition, deployment and commoditisation of coerced labour among the island societies.

⁵⁷ Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade", pp. 168–175; Van Fraassen, *Ternate*, I, p. 81.

The Case of the *Collector*: Michael Hogan's Illicit Slave Trade at the Cape of Good Hope in 1800

Michael C. Reidy

Abstract

This chapter investigates the overlapping of public and private interests in the slave trade with reference to the fraudulent privateering voyage of the *Collector* financed by the British merchant Michael Hogan at the Cape of Good Hope at the turn of the nineteenth century. This incident demonstrates how British merchants based in Cape Town made arrangements with merchants at Mozambique to import enslaved Africans into the colony when the British colonial government was regulating the issuing of licenses for the importation of slaves.

Keywords: Cape of Good Hope, British commerce, Mozambique, Indian Ocean World, privateering

*'While I & all the world were disposed to abuse Egoism who is more guilty of it than the person who keeps something of a Journal? true, I am guilty of it but who knows I am? Nobody, my paper wont tell unless it is pressd to do so [sic]'*¹

¹ Lenta and Le Cordeur, eds., *The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard, 1799–1800* Vol. 1, 9. Lady Anne Barnard née Lindsay arrived at the Cape in November 1797. She was married to the colonial secretary, Andrew Barnard. This chapter was presented at a seminar convened by Dr Samuel Sanchez at University Paris Diderot on 22 January 2015 and re-drafted for the African Studies Association, Philadelphia, panel presentation 'African and Malagasy Diasporas in the Indian Ocean' on 17 November 2022, chaired by Dr Jane Hooper (Mason University, Virginia). I would like to thank Professor Hans Hägerdal for allocating funding for my attendance at the conference which produced the present volume and Benjamin Crous, Nigel Penn and Gary Sturgess for their comments on the final draft. I would further like to thank Erika le Roux from the Western Cape Archives for her generous assistance now and over the years.

1. Introduction

This chapter investigates the overlapping of public and private interests in the slave trade with reference to the fraudulent privateering voyage of the *Collector* financed by the British merchant Michael Hogan at the Cape of Good Hope at the turn of the 19th century.² This incident reveals how British merchants based in Cape Town made arrangements with merchants at Mozambique to import enslaved Africans into the colony after the British colonial government began to regulate the issuing of licenses for the importation of slaves into the colony following Britain's Order in Council of 1796 and increased pressure from William Wilberforce's abolitionist movement. The Cape's first British Governor, George Macartney, limited the importation of slaves into the colony in order to uphold the Orders in Council, protect the East India Company's (EIC) trade charter east of the Cape and prevent the outflow of silver from the colony. Macartney, as we shall see, issued a proclamation in 1798 which levied fines against merchants who imported slaves into the colony without the express permission of the governor. This chapter shows how Michael Hogan bypassed Macartney's restrictions on the slave trade by bribing Macartney's successor, Sir George Yonge, in order to obtain a license to import slaves into the Cape colony. It further demonstrates how Hogan inveigled a number of Cape merchants and officials into his stratagems.

This chapter draws on a number of published and unpublished primary sources, viz. Michael Hogan's private papers, Lady Anne Barnard's diaries, the Kimberley Library's Macartney Papers, two Commissions of Inquiry, depositions of the Council of Justice at the Western Cape Archives in Cape Town and the records of the High court of admiralty records in Kew, London.³ The collections of the Hogan and Macartney's papers, along with Lady Barnard's journal, give us an insider's perspective on the *Collector* scandal which otherwise would have been a formal account based on the court proceedings of the Admiralty Court and Cape Town's Council of Justice.

² Hogan went to sea as a teenager. He later became an influential merchant in India, Cape Town and New York City. His biographer Michael Hogan Styles, the author of *Captain Hogan: Sailor, Merchant, Diplomat on Six Continents*, deposited transcripts of Hogan's personal papers at the British Library in London and the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney. British Library (BL) MSS EUR 489/1, Michael Hogan Family Papers (hereafter 'MHFP').

³ Lenta and le Cordeur, eds., *The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard, 1799–1800*, Volume 2 (hereafter 'LAB 2'); Kimberley Library MS43 (KL), South Africa, Macartney Papers (Nigel Penn made his transcripts of these papers available to me and also encouraged me to research the slave trade during the first British occupation); MHFP; George McCall Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony (RCC)*; Western Cape Archives, Cape Town (WCA), Council of Justice (CJ) 439, ff.231–341; and, National Archives (NA), Kew, High Court of Admiralty (HCA) 49/23/14, the *Collector*.

Background

The production and management of the colony's grain supply was a matter of prime importance to the administrators of the first British occupation of the Cape colony. Just as the Dutch at the Cape had supplied the French with grain during the Seven Years War (1756–63), there was an even greater demand for wheat during the first British occupation, with the presence of the British Royal Navy, soldiers and administrators trebling the number of mouths to feed in Cape Town after September 1795.⁴ The increased demand for wheat led to an increased demand for young male slaves to produce the wheat and then thresh it in the harvest season. The prices of both slaves and wheat was, therefore, at a premium during the first British occupation. The colony's free burghers and British merchants, like Hogan and Alexander Tennant, saw this as a good business opportunity.⁵ The situation was exacerbated in 1798 when a drought and failed wheat crop created the biggest demand for slaves in the history of the colony. Governor George Macartney not only restricted the importation of slaves into the colony, but he also made the importation of slaves without his permission a punishable offence.⁶ Macartney took it upon himself, in co-operation with the Royal Navy, to protect the English East India Company's (EIC) charter east of the Cape, prevent Spanish silver coin (the only means of exchange for slaves at Mozambique) from leaving the colony and Cape grain from being supplied to the French at Mauritius and Reunion. He regulated the importation of enslaved people to the Cape by issuing only two licenses for the importation of slaves into the colony during his brief term of office.

Michael Hogan approached the second governor of the Cape Sir George Yonge,⁷ shortly after he had assumed office, to import 600 enslaved Africans into the colony in 1799. Yonge granted Hogan permission to import 800 slaves (a fact that later came to light) into the port through his private secretary Richard Blake, who was married to his niece, rather than follow the formal route by conducting the business through the colonial secretary, Andrew Barnard. We shall see how Hogan offered Blake a bribe of a third of the profits of this venture in exchange for his license

⁴ For the Cape's supplying the French at Mauritius with grain during the Seven Years' War, see Thiébaud, 'An Informal Franco-Dutch Alliance', 128–47.

⁵ Tennant was a Scotsman who went on to become a prominent slave trader, auction master of prize goods (at five percent commission) and owner of Zonnebloem Estate after 1797. The price of an adult slave during the first British occupation was triple the average price of 380 *rijksdaalders* (*Rd.*) during the late VOC period.

⁶ Macartney (1737–1836) was governor of the Cape from 5 May 1797 to November 1798.

⁷ Sir George Yonge (1731–1812) was the second British governor of the Cape colony from 10 December 1799 to 20 April 1801.

which enabled Hogan to make arrangements with Joaquim do Rosário Monteiro⁸ to transport a shipment of enslaved Mozambicans to the Cape. Hogan was tempted to devise other ways of importing enslaved people into the port, since the Order in Council of 1796 (prohibiting the landing of slaves at British possessions without government permission) and Macartney's precedent of restricting licenses for the importation of slaves into Cape Town became British policy at the Cape. This policy coincided with unprecedented levels of Portuguese colonial slave traffic passing the Cape from 1793 onwards. Hogan, therefore, obtained letters of marque to outfit privateering vessels to capture French ships and merchandise, which included slaves, as 'prize' goods or spoils of war in the Mozambique Channel.⁹

2. The importation of slaves at the Cape during the first British Occupation, 1795–1803

Secondary literature

José Capela, Patrick Harries and Pedro Machado have shed light on the organisation of the slave trade and the networks between British merchants at Cape Town and Portuguese colonial merchants and Gujarati *vānīyās* at Mozambique Island, Quelimane and Inhambane during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.¹⁰ The port of Cape Town had serviced French slave ships on route to St. Domingue (Dominican Republic), Guadeloupe and Martinique from the mid-1770s until the hostility between Britain and France put a halt to French slave traffic in the Mozambique Channel with the onset of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1792.¹¹ Portuguese merchants, however, continued to transport slaves to the Cape, the Mascarene Islands, India and South America. Machado has traced the involvement of *vānīyā* merchants in the Portuguese colonial slave trade from 1746, along with the important role of supplying slave traders, such as Joaquim Monteiro, with credit for the purchase of enslaved Yao and Makua in exchange for Indian cotton

⁸ Monteiro, a native of Goa, settled at Mozambique Island c.1770. He was the most prominent slave trader in the history of the western Indian Ocean. See Capela, *Conde de Ferreira & Co.*

⁹ 'Prize' means to 'apprize' or 'seize.'

¹⁰ Harries, 'Mozambique Island, Cape Town and the Organisation of the Slave Trade in the South-West Indian Ocean, c.1797–1807,' 409–427; Capela, *O Tráfico de Escravos nos Portos de Moçambique*, and Machado, 'A Forgotten Corner in the Indian Ocean', 17–32 and *Ocean of Trade*. See also Ross, 'The Last Years of the Slave Trade to the Cape Colony', 209–220.

¹¹ Revolutionary France declared war on Britain soon after the beheading of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793. The war ended in 1802 but Britain and France continued to wage war on each other during the Napoleonic Wars from 1803–14.

and cloths.¹² The *vānīyās* traded silver for cloth, which the Portuguese colonials in Mozambique used for purchasing enslaved people. Machado, on the other hand, has convincingly demonstrated how *vānīyā* merchants like Sobhachand Sowchand, Jiv Sangaj, Laxmichand Motichand and Ramji Premji financed and outfitted slave trading voyages between Mozambique Island, Inhambane, Quelimane and Cape Town after 1788. Harries has expanded on Machado's thesis in his study of the organisation of the slave trading between Portuguese colonial merchants and *vānīyās* in Mozambique and British merchants at the port of Cape Town.

Richard Allen, Jean-Pierre Tardieu and Rafaël Thiébaud, on the other hand, have analysed the operations of human trafficking between Mozambique and the Mascarene Islands during the European colonial era.¹³ Alex Borucki has disentangled the trading relationships between South American Rio Platanese traders and North American merchants at the turn of the 19th century. While North American traders often traded goods, like hides and jerky, for slaves and silver, South American slave traders purchased slaves with silver at Mozambique; and that silver went on to circulate as far as India and China. The Americans completed their triangular trade by carrying enslaved Africans back to the Americas between 1798 and 1808.¹⁴ Borucki's research builds upon the foundational work of Om Prakash, who has argued that the trade route around the Cape to the Indies and the circulation of Spanish silver were the two major economic forces of the pre-modern 16th century, by explaining the circulation of goods, silver and slaves between the Americas and the Indian Ocean world during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.¹⁵ The importation of Mozambican slaves was an economic and political concern for the British because of their mandate to protect the EIC's charter, keep the limited supply of silver in the Cape and stop English merchants from encroaching on the EIC's trading monopoly under the flags of neutral nations.¹⁶

¹² Machado, *Ocean of Trade*, 209.

¹³ Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*; Antunes, 'O Comércio com o Brasil e a Comunidade Mercantil em Moçambique (sec. XVIII)'; Capela, *O Tráfico de Escravos nos Portos de Moçambique*; Jean-Pierre Tardieu, 'Les Revers du Commerce Négrier entre l'Océan Indien et le Rio de la Plata (fin du XVIIIe siècle-début du XIXe siècle),' *Outre-Mers* (2014); and, Thiébaud, 'Traites des esclaves et commerce néerlandais et français, à Madagascar (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)'.

¹⁴ Borucki, 'The Slave Trade to the Río de la Plata, 1777–1812: Trans-Imperial Networks and Atlantic Warfare' and 'The U.S. Slave Ship *Ascension* in the Río de la Plata', 630–657. Spain opened the slave trade with its colonies to foreigners in 1789 and expanded it in 1791. France opened its Indian Ocean trade to French private citizens in 1769 and foreigners in 1791. See also Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Labour Migration in the Colonial Indian Ocean World,' 129–153.

¹⁵ Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630–1720*, 3: 'The discovery of the Cape route to the East Indies and the growing import of American silver into Spain are generally recognized as the two major forces behind the rise of a premodern world economy in the 16th century.'

¹⁶ Jan Willem Janssens was governor of the Cape during the Dutch Batavian Administration from March 1803 to January 1806. He also tried to stop the outflow of silver from the colony.

The importation of slaves into the Cape, which tapped into the growing export markets of Mozambique, reached unprecedented levels from Commander James Henry Craig's first importation of slaves during the first British occupation in 1796 to the 1 January 1808 when Britain's Slave Trade Act officially banned slave importation throughout the British Empire.¹⁷ Harries, Michael Reidy and Christopher Saunders have demonstrated, however, that slaves were imported into the colony, subject to a fourteen-year term of indentured labour, as 'prize negroes' or 'negro apprentices' after 1808.¹⁸ The present author has identified the importation of a total of 8,328 enslaved people from 1796 to 1808, 3,326 of which were imported during the first British occupation.¹⁹ The British navy and merchants imported over 3,300 'prize slaves' into the Cape from 1796 to 1808,²⁰ and Monteiro imported at least 1,075 slaves during this time while Hogan imported over 2,300 into the colony.²¹

Hogan's schemes

Michael Hogan's personal papers yield detailed information on the methods which British merchants employed in the conducting of business at Cape Town. Hogan despatched a letter to the future EIC agent at the Cape John Pringle, on the eve of his departure from Portsmouth, expressing how the two would 'undoubtedly be as one from his official capacity,' but that Pringle would not be able to act in a public firm on account of his position in the East India Company.²² Hogan sent another letter to Pringle from the Canary Islands a month later, urging Pringle to

¹⁷ Craig was military Commander and acting-governor of the Cape from September 1795 to November 1797.

¹⁸ Harries, 'The Hobgoblins of the Middle Passage, 48–49; Reidy, 'The Importation of Slaves and 'Prize Negroes' at the Cape of Good Hope, 1797–1818' (hereafter 'Reidy, MA'); and Christopher Saunders, 'Liberated Africans in Cape Colony in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', 223–239, and Saunders, "Free, Yet Slaves", 99–115.

¹⁹ Over 10,000 enslaved people were brought into the colony (Michael C. Reidy expanded dataset). The number of enslaved people imported into the colony from 1795 to 1803 is incomplete, since many ships did not list the number of people aboard or who had been imported into the colony. I counted 7,200 enslaved people imported into the colony during this period in my MA. Nigel Worden quoted this number in 'Indian Ocean Slaves in Cape Town, 1695–1807', 398.

²⁰ Reidy, 6–7.

²¹ See Reidy, MA 'Appendices I and II' and Harries, 'Mozambique Island,' 416. Sometimes Hogan and Monteiro worked together. Hogan imported enslaved Africans into the colony with the *Harbinger* (West Africa), *La Rose*, *La Africano*, the *Joaquim* and *Collector* between November 1799 and April 1800. He also disembarked enslaved people from the *Boa Caetano* (125 males and 25 females) and *San Josea de Indiana* in 1801.

²² MHFP, Letter 132, Michael Hogan (Portsmouth) to Dr Cleland (London), 3 October 1797.

connect with the colony's colonial secretary Hercules Ross.²³ Hogan, like the leading merchants of London, believed that profitable business could be done at the Cape and encouraged Pringle, by saying:

Command as many good bills as possible. You and I are strongly recommended to connect ourselves with Ross. Think of it. I know it would be to our advantage in Europe on account of his good mercantile connections, and his knowledge of business is good, though he cannot act publically while in Government service.²⁴

Hogan arrived at the Cape on 4 February 1798 with letters of introduction from the British Secretary of War and the Colonies and the Director of the EIC Board Henry Dundas. Hogan was well-connected in London and India; and worked with the House of David Scott & Sons who took a big share of the India trade. Hogan and Tennant, as we shall see in this case study, along with other Cape Town-based British merchants, harnessed their political influence and money in the form of 'gifts' (bribes) to secure licenses for the importation of slaves during the first and second British occupation governments of the Cape.

Wheat, silver and slaves

The first British governor of the Cape, Earl George Macartney, took measures to enforce the protection of the English East India Company's trade, which was the main strategic reason for Britain's occupation of the Cape, when he arrived at the colony in May 1797.²⁵ Henry Dundas received letters from Vice-Admiral George Keith Elphinstone a few weeks after Britain's occupation of the Cape, in October 1795, and his successor Admiral Thomas Pringle, in September 1796, who requested the establishment of a Vice Admiralty Court (VAC) at the Cape, on account of the large number of British merchants who were selling India goods to the French at Mauritius under neutral flags.²⁶ There were also failed attempts by Portuguese colonial merchants

²³ Hogan deputed Pringle to transport his personal effects to the Cape.

²⁴ MHFP, Hogan (Lat 35N Long 13W, near the Canary Islands on route to the Cape) to John Pringle (at the Cape), 19 November 1797.

²⁵ Armstrong and Worden, 'The slaves, 1652-1834', 109-168. See also Styles, *Captain Hogan*, Reidy, MA, and also Ross, 'The Last Years of the Slave Trade to the Cape Colony', 209-220. Ross summarises the case of the *Collector*. See Maurice Boucher and Nigel Penn, eds., *Britain at the Cape, 1795 to 1803* for an overview of slave importation to the Cape during the first British occupation.

²⁶ Van Niekerk, 'Judge John Holland and the Vice-Admiralty Court of the Cape of Good Hope, 1797-1803'.

to sell slaves at the Cape for grain, which they sold on to the French at Mauritius.²⁷ British officials discovered a false logbook aboard a Portuguese ship the *Diana*, which indicated that instead of the ship going to Brazil from its port of origin in Mozambique, it was headed for Mauritius to supply grain to the French military and navy. Commander Craig seized the ship as a 'prize,' confiscated its slaves and forbade British merchants from further contact with Mozambique.

Governor Macartney put his foot down at the slightest indication of Capetonian merchants conducting business, including the sale of slaves in exchange for Spanish *piastres*, with the French.²⁸ Macartney, therefore, requested that the VAC, which was established in January 1797, become active in July 1797.²⁹ He wanted to put an end to the skullduggery that was sabotaging British India trade and its war effort in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, Macartney prioritised the control of slave importation into the colony upon his arrival there. He issued a proclamation that threatened to impose heavy fines on any merchants who either tried to import slaves into the colony or had purchased slaves without the express permission of the governor: 2,000 *rijksdaalders* (*Rd*) for the first offence, 5,000 *Rd* for a second, and forfeiture of both ship and slaves for a third violation.³⁰ The British government hoped that the presence of a VAC would discourage smuggling and piracy, while encouraging the capture of French, Spanish and United Provinces Dutch ships during the war against France.

The 'Negro-subject'

Macartney's tenth instruction dated December 1796 from King George III addressed the contentious issue of the importation of slaves into the colony. It was Macartney's duty to determine whether the importation of slaves at the Cape was necessary and there is a note in the marginalia of this instruction in Macartney's hand saying: 'must continue.'³¹ Macartney questioned the colony's *fiscaal*, or chief magistrate,

²⁷ RCC Vol. 2, John Pringle to Evan Nepean, 24 January 1796. Theal relates how Pringle reported the arrival of the *Diana*, flying neutral Portuguese and Danish colours, with a shipment of Mozambican slaves.

²⁸ WCA, British Occupation (BO), Series 90, 'Documents Pertaining to the Slave Trade at the Cape,' Macartney to unnamed correspondent, 3 April 1798.

²⁹ Van Niekerk, 'Judge John Holland and the Vice-Admiralty Court of the Cape of Good Hope, 1797–1803', 181.

³⁰ RCC, London, 5 April 1831, John Thomas Bigge, 'Report upon the Slaves and State of Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope,' December 1827–April 1831, Vol. 25, 353. Another hefty fine of 1000 *Rd*, over twice the cost of a slave at the time, would be levied against anyone who purchased slaves without the permission of the governor. Styles, 357: The *rijksdaalder* was worth 2 ½ Dutch guilders and about 1/5th the value of a pound sterling (one pound sterling could purchase four Spanish dollars).

³¹ Brenthurst Library (BL), Oppenheimer Collection, MS63f, 'Macartney Papers,' unpaginated; and, RCC Vol. 1, MS Instructions of article no. 10, 31 December 1796, 10: 'You are to transmit to one of

Willem Stephanus van Ryneveldt, on the state of slavery and the importation of slaves at the Cape until the first British occupation.³² Van Ryneveldt's responses are repeated in Macartney's report to Henry Dundas. Henry Dundas, who was the British secretary to the colonies, and Macartney were both in favour of the gradual abolition of the slave trade, since the profitability of the British sugar and shipping industries was dependent on the transatlantic slave trade. Dundas wrote to Macartney in a private correspondence that the abolition of the slave trade was one of the few subjects which he and Prime Minister William Pitt had disagreed on. Dundas and Macartney, on the other hand, considered Wilberforce and Clarkson and their abolitionist sympathisers to be fanatics and 'Jacobins'.³³

Van Ryneveldt responded to Macartney's question on the efficacy of slave importation to the Cape, by saying that slavery was a 'necessary evil' and that both wine and grain production would at first 'decay', then 'completely languish', should the importation of slaves be completely prohibited. Van Ryneveldt went to the Burgher Senate, which was a body of seven influential Cape-Dutch free burghers, who had informed acting-governor Craig that 'there is required a Treasure to purchase the necessary number of slaves' – even when the 'trade' was allowed. The free burghers petitioned the new government to allow the importation of slaves into the colony because the viticulture and viniculture of the Cape had grown reliant upon Malagasy and Mozambican slave labour in the second half of the 18th century. Van Ryneveldt and the members of the representative body of the colony's free burghers, the Burgher Senate, were the most prominent private owners of slaves at the Cape and the colony's leading wheat and wine farmers. The Burgher Senate, therefore, constituted the largest potential market for the purchase of highly priced enslaved Mozambicans. It is worth noting that Van Ryneveldt paid a bond as security for Hogan's privateering ventures on the *Collector*. We shall see below how Van Ryneveldt also presided over the court case that implicated Hogan in the fraudulent transaction which later took place, which is suggestive of further

our principal secretaries of state [Henry Dundas], for our information, an account of the regulations established at the settlement relative to the importation of slaves, of the particular laws and police under which they were obtained by the proprietors, of those to which they are subject and by which they are protected within the settlement, and the services which are derived from them there, together with your opinion whether the importation might not henceforth be prohibited, without material injury or inconvenience to the settlement.'

³² WCA A (Accessions) 455 Dundas-Melville Collection, 'Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope,' B.P. 12 (10), W.S. van Ryneveldt, 'Replies to the Questions on the Importation etc., of Slaves into the Colony; – proposed by His Excellency the Earl of Macartney etc., etc.,' dated 29 November 1797 (presented to the Cape Archives by G.W.A. Mears, the original mss. destroyed by fire). Van Ryneveldt (1765–1812) was the colony's *fiscaal*, or fiscal (chief justice or magistrate), at the time of British occupation.

³³ Royal Museums Greenwich, Caird Library, London, Michael Graham Stewart Slavery Collection (MGS)/60, 'Evidence of Lord Macartney on the Slave Trade' (1792) unpaginated pamphlet.

collusion between high-ranking government officials and merchants in the sale of Mozambican slaves at the Cape colony.

Macartney wrote that he had ‘purposely avoided the Negro-subject’ in his public correspondence with Dundas in order to avoid ‘discussion or inquiry’ on the matter or to ‘undergo the ordeal either of Parliament, or the India House’, all the more so, because Wilberforce’s abolitionist campaign was gathering momentum at Westminster and among the British public.³⁴ He also assured him that the importation of slaves into the colony was under his ‘immediate check and control’ and would ‘be managed with all caution and reserve.’ The new governor, however, had to ensure that there was enough grain to feed the colony’s existing population, as well as the British military and naval contingent at the Cape. The Burgher Senate constantly reminded him that the inflated cost of grain was commensurate with the insufficient numbers of slaves who ordinarily produced the grain; a demand that was exacerbated by shortages of wheat following a drought in 1798. Macartney, therefore, was prepared to allow for the importation of slaves into the colony but under the strict control of the colonial government.

Macartney’s reluctance to grant licenses for the importation of slaves to British merchants at the Cape did not stop Hogan and Tennant from flooding his office with requests for licenses to import slaves to the Cape from 1797 to 1798. The pair had become acquainted with one another in Bombay and Calcutta c.1790; and may have sold Monteiro the 300-ton *Charlotte* in Calcutta sometime before 1793. Monteiro later renamed the *Charlotte* the *Joaquim*.³⁵ Monteiro, who conducted partnerships with *vānīyā* merchants such as Motichand and Sobhachand, imported slaves from Mozambique to Daman and Diu, the Mascarenes, the Cape, Rio de Janeiro and Charleston.³⁶ Monteiro arrived at Table Bay on the *Joaquim* with letters of endorsement from the governors of Mozambique and Goa, in 1797.³⁷ He established lawyer Julio da Costa as his agent in Cape Town, while nurturing dealings with François Duminy, Michael Hogan and Alexander Tennant.³⁸ Monteiro stayed at Duminy’s townhouse ‘Le Jardin’ in 1801 and gifted the French captain’s daughter with a ‘*petite*

³⁴ BL MS 063f, Macartney to Dundas, 7 May 1798. Dundas was unpopular among the abolitionist lobby for his gradualist policy towards the abolition of the slave trade. Dundas expressed that he was very glad Macartney ‘had not introduced the subject of the importation of Negroes’ at the Cape in his earlier correspondence dated 26 January 1798.

³⁵ University of Witwatersrand Library, Johannesburg, Gubbins Collection (GC) A (Accession) 88. The *Joaquim* was the most prolific slaver in the South-West Indian Ocean from 1793 to the 1810s.

³⁶ Monteiro delivered c.300 enslaved Mozambicans to Hogan north of Charleston on the *Excellentissimo Augusta* in 1804. See Phillip, *British Residents at the Cape, 1795–1819*, 182–184.

³⁷ GC A 24, General James Henry Craig’s ‘Homeward Letterbook,’ enclosure dated November 1796.

³⁸ Harries, ‘Mozambique Island,’ 415. François Duminy (1747–1811) was the VOC’s *commies* or commissioner for the slave trade from 1781–85.

negresse'.³⁹ British merchants sent their Capetonian agents, like Charles Jacks and François de Lettre, with powers of attorney to Mozambique Island to arrange contracts for the sale of slaves with Mozambican slave traders. The issuing of a slave trading license to British merchants secured the arrangement and outfitting of slave trading voyages with slave traders at Mozambique, Inhambane and Quelimane.

3. Michael Hogan's slave imports, 1799–1800

The Joaquim, La Rose and La Africano

British slave traders could purchase slaves from Mozambican slave traders in Cape Town or obtain letters of marque to capture slaves as 'prize slaves' from French, Dutch and Spanish ships in the Mozambican Channel. This chapter focuses on Hogan's slave trading activities at the Cape between 1799 and 1800 with emphasis on the privateering voyages which he funded and outfitted from Cape Town during that time. Hogan and Tennant, however, had struck up business dealings with Monteiro at the Cape before that time. Tennant, in 1797; and Hogan, after 1798. Captain Manoel Gomes arrived at the Cape on Monteiro's behalf on the *Joaquim*, with a shipment of 450 enslaved people on 27 January 1799.⁴⁰ The *Joaquim* arrived at the Cape again, just over a year later in March 1800 – following Hogan's so-called 'prizes,' *La Rose* (November 1799), *La Africano* (December 1799) and *Collector* (January 1800). The ship had arrived at the port on the pretext of needing water and provisions. Alexander Tennant, however, had secured this shipment of Mozambican slaves in advance of its arrival at the Cape, through his agent Charles Jacks, whom he had sent to obtain a contract from Monteiro at Mozambique Island in 1798.⁴¹ Acting-governor Lieutenant-General Francis Dundas allowed the importation of these slaves into the colony a month later, in response to the Burgher Senate's advice that the production of grain could only be increased with more slaves.⁴² Dundas requested that the port-captain Donald Campbell allow the

³⁹ Reidy, MA, 21n59 (BO 126, Monteiro to Duminy, 3 November 1801).

⁴⁰ RCC, Vol. 3, Donald Campbell (port-captain of Table Bay) to Henry Dundas, 8 May 1800.

⁴¹ WCA Notarial Protocol Series (NCD) 1/32, March 1798: Monteiro outfitted the *Joaquim* to import slaves to the Cape. Jacks arrived at the Cape a year later on the *Joaquim* in March 1799.

⁴² RCC Vol. 3, Francis Dundas to Henry Dundas, 6 April 1799. The demand for slave labour was legitimised by the 'prize negro' apprentice system after the Slave Trade Act, which abolished the slave trade in the British Empire, came into effect on 1 January 1808. Sir Francis Dundas, Henry Dundas's nephew, was acting-governor of the Cape from 21 November 1798 to 9 December 1799 and, again, from 20 April 1800 to 20 February 1803.

enslaved people to be disembarked upon the favourable inspection of their health certificates.⁴³ The slaves belonged to the ‘House of Tennant & Trail,’ and Campbell surmised that Michael Hogan was their partner.⁴⁴ Campbell, significantly, attributes the admission of Hogan to a third share in the venture to the Irishman’s connections with Hercules Ross and John Pringle, ‘the Gentlemen most in the Lieut. Governor’s confidence.’⁴⁵ Hogan had, after all, obtained ‘letters of marque and reprisal,’ signed by the acting-governor of the Cape, Lieutenant-general Sir Francis Dundas, and countersigned by the colonial secretary Hercules Ross, for the *Collector* – a two-masted, ninety-ton, Dutch-built ship with ‘six carriage Guns carrying shot of six pounds weight, navigated by thirty seamen’ – on 6 February 1799.⁴⁶ It is significant that Ross countersigned the ‘letters of marque,’ since Hogan had written to Pringle earlier that there was much business to be done between the three men – with Ross holding the keys to the acting-governor’s office.

The *Collector* was despatched in March 1799 to capture ‘such Prizes as she may take’ in the Mozambique Channel.⁴⁷ Tennant and Peter Laurens Cloete, Cape Town’s wealthiest free burgher and Hogan’s agent after his 1804 departure from the Cape, put down £1,500 ‘bail and security’ on February 11.⁴⁸ It is also worth noting that Willem van Ryneveldt and Laurens fronted the 36,422 *Rd* security required for Hogan and his prize *La Rose* on 5 December 1799.⁴⁹ The ninety-ton brig or French prize, *La Rose* – ostensibly captured by the privateer called the *Collector*, which belonged to the Irish merchant Michael Hogan – was brought to anchor in Table Bay by members of the *Collector*’s crew on 10 November 1799. Hogan inspected the

⁴³ The slaves from the *Joaquim* were quarantined on Robben Island until they had been inoculated against smallpox.

⁴⁴ KL, Campbell to Macartney, 8 May 1800: ‘Messrs Tennant & Trail, the original proprietors of this Cargo, found it prudent to admit Mr Michael Hogan to a share, I believe, one third; this I apprehend in consideration of the influence Mr Hogan had with the Gentlemen most in the Lieut. Governor’s confidence, Messrs Pringle and Ross.’ The lieutenant-governor referred to here was Francis Dundas.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* The fact that the *fiscaal* and the prominent burghers had petitioned Dundas, and that he had acquiesced to their petitions, also suggests that some of them may have been invested in Hogan and Tennant’s slave trading ventures.

⁴⁶ NA HCA 49/23/14.

⁴⁷ BO 116, ‘Memorials,’ Memorial 23, Michael Hogan to Sir George Yonge, 16 April 1800. KL, Campbell to Macartney, 8 May 1800: ‘Mr Hogan fitted out from this Bay a private Brig of War, called the *Collector*, commanded by a David Smart, who sailed about the beginning of March 1799 as stated, to cruise against the enemy, about Madagascar, the French Islands, and the adjacent seas.’ See also Harries, ‘Mozambique Island,’ 415–416.

⁴⁸ Hogan appointed the brothers Laurens and Hendrik Cloete jr. to be his agents when he left the colony in 1804.

⁴⁹ NA HCA 49/34 (5B 1040), George Rex (marshal of the VAC), VAC Marshal’s Report, 5 December 1799. Van Niekerk describes the role and activities of the VAC’s personnel.

ship, which was being held by the VAC until its adjudication, on 26 November. He also asked the court if the forty-eight enslaved Mozambicans, or prize slaves, could be released from their quarantine on Robben Island since their health was at risk and their maintenance was expensive. *La Rose* and its 'prize slaves' were judged lawful prize by John Holland at the VAC in the Castle of Good Hope. Hogan advertised for the sale of prize slaves at his warehouse on the Heerengracht (present-day Adderley Street) for 6 December 1799. The adjudication procedure was repeated when the *Collector* sent *La Africano* to the port in December. This time Hogan asked the court if he could transfer the sixty-nine enslaved Mozambicans from the 60 ton 'small lugger' to his ship the *William* because they might become ill, owing to the waves crashing over the side of the lugger during the 'heavy southeast gales' in Table Bay. Royal naval officers and British merchants, who had noted that the two prize ships had arrived in the harbour with no prisoners of war or slave trading equipment, that the slaves had been obtained in contravention of Order in Council of the British Parliament of 1796 which forbade slave traffic to Britain's colonies without the consent of the government.⁵⁰ Hogan, nevertheless, went ahead and sold his prize slaves from *La Africano* in the first week of January 1800.

***'This beneficial traffick of Human nature': the Joaquim (March 1800)*⁵¹**

Joaquim Monteiro's slaving ship the *Joaquim* arrived at the Cape a mere two months after *La Africano* in March 1800. Lady Anne Barnard likened the 'strange' sight of the slaves at Cape Town's foreshore to 'Etruscan figures' on her return from the Castle of Good Hope to her home at Newlands on the outskirts of town.⁵² Michael Hogan intended to sell the slaves by public auction the next day – and disembark another 300 enslaved men and women the day after. Barnard, who sympathised with the abolitionist movement and Thomas Paine's rights of man, wrote: 'I sighd & thought of Willberforce, how it woud have agitated his nerves to have looked at them when it agitated mine who am not wound up as he is to vibrare to that key and who am accustomed to see Slavery all day long.' Lady Barnard, the nominal 'first lady' of the Cape in the absence of Macartney's wife, wrote: 'I drove home full of thoughts but without power to do them any good.' Her sense of powerlessness is ironic considering her intimate connection to two of the most powerful men in the British Empire at the time, Macartney and Dundas. Why did she not encourage

⁵⁰ KL, Acheson Maxwell (controller of customs) to Macartney, 15 July 1800. See Reidy, MA, 30992 and RCC, Vol. 3, Letters from Captains of the Royal Navy to John Hook Greene (collector of customs), 7 March 1800, 79.

⁵¹ LAB 2, 105.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Sunday 10 March 1800, 69. Figures in Etruscan artworks are often thin.

them to abolish the slave trade? She sent two hampers of peaches to the newly arrived enslaved people, but her offering was refused because the peaches might be bad for their health. Lady Anne Barnard's journal entries from the 11th to the 15th of March (the 'Ides' of March) chronicle 'more tricks' and 'deceits' from Michael Hogan. The *Joaquim* arrived anchored at Table Bay on 10 February 1800. The entry in Barnard's journal of Saturday the 1st or Sunday the 2nd of March 1800 reports that Governor Macartney had been 'eminently averse' to issuing licenses for the importation of slaves to British merchants at the Cape and that, having granted one license for Hogan and Tennant to import slaves from West Africa, had 'positively refused' a second. Andrew Barnard was told by Hogan that he had 'reservd the choice of six good slaves of one for him [sic].'⁵³ Barnard refused Hogan's offer.

Barnard's investigation (March – April 1800)

The *Collector* arrived in Table Bay a month after the *Joaquim* in April 1800. Andrew Barnard became involved in this case soon after twenty-six-year-old Irishman, David Smart, and several of the young officers from the *Collector* testified before the Vice Admiralty Court that they had captured the 400 ton *L'Auguste* in the Mozambique Channel, having driven the ship to shore at Morondava River on the mid-western coast of Madagascar. They concurred, just as they had during the 'interrogatories' for *La Rose* and *La Africano*, that the vessel's French mariners had evaded capture by rowing away on the ship's boat.⁵⁴ The 164 enslaved people aboard the *Collector* were 'condemned' as prize on 11 April 1800 and sold shortly thereafter by Hogan.

Governor Yonge sent a letter, countersigned by his personal secretary Blake, to John Hooke Green the Collector of Customs approving of their sale on April 14. Campbell presented his letter to Governor Yonge, with evidence that the transaction was fraudulent, to the colonial secretary Andrew Barnard the next day.⁵⁵ The matter now only had to go to the Council of Justice. Anne Barnard wrote in her journal, entries dated 14 April ('and a few days more'), that 'a catastrophe' was unfolding because of the *Collector*: that 'the Ides of March were not passed.'⁵⁶ It was becoming apparent that Michael Hogan was personally embroiled in a fraudulent slave trading scam which had enabled him to sell 278 prize slaves at the Cape from *La Rose*, *La Africano* and the *Collector*. When Andrew Barnard met Michael Hogan

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7 March 1800, 63.

⁵⁴ Scarr, *Seychelles since 1770*, 4. Scarr has identified the *Collector*'s presence at the Seychelles in the Mauritian archives.

⁵⁵ Styles, 112.

⁵⁶ LAB 2, 251.

to ascertain if Campbell's accusations were true, the Irishman became very angry and, when the meeting was over, Hogan had convinced him that Campbell's accusations were untrue. Campbell, however, delivered the letter he had drafted for the governor to Barnard on March the 15th, with evidence from the captain and officers of the Danish ship, *Holger Danske*, that the *Collector's* 'prize' slaves had been purchased at Mozambique Island and Quelimane and taken from the *L'Auguste* at Madagascar.⁵⁷ Barnard, a consummate diplomat, cautioned Campbell to wait until the VAC had made its ruling before reporting his evidence to van Ryneveldt or Yonge. The Colonial Secretary reported, later, in his *Letterbook*, to the former governor, Earl Macartney how, 'At first the parties talked *big* and threatened Campbell with everything that was *terrible*'.

Yonge's reaction

Barnard delivered Campbell's letter to Yonge at Government House in the Company's Gardens after the VAC had adjudicated the *Collector's* slaves as prizes of war. The elderly governor's fit of rage was even more dramatic than Hogan's. He told Barnard that Campbell's accusations were 'unfounded' and that he doubted if he would 'permit the business to come before the Court of Justice or not'.⁵⁸ Yonge, who had instructed Campbell to report any suspicious shipping activity in the port, now accused the port captain of being 'invidious' and told Barnard that it was his duty as governor, 'to quash such dispositions in society'. Yonge threatened to thwart Campbell's attempt to persuade van Ryneveldt to bring the matter to court, by speaking with the fiscal himself. When Barnard told the governor that 'there was something illicit in the transaction and that it was the government's duty to squash the illicit transaction if Campbell could prove it', Yonge replied that merchants sometimes engage in activities that are considered 'illicit' and that 'men of eminence & ability are not to be sacrificed to a sett of dirty low informers [sic]'. It was then that Barnard realised 'that this same bribe can have gone to the governors own pocket [sic]'. Hogan later admitted to a Commission of Inquiry that investigated Yonge's transgressions that he had made a '*douceur*', or 'gift', to obtain his license from Yonge and his assistants to import slaves into the colony.⁵⁹ Lady Barnard suggests that Hogan's bribe, said to have been £3000, had put 'His

⁵⁷ KL, Maxwell to Macartney, 15 July 1800. *L'Auguste* was also called the *Mountain* while stationed at Mozambique Island.

⁵⁸ LAB 2, 70. This 'Court of Justice' was called the *Raad van Justitie* or 'Council of Justice' in Dutch.

⁵⁹ LAB 2, 64, 'I forgot to mention a very odd surmise which it seems is generally believed here, that Mr Blake has accepted a present from Mr Hogan to procure him this advantage which will be an immense one to the other.'

Excellency in [Hogan's] power'. Hogan stated before a secret committee (the COI that was assembled to investigate Yonge's infelicities) that:

finding the Governor disposed to acquiesce, I set my claim for the importation of slaves in the strongest point I could and begged to know whether I might write him on the subject, to which he replied he was ready to attend to what I chose to write to him, that he had heard of me in England and would be glad to be intimately and secretly acquainted with me and desired that I would speak to Blake.⁶⁰

Yonge tried to stop the case from going to court. He summoned Willem van Ryneveldt into his office and presented him with Campbell's letter which dealt with an 'unauthorised trade'. Yonge suggested that there was a money motive – a third share in the 18,147 *Rd* profits of the trade – for both Campbell and van Ryneveldt (with the last third going to the government).⁶¹ Van Ryneveldt told the governor that he was willing to forgo his share in Hogan's forfeited profits, but wanted only to be paid for his legal services. Barnard reassured the fiscal that Yonge would not obstruct the case, since it would leave an 'indelible stain' on his reputation because he had received a bribe from a merchant. Barnard and van Ryneveldt agreed that it was Campbell's duty as port-captain to produce any evidence of foul play in relation to the *Collector* before the court.

4. 'A vile dark finessing affair': The *Collector* scandal⁶²

Donald Campbell's determination to bring his allegations into the public sphere brought both Michael Hogan and the Vice Admiralty Court judge John Holland under scrutiny at the Cape. Holland visited Andrew Barnard a few days after Barnard met with Hogan. Holland spoke disparagingly of Hogan and Barnard felt perhaps, that he was trying to elicit information from him on Hogan's behalf. Anne Barnard reports that her husband was 'uncall'd on [sic]' but, finding himself at the heart of this intrigue, 'tried to rouse in each a sense of what was right', under the circumstances. She had also heard 'from various people' that Holland 'had condemned the slaves as prize property on the evidence of one black boy' who had

⁶⁰ Styles, 109. See MHFP, File Nr: En-159, 9 January 1801, 'Communications made to the Secret Committee at the [Cape of Good Hope] relative to Sir George Yonge.' The firm Walker & Robertson were granted similar permissions for contracts and licenses during Dundas's command of the Cape. KL, Barrow to Macartney, 20 December 1800 for the £3000 figure.

⁶¹ Commission of Inquiry, *RCC* Vol. 4, October 1801, 258.

⁶² LAB 2, 'The Vineyard' 14 April 1800, 102.

been dismissed during his second examination, at Hogan's request, because of his contradictory testimony. The High Court of Admiralty records document the 'standing interrogatory' of a certain Mohamet Bram dated 8 April 1800. Bram had stated that 'the cargo was taken from Mosambique in Boats to the ship *L'Auguste* a short time previous to the capture [sic].'⁶³ He corrected his original statement by saying he had been taken as a prize slave by a French privateer called the *Marquis* a year before, and sent on with the *L'Auguste* on a slave trading voyage from Mauritius to Mozambique. He added that the ship and its cargo of enslaved Africans was captured during the return journey to the Isle de France. Lady Barnard summarised Hogan and Yonge's private agreement in her journal, writing:

Mr Hogan only obtained leave by a lye to sell them, and had he *not* composed the lye he could not have done it unless he had obtained permission from the Governor – this permission he happened to have obtained a few weeks ago, to land 1800 slaves & meaning to avail himself of this beneficial traffick of Human nature had intended by a skillful manoeuvre to secure also the *sale* of 6 or 800 *more* as prize property – thus stood the business [sic].⁶⁴

The Barnard's were both convinced that Hogan would 'fail at present & between ourselves he will deserve it'.⁶⁵

The Council of Justice's proceedings, 21 April to 10 July 1800

The case of the *Collector* entered the public sphere when Van Ryneveldt opened a Commission of Inquiry (COI) from 15 to 20 April 1800 to investigate Campbell's allegations that the *Collector* had engaged in an illicit act of smuggling slaves into the colony. Van Ryneveldt received a letter written by George Yonge, with an 'original missive from the Port Captain Donald Campbell,' from Andrew Barnard on 15 April 1800.⁶⁶ Hogan met with Yonge at Government House on 16 April 1800 to get the governor to intercede in this matter for him. He claimed that the accusation that the slaves had been purchased was 'improbable'; and, in addition to this, no objections had been raised when the matter had been placed before the Vice-Admiralty Court.⁶⁷ Hogan told Yonge that these charges were a terrible slur on

⁶³ NA HCA 49/34, 8 April 1800, 'Re. Examination of Mohamet Bram on the 22nd Standing Interrogatory.'

⁶⁴ LAB 2, 105.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁶ WCA CJ 439, 233.

⁶⁷ Styles, 113.

his reputation as a merchant. Yonge tried to dissuade van Ryneveldt from taking the matter before the Council of Justice, the more so because it had already been decided by the Vice Admiralty Court. The public nature of the accusations from Campbell, the British naval officers and Hogan's antagonists in the business sphere forced van Ryneveldt to bring the matter before the Council. The case entered the criminal justice roll on 21 April 1800.

The Council heard the statements of Captain Smit and officers from the Danish ship *Holger Dansche*, which had been at Mozambique at the same time as the *Collector*, as well as the 'interrogatories' of the *Collector's* crew.⁶⁸ Van Ryneveldt also questioned some of the enslaved Africans from the *Collector* and they testified that they had been purchased at Mozambique. Michael Hogan appeared in court on the first day of the hearings. His men repeated the testimonies which they had presented before the Admiralty Court, which dealt with matters at sea. The Council of Justice, on the other hand, dealt with civil and criminal matters on land. The Council of Justice was presented with a confusing 'equipoise of evidence', until the chief-mate confessed that there had been two sets of logbooks for the *Collector* – which Campbell seized from the chief-mate's trunk on the detained ship. The nine mariners who had testified before the Vice Admiralty Court during the adjudications of *La Rose*, *La Africano* and the *Collector* disappeared after the discovery of the 'original journal' (*Origineel Journaal*), along with the ship's captain, David Smart. Smart, who had met Donald Campbell after the discovery of the logbook, threatened to demonstrate to the Council of Justice how 'Hogan had formed and arranged the whole plan.'⁶⁹ Hogan's captain, understanding that 'it was a hanging matter', and, having received an alleged bribe of £2000 from Hogan, fled the colony.⁷⁰

The onus of guilt shifted from Hogan to Smart, after he failed to appear before the court three times – on 6 June, 24 June and 10 July 1800.⁷¹ Smart's departure exonerated Hogan from all blame, though Lady Anne Barnard, along with others, noticed 'the extreme dejection of Mr Hogans continance [sic]' on the evening of Friday May 2, upon his loss of 18,147 *Rd*.⁷² Now that the case was closed, Lady Anne Barnard mused, Hogan could recover his reputation and Cape Town's high society

⁶⁸ Peter Lindquist and Jervis Daniels Brödig were the Danish officers who testified with Captain Smit or Smith.

⁶⁹ LAB 2, 137.

⁷⁰ LAB 2, 261. Vice-admiral Roger Curtis issued a letter on 24 April 1800 to the captains of the naval vessels under his command for David Smart to be arrested should he be found on any of the ships in the colony.

⁷¹ WCA CJ 479, ff. 221-341.

⁷² LAB 2, Saturday 3 May 1800, 123.

could ‘see the affair blow over’.⁷³ The scandal, however, had revealed Yonge’s involvement in the affair – his ‘jobbing’ – and Lady Anne Barnard condemned his involvement in what she described was ‘only continuing the old practice here – and a practice by no means as despised by the Dutch as it is by us,’ the use of public office for private gain.⁷⁴ Armstrong and Worden have touched on VOC officials profiting from selling slaves on the internal market during the 17th and 18th centuries in their overview of slavery at the Cape; and, as we can see, this was a practice that continued as long as enslaved people yielded profits in the Cape.⁷⁵ This gave her a chance, once again, to praise her husband who was ‘not incensed at’ what had transpired but, by being principled, did much to ‘inspire awe’. Her journal reveals, when all is said and done, the measures the Barnards had taken to protect Andrew Barnard from being implicated in the scandal.

Given Machado’s research on the *vānīyās* of Mozambique, we can assume that Sobhachand Sowchand and Laxmichand Motichand, had both played a part in this slave trading transaction – since they were actively involved in the slave trade between Mozambique Island and Quelimane. Sowchand operated from Mozambique Island, in co-operation with Monteiro, and Motichand ran slave trading voyages between Mozambique Island and Quelimane. The logbook of the *Collector* documents that Captain Smart and his men had saluted the governor of Quelimane when they had docked there, and had invited him on board before embarking their shipment of enslaved Africans onto the ship.⁷⁶ There is every reason to believe that governor Yonge and Michael Hogan were trying to establish a secret slave trading relationship between Mozambique and the Cape, because Yonge had expressed his eagerness to meet the governor of Mozambique, Francesco Guedes de Carvalho Menezes, in a letter dated September 1801 to discuss ‘some politic affairs concerning these two Governments.’⁷⁷ Merchants could make arrangements to import slaves to the Cape if their activities were supported by the governors of the Cape and Mozambique. Campbell’s exposé, however, prevented this from happening.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ LAB 2, 103.

⁷⁵ Armstrong and Worden, ‘The Slaves,’ 115. Cape officials controlled the internal slave market in Cape Town from the beginning of the VOC settlement. Willem Adriaen van der Stel and his council took this practice to new heights from 1699–1707.

⁷⁶ WCA CJ 479, 243.

⁷⁷ Styles, 142.

The second Commission of Inquiry (October 1801)

A second Commission of Inquiry (COI) – composed of T.P. van de Leur (Brigadier-General), John Pringle (EIC agent and commissary-general), E. Buckley (civil paymaster) and John Barrow (auditor-general) – was convened to investigate Yonge's alleged misuse of office in October 1801. The COI convened to investigate, among other things, Governor Yonge's alleged acceptance of a bribe by Michael Hogan to import slaves into the colony.⁷⁸ The COI never sent their report to London and by the time their report had been submitted to the Cape authorities on 16 March 1802, Britain was preparing to exit the Cape. The Commission concluded that Yonge's private secretary, Blake, and his aides-de-camp, Cockburn, had processed the agreement between Hogan and Yonge to import enslaved Africans into the port. It transpired that Blake and Hogan had shares in a large proportion of Hogan's license and that 'a very strong degree of presumption appears in the several circumstances brought forward, that [Yonge] connived at and promoted the corrupt practices carried on in his family'.⁷⁹ Cockburn defended himself by stating that he had only profited from the sale of ten slaves; while Yonge informed Henry Dundas that he had consented to the completion of Hogan's license by March 1800.⁸⁰

The Commission blamed Hogan for the *Collector's* fraudulent privateering voyage, though Campbell had already dropped the charges he had made against the Irishman. The Commission concluded that John Holland had been aware of 'the possibility of earlier underhand slave dealings between Hogan and Yonge' and had made a cloak to cover the most iniquitous transaction.⁸¹ When Holland was asked why he had not taken steps to punish the perjurers in the VAC, he replied that no one had appeared to prosecute for perjury.⁸² The commissioners agreed that Holland had compromised the reputation of the VAC. Henry Dundas informed King George III that Yonge was to be recalled after only ten months of governorship on account of his 'wild and extravagant' behaviour. The disgraced governor was so unpopular that the Royal Navy refused him passage back to London.

⁷⁸ RCC, Vol. 4, 258.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ WCA Accessions (A) 1415 (74), Andrew Barnard to Macartney, 10 March 1800: 'I know that your rule of conduct so far from serving as a model for [Yonge] is seldom approved of, and still seldomer following.'

⁸¹ Van Niekerk, 'Judge John Holland and the Vice-Admiralty Court of the Cape of Good Hope, 1797–1803', 195n81.

⁸² Van Niekerk, 'Judge John Holland and the Vice-Admiralty Court of the Cape of Good Hope, 1797–1803', 195.

5. Hogan leaves Cape Town

British merchants reaped great profits from slave trading at the Cape and John Barrow reported to Macartney in December 1800 that slave importation was ‘in its Zenith’ while Yonge was governor there.⁸³ Harries notes that the formal inquiries and removal of Yonge from the position of governor did not deter Hogan from pursuing further slave trading opportunities.⁸⁴ Hogan represented a Mozambican physician Carlos José Guezzi in the aftermath of the *Collector* affair as his agent for the sale of slaves in January 1802. Guezzi arrived as supercargo of the *Calypso* with a letter of introduction from General Isidro de Almeida Souza e Sá requesting that the Lieutenant-governor, Francis Dundas, give all assistance to Guezzi and Monteiro’s *Ninfa do Mar*. Dundas issued a license to the British merchant firm Walker & Robertson to import 170 enslaved Africans from the *Calypso* and 245 from *Le Claire* in February 1802.⁸⁵ The slaves were transhipped from the *Joaquim*, which was lying in Table Bay – and were the last slaves imported under license at the Cape during the first British occupation. Hogan wound up his business activities at the Cape with the commencement of the Dutch Batavian Administration in 1803, arranged the shipment of a cargo of enslaved people to Charleston and liquidated his assets into four shiploads of Java coffee bound for New York. Alexander Tennant remained at the Cape, where he continued to import enslaved people into the colony until 1812.

6. Conclusion

The importation of Mozambican slaves to the Mascarenes and French West Indies by French merchants reached unprecedented levels between 1770 and the early 1790s. While the onset of the French Revolutionary Wars diminished the presence of French slave traffic in the western Indian Ocean after 1793, Portuguese and Spanish colonial slave traders increased the exportation of enslaved people to Cape Town and, later, the Americas from the mid-1790s to the 1850s. Britain’s occupation of the Cape in 1795 coincided with an unprecedented rise of Portuguese and Spanish colonial slave traffic across the western Indian Ocean and on to the slave markets of the Americas. Britain’s occupation of the Cape also coincided with the 1796 Order in Council which prohibited the importation of enslaved people into

⁸³ KL, Barrow to Macartney, 23 December 1800. Hogan imported 160 enslaved Mozambicans into the colony on 30 December 1800.

⁸⁴ Harries, ‘Mozambique Island,’ 417.

⁸⁵ BO 126, ‘Letters Received from various individuals,’ F. Dundas to Greene, 9 February 1802.

British possessions without the written permission of its colonial administrators. This ruling, along with increasing pressure from William Wilberforce's abolitionist movement, forced Britain's colonial administrators to keep the importation of slaves at a minimum. Enterprising British merchants like Michael Hogan and Alexander Tennant were determined, however, to exploit the huge demand for slave labour at the Cape and came up with a number of creative schemes to import slaves into the colony. The *Collector* scandal represents a last ditch effort on the part of Portuguese colonial merchants, Spanish American slave traders and British merchants to bypass British imperial restrictions on the importation of slaves at the Cape in advance of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. The later activities of the Royal Navy's antislavery squadrons and Mixed Commission Courts at the Cape of Good Hope and St. Helena accelerated Britain's dismantling of the Indian Ocean slave trade following the Palmerston Act of 1839. The Royal Navy's effective 'war on the slave trade' resulted in the last admissions of 'liberated Africans' into the Cape colony in the 1860s

Reconstructing Iberian Involvement in the Commerce in People Around Maritime Asia: Between Challenges and Future Possibilities

Filipa Ribeiro da Silva

Abstract

International scholarly interest in the Portuguese engagement in slavery and slave trade took off in Portugal as well as in several Portuguese-speaking countries around the world in the 1980s and 1990s. This research trend became increasingly visible after the turn of the century. The findings have helped to open a debate about the role of the Portuguese in this horrific commerce, and the profits obtained through the commercialisation of the labour of enslaved people. The main focus of these debates has been on the transatlantic slave trade, while the role of the Portuguese in the commerce of enslaved and bonded peoples in the great Indian Ocean, the Asian Seas and the Pacific has remained absent. This chapter focuses on the Portuguese involvement in the commerce in humans in maritime Asia. It offers an overview of the existing scholarship and its main contributions. It moreover discusses the main limitations and gaps in the available literature. The text reflects on the main constraints imposed by the source materials, collections and archives, and explores methodological challenges. Finally, the chapter puts forward some core ideas for drafting an agenda for future research.

Keywords: Portuguese Empire, Maritime Asia, historiography, methodology, research agenda

1. Introduction

Portugal still has a long way to go in order to come to terms with the least positive legacies of its imperial past. Public discourse and memory remain dominated by narratives that continue to glorify the bravery of Portuguese maritime explorers and conquistadors and their deeds in the building of what is still portrayed and perpetuated as one of the largest and long-lasting European overseas empires. Most of the people that worked to build that empire, being enslaved, exiled, convicted or humble settlers are more often than not absent from collective imaginary. This public narrative of Portuguese Imperial History is also very silent about the role played by seamen, military, merchants, officials of the Crown, and religious men

in the capture, displacement, commercialisation, and exploitation of those people coerced to work in the construction of the 'glorious' Portuguese overseas empire, being they of African, Native American or Asian origin.

Academic research on European involvement in the trade in enslaved people started in the late 1960s and 1970s in the context of the first Independences of African and Asian countries and the pan-movements for Liberation and Self-determination.¹ The interest of international scholars on the Portuguese engagement in these activities can be traced back to these decades, but research about this topic only really took off in Portugal as well as in several Portuguese-speaking countries around the world in the 1980s and 1990s. This trend only became increasingly visible after the turn of the century.² The findings put forward by this scholarship have helped to open a debate about the role of the Portuguese in this horrific commerce, and the profits obtained through the commercialisation of the labour of enslaved people, or the output of their labour, either in the form of raw materials or processed goods.³ In recent years, this wind of change that started in academia back in the 1980s, has finally reached the public scrutiny, leading Portuguese public figures and politicians, including the President of the Republic of Portugal to directly intervene in this discussion.⁴

However, like in most European and American countries involved in these hideous activities, in Portugal the main focus of these debates has been on the

¹ See among many others: Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*; Miller, *Way of Death*; Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441–1555*.

² Carreira, *O Tráfico de Escravos nos Rios de Guiné e Ilhas de Cabo Verde, 1810–1850*; Tinhorão, *Os Negros em Portugal*; Rosário Pimentel, *Viagem Ao Fundo das Consciências*; Marques, *Os Sons do Silêncio*; Lahon, *O Negro no Coração do Império*.

³ Alencastro, *O Trato dos Viventes*; Curto, *Álcool e Escravos*; Acioli Lopes, 'Negócio da Costa da Mina e Comércio Atlântico Tabaco, Açúcar, Ouro e Tráfico de Escravos – Pernambuco (1654–1760)'; Vieira Ribeiro, 'The Transatlantic Slave Trade to Bahia, 1582–1851'; Fonseca, *Escravos e Senhores na Lisboa Quinhentista*; Caldeira, *Escravos e Traficantes no Império Português*; Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World*; Menz, 'A Companhia de Pernambuco e Paraíba e o Funcionamento do Tráfico de Escravos em Angola (1759–1775/80), 45–76; Florentino, *Em Costas Negras*; Fonseca, 'A Historiografia Sobre os Escravos em Portugal', 191–218; Caldeira, *Escravos em Portugal*; Domingues da Silva, *The Atlantic Slave Trade from West Central Africa, 1780–1867*; Ribeiro da Silva, 'The Profits of the Portuguese–Brazilian Transatlantic Slave Trade'.

⁴ In the Portuguese media, see, for example: <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/colonialismo/passado-colonial/marcelo-pediu-desculpas-pela-colonizacao-portugal-esta-a-assumir-a-sua-historia-imperial-e-violencias-associadas-ou-o-presidente-deixou-se-levar-na-onda/20230428/644aa659d34ef47b87534cd6>; <https://expresso.pt/politica/2024-04-24-marcelo-diz-que-temos-de-pagar-pela-escravatura-em-africa-e-massacres-coloniais-00c34700>; and <https://www.publico.pt/2024/04/24/politica/noticia/portugal-pagar-custos-escravatura-crimes-coloniais-marcelo-2088143>. In the Brazilian media, see for instance: <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2024/04/24/portugal-tem-que-pagar-custos-de-escravacao-no-brasil-diz-presidente-do-pais.ghtml>; <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/internacional/noticia/2024-04/presidente-de-portugal-reconhece-culpa-por-escravacao-no-brasil>.

transatlantic slave trade carried out by merchants based either in Portugal, or other territories of the so-called Portuguese Atlantic, in particular Brazil, and Angola. The role of the Portuguese in the commerce of enslaved and bonded peoples in the great Indian Ocean, the Asian Seas and the Pacific remains absent from the public eye. The public silence about Portuguese engagement in the trade on enslaved and bonded peoples in maritime Asia contrasts with the efforts of several scholars in Portugal, Portuguese-speaking countries and internationally to unveil multiple facets of these Portuguese activities, which can also be traced back to the 1970s.

This chapter focuses, precisely, on the Portuguese involvement in the commerce of peoples (enslaved, bonded, coerced, dependent) in maritime Asia. Its goals are four-fold. Firstly, it aims to offer the readers an overview of the existing scholarship and its main contributions to the advancement of the study of this topic. Secondly, it discusses the main limitations and gaps in the available literature. Thirdly, it reflects on the main constraints imposed by the source materials, collections and archives. And to conclude, it explores some of the methodological challenges faced by researchers working on the study of this topic and puts forward some core ideas in an attempt to draft an agenda for future research.

2. Portuguese Trade in People in Maritime Asia: Taking Stock of the Scholarship

From as early as the 1970s, several scholars began to unveil the circumstances of Portuguese involvement in the procurement, transportation, commercialisation and exploitation of people, their labour power, and their labour output in the great Indian Ocean Rim, the East Asian seas and the Pacific.⁵ The first studies exploring this topic tended to focus on the connection between the Indian Ocean trade, to slave trade within the African continent, and to the transatlantic slave trade. Soon after, however, researchers started to gather evidence that attested to Portuguese involvement in commerce of enslaved peoples not only directed to the Atlantic, but also to the Indian Ocean, in particular the Islands, where cash-crop production took off in the 18th century, and the capitalist-American-like plantation model of exploitation based on colonial slavery societies first developed in this part of the world.⁶

⁵ Alpers, 'The Role of the Yao in the Development of Trade in East-Central Africa, 1698–c.1850'; Alpers, 'The French Slave Trade in East Africa (1721–1810)', pp. 80–124; Isaacman, *Mozambique*; Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambesi*; Capela, *Escravidura*; Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Capela, *As Burguesias Portuguesas e a Abolição do Tráfico da Escravatura, 1810–1842*; Alpers and Historical Association of Tanzania, *The East African Slave Trade*.

⁶ José Capela and Eduardo Medeiros, *O Tráfico de Escravos de Moçambique para as Ilhas do Índico, 1720–1902*; Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean 1800–1861'.

In the 1990s, research began to sketch a broader and more complex image of the Portuguese participation in the commerce of enslaved peoples in the Indian Ocean Rim, and further eastwards.⁷ This emerging body of literature started to put forward a couple of ideas that remain central to present-day studies of trade on enslaved and bonded peoples around maritime Asia. Firstly, some of these early studies pointed out that the Portuguese encountered pre-existent maritime commerce in enslaved peoples that preceded their arrival and their slaving activities in this vast region – with trade being controlled by different groups of merchants. Secondly, other works showed that the trading operations of the Portuguese involving enslaved peoples had to be carried out in pre-existing labour markets, using existing infra-structures and adjusting to pre-existing cultures of exchange. Thirdly, this early research offered evidence of the multiplicity of routes, their interconnect-edness and multi-directionality. Fourthly, several researchers emphasised that in the Indian Ocean Rim and eastwards, the Portuguese (as well as other Europeans) came across a wide variety of forms of coerced labour, which more often than not they labelled as ‘slavery’, ‘slaveries’ or ‘captivities’, using the European Roman Law-based legal framework, and social definitions of ‘slave’.⁸

If we consider several of the aspects listed above, there are some important differences in slaving operations in maritime Asia and the Atlantic Ocean. Firstly, the former was home to a web of maritime commerce that was far more complex than the Atlantic World. Secondly, in Asia, maritime slave trade, slave sea routes and markets existed prior to the arrival of the Europeans. This means that the Portuguese (as well as all other Europeans) had to face competition from merchants operating in local, regional and inter-regional sea-routes, as well as in the local slave markets to gain access to enslaved and bonded workers. In the Atlantic, in contrast, in the initial period of the developing slave trade, the Portuguese faced no competition in their maritime operations. Competition existed only in the access to African markets supplying enslaved people, which were also catering labour power to the inter-African and Saharan trade, heading to the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Middle East. These differences in terms of competition to access enslaved and coerced labour markets must have had an impact on the way the Portuguese (and other Europeans) developed their slaving operations in maritime Asia and the Atlantic. However, this is a question that has not been sufficiently explored by the scholarship, yet. Another important difference is the fact that the transatlantic slave trade deals only with transport of enslaved Africans, whereas

⁷ See for example: Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*.

⁸ See among others: Pinto, *Slavery in Portuguese India, 1510–1842*; Thomaz, *A Escravatura em Malaca no Século XVI*; Pinto, *Trade and Finance in Portuguese India*; Shirodkar, ‘Slavery in Coastal India’, pp. 30–41.

maritime Asian trade in people involved not only enslaved, but also people bonded, coerced and dependent in different and multiple ways.

The seeds planted by these first waves of scholarship on the Portuguese involvement in the maritime Asia trade in people started to be harvested in the first decades of the 21st century. The last two decades have witnessed the publication of a growing body of scholarship that explores some of the ideas mentioned earlier but has also raised new questions. This most recent wave of scholarly production has therefore brought to the fore a handful of core issues.

Some scholars began to explore the trans-regional and trans-oceanic dimension of the Portuguese (as well as Spanish) slaving activities in maritime Asia, namely by examining the transport of enslaved peoples in two of the major trans-oceanic routes operated by the Iberian Crowns (either directly or under concessions to private merchants): the Manila Galeon crossing the Pacific to connect Spanish colonial possessions in the Philippines and New Spain (present-day Mexico), and the Portuguese Indiaman sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, between Goa and Lisbon.⁹

Other researchers took preliminary steps to further reveal the complexity of slaving operations by expanding the chronological and geographical scope of the study of this topic. While some moved beyond the 18th century, others explored new areas beyond the Western Indian Ocean, and started to look in further detail into operations on both shores of the Indian sub-continent, as well as in the Southeast Asian and the East Asian Seas in the 16th and 17th century.¹⁰

Some of the studies that have come to light in recent years also clearly showed the multitude of actors involved in the Portuguese slave trade in maritime Asia. Like in the Iberian Atlantic, the slaving activities carried out by the Portuguese in this vast region involved people from all walks of life, including not only big, medium and small merchants, but also officials of the Portuguese Crown serving in local colonial governments and fleets, missionaries, regular clergymen, military, members of sailing crews, big, medium and small landowners, among others. Portuguese commercial operations at large (as well as from other Europeans merchants) appeared to have also counted on the collaboration of local merchants,

⁹ See among others: Seijas, 'The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish Manila: 1580–1640'; Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico*; Ribeiro da Silva, 'La traite des esclaves à Lisbonne durant la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle' pp. 303–339.

¹⁰ See among others: Hägerdal, 'The Slaves of Timor'; Fujitani, 'Sino-Portuguese Trafficking of Children during the Ming Dynasty', pp. 311–322; Manso and Sousa, 'Os Portugueses e o Comércio de Escravos nas Filipinas (1580–1600)', pp. 7–21; Harries, 'Middle Passages of the Southwest Indian Ocean', pp. 173–190; Harries, 'Slavery, Indenture and Migrant Labour'; Harries, 'Mozambique Island, Cape Town and the Organisation of the Slave Trade in the South-West Indian Ocean, c.1797–1807', pp. 409–427; Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan*; Hägerdal, 'Slaves and Slave Trade in the Timor Area', pp. 15–33.

credit providers, local crew members, and local authorities, from Arabs, to Indians, to Armenians, to Javanese, and Arakanese.¹¹

In this respect, there is a visible difference between slaving in maritime Asia and the Atlantic World. Research has certainly shown that local authorities and merchants (both big, and small) in Atlantic Africa collaborated with the Portuguese (and other European slave traders). There is equally evidence that Africans (enslaved, freed and free) were found serving in the Atlantic vessels engaged in slave trading. However, most of the operations concerning credit and the safeguarding of risks were in the hands of Europe-based merchants and entrepreneurs. Evidence suggests that this might have not always been the case in maritime Asia. This is, certainly, a question that needs to be further researched in direct connection with slaving operations (being carried out by the Portuguese or other Europeans).

Additionally, this new wave of scholarship on Portuguese participation in the commerce of enslaved and coerced peoples in maritime Asia is showing that this involvement was not only carried out by multiple historical actors, but also that these actors engaged in slaving operations in different ways and capacities. While some might have been involved solely with the out-fitting of ships or with the transportation of enslaved and bonded peoples, others might have been engaged in the commercialisation of their labour power. Whereas other individuals might have been more active in the commercialisation of the raw materials or processed goods extracted and/or produced by enslaved and bonded peoples.

This most recent historiography is also pointing out two other rather important aspects: i) the trans-imperial or cross-imperial character of Portuguese slave trading activities, and ii) the capacity to cater to the needs of local authorities and polities. This means that the Portuguese were not only procuring, transporting and commercialising enslaved and bonded people to cater to the labour demands of their own settlements and outposts in the *Estado da Índia*, but also to provide manpower to other European empires, in particular the Spanish, although there is also evidence of Portuguese trading people to Dutch and French territories. Equally important is the fact that the Portuguese were also transporting enslaved and bonded people for local rulers in the context of trade as well as in the context of warfare, like in the case of Arakan or in the context of the Imjin War.¹²

¹¹ See for instance: Machado, 'A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean', pp. 17–32; Souza, *The Survival*; Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*; Miyata, *Portuguese Intervention in the Manila Galleon Trade*; Van Dyke, 'Ambiguous Faces of the Canton Trade', pp. 21–42; Villamar, *Portuguese Merchants in the Manila Galleon System: 1565–1600*; Souza, *Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese in Maritime Asia, c.1585–1800*; Carreira, *Globalising Goa (1660–1820)*; Mukherjee, 'Portuguese Slave Ports in Bengal, 1500–1700', pp. 215–236.

¹² See for instance: Charney, 'Arakan, Min Yazagyi, and the Portuguese'; Charney, 'Crisis and Reformation in a Maritime Kingdom of Southeast Asia', pp. 185–219; Yimprasert, 'The Portuguese in

The new body of scholarship on the Portuguese participation in the commerce of enslaved and bonded peoples in maritime Asia has also started to sketch a profile of the individuals that ended up enslaved, displaced, sold and exploited at the hands of the Portuguese merchants, either serving the interests of the Portuguese Crown, their own private interests, or the interests of third parties (being Europeans or not). This preliminary sketch is quite revealing pointing out not only the diverse geographical origin of peoples trapped in the Portuguese commercial webs in maritime Asia, but also their diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.¹³ More importantly, this scholarship is revealing that these people ended up being labelled as enslaved and entered the Portuguese maritime circuits in rather different circumstances. Some were captured at war, others were pawns for debts, many ended up in the slaving markets and trading circuits as punishment for a crime, others were tribute slaves, and there were also cases of free people that ended up being kidnapped or abducted and sold into slavery.¹⁴ Here, there are many parallels that can be established with the ways through which Africans also entered the Atlantic slave routes, and how Native Americans ended up enslaved at the hands of the Europeans in the Americas. But at the same time, there are also significant differences between commerce in people in the Atlantic and maritime Asia. While the former tends to be dominated mainly by enslaved Africans, in the latter not all people traded were enslaved (as in the Western definition), many were bonded to a debt, a Lord, or a land. Additionally, enslavement, bondage and coercion appear to have been more transitory juridical and social statuses, with people being able to enter slavery and change their status more frequently than in the Atlantic, where those enslaved had very few prospects of being freed.

Scholarship on the commerce and exploitation of people in the Indian Ocean, the East Asian Seas and the Pacific has come a long way not only in terms of content, but also in terms of approaches. The first studies in the 1970s and 1980s were very much influenced by the Dependency Theory. Consequently, the core goal of their research was to understand how European activities contributed to the underdevelopment of this region of the world. The focus of these studies ended up being the Europeans, their economic activities and the consequences of their operations.

Arakan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', pp. 66–82; Yimprasert, 'Portuguese Lançados in Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries'; van Galen, 'The Changing Nature of the Seventeenth Century Slave Trade in Arakan and Eastern Bengal'; Marino and Clements, 'Iberian Sources on the Imjin War', pp. 27–48; Ehalt, 'Suspicion and Repression'.

¹³ Souza de Faria, 'From Asia to Lisbon', pp. 83–98; Souza de Faria, 'Enslaved Children in Portuguese India, 1550–1760', pp. 159–180; Fujitani, 'The Concubine Slaves of the Portuguese in the China Sea Region'.

¹⁴ See, for instance: Ehalt, 'Geninka and Slavery', pp. 342–356; Fujitani, 'Government Slavery in Portuguese Melaka, 1511–1523'.

Thus, these earliest studies paid attention to the reconstruction of trade patterns. Their efforts allow them to explore routes and interconnections between regions in an attempt to reconstruct a web of multiple circuits across these water surfaces.

In the 1990s, studies started to explore the inter-connections between European slaving operations and local forms of slavery, enslavement and coercion. In that sense, we could argue that in terms of approach there was a refocus on maritime Asia and East Africa, and on the impact of local aspects on European operations. This shift progressively allowed for the exploration of Arab and Asian merchants and merchant diasporas and their role in these commercial circuits.

The 'global turn' in the early 1990s and the influence of globalisation theory led scholars to pay closer attention to inter-connectedness, not only between regions of supply and demand, but also between European and non-European merchants, and their connections with local polities. Simultaneously, there was a clear decentring from the coloniser to a recentring on the colonised, with more attention being paid to workers, whether free, enslaved, or coerced in any other form. Hence, we could argue that in terms of approaches, we see three main moments: the first dedicated mainly to European routes and trade settlements, and consequently dominated by 'national approaches focusing on the different European powers in Asia'; a second devoted to the study of non-European routes and commerce in connection to the Europeans, and a third, where we see a clear shift in the focus to the local authorities and the local merchants, and more recently to the local enslaved, bonded and coerced peoples, and the study of their activities, and living experiences.

This brief overview makes clear that scholars have come a long way since the first studies in the 1970s and what has been accomplished is quite impressive. However, this panoramic view of the scholarship also shows some of its current limitations. In my view, there are a number of issues that scholars should put some effort in addressing in future research. Among these, I would like to highlight five main challenges. The first is geographical fragmentation. Many case studies focus on specific regions, with little dialogue or connection with other spaces. There is a lot of merit in carrying out research at a micro- and meso- level, but once there is a proliferation of studies at these scales, it is important to move forward in an attempt to draw a larger picture. The second problem is the so-called 'methodological nationalism'. Most studies on European engagement in commerce in people in maritime Asia (being Portuguese or others) tend to focus solely on slaving operations within a single empire and often only based on source materials produced by that same imperial power. There is a danger in making European empires the key unit of analysis and source of information. On the one hand, this type of approach overlooks slaving operations across multiple empires, and on the other, obscures activities that were carried out by European historical actors outside of the sphere of European empires. In this respect, it is also rather important that scholars

continue the efforts made earlier by other researchers to disentangle the activities carried out under the guise of the Portuguese Crown and those that were developed by Portuguese subjects on the margins of the Crown, or those that self-identified with the ‘Portuguese Tribe’.¹⁵

The third problem is the danger of falling into the trap of European bias. Many case studies depart from and dialogue mainly with European literature, ignoring local scholarship. In addition, studies also often rely heavily on European source materials. It is certainly true that for some regions local sources are scarce or do not have abundant information on trade in people. However, descriptive sources can be rather informative and formative to understand the workings of European trading in people in maritime Asia and its encounters and interactions with local and regional circuits. Language skills are of course a barrier to access local sources and local historiographies, but that is something that can be overcome by working together with local scholars or specialists of Areas Studies. The fourth problem is directly connected precisely with Area Studies on the various regions of the Indian Ocean and East Asia. Historical studies developed within this interdisciplinary academic field have tended to focus solely on local sources and local languages, and only sporadically and reluctantly engage with European materials, because of their implicit colonial biases. Younger scholars are taking steps to bridge this academic disciplinary divide by bringing into dialogue European and local sources and historiographies in their research, but there is a lot of ground to be covered in this respect.¹⁶

The last two major issues I see in the current literature are, on the one hand, the ‘tyranny’ of the long 18th-century and, on the other, the limited dialogue between the streams of scholarship that look at the procurement, displacement, commercialisation and exploitation of people in maritime Asia over time. The over-focusing on the 18th century leaves earlier periods of European engagement in slave trading in maritime Asia overlooked, with crucial consequences for our understanding of the topic, as those were formative periods. The disconnect between the historiographies that examine the commerce in enslaved and bonded peoples prior as well as during European colonialism in Asia, and its connections with commerce in indentured labourers in the Age of Imperialism, as well as with present-day forms of Human Trafficking is another major problem. Improving the dialogue between these different bodies of scholarship, which are currently still much bounded by

¹⁵ Halikowski, ‘No Obvious Home’, pp. 1–28.

¹⁶ See, for instance: Zurndorfer, ‘Human Trafficking and Piracy in Early Modern East Asia’, pp. 908–931; Liu, ‘Macao’s Moral Maze’, pp. 1–18; Ehalt, ‘Jesuits and the Problem of Slavery in Early Modern Japan’; see also the Special Issues on Slavery and Bondage in Asia published in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* in 2021: <https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/49044/print> and in *Itinerario* in 2023: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/itinerario/article/regimes-of-bondage-the-encounter-between-early-modern-european-and-asian-slaveryes/745B2800D2997461FF06660DC739A39F>.

chronological, geographical and disciplinary constraints, could significantly help our understanding of the trade in people in maritime Asia in a long-term and comparative perspective.¹⁷

These are, however, not the sole challenges ahead of scholars aiming to study Portuguese (and more broadly European) engagement in the commerce of peoples in maritime Asia. In my view, there are three other core hurdles: accessibility and searchability of sources, the biases of colonial sources (in particular concerning definitions of slave and slavery) and the risks of approaches overly focused on European Imperial units of analysis and European activities.

3. Navigating the Wide Sea of Sources

Many of the issues I have raised above are directly connected with a logistical problem faced by researchers aiming to explore this topic in the context of maritime Asia: the issue of the availability and accessibility of the sources. This is certainly not an exclusive problem for the reconstruction of the Portuguese trade in people in maritime Asia. If reconstructing the participation of any European empire in the maritime Asian slave trade is a daunting task, to carry out that kind of research for the Portuguese empire and subjects of the Portuguese Crown is a tough exercise in puzzle making.

Present-day archives and source collections concerning the former 'Estado da Índia' and the activities of the subjects of the Portuguese Crowns operating in maritime Asia are spread over at least four continents, multiple countries and cities, from Macao, to Goa, Maputo, Luanda, and Rio de Janeiro, as well as Lisbon and other port cities in Portugal.¹⁸ In addition, several archives located in former territories of other empires also have source materials that are equally valuable to study this topic, and they too are scattered across the globe, from the Philippines and Indonesia to Mexico, the Netherlands and the Vatican.¹⁹ Careful mapping of

¹⁷ See for instance: Asome, 'The Indentured Coolie Trade from Macao', pp. 157–179; Ginés-Blasi, 'The 'Coolie Trade' via Southeast Asia', pp. 97–118; Gonçalves, 'Pirates, Anamites and Trafficking', pp. 1–22; Gonçalves, 'Operários Chineses em Moçambique'.

¹⁸ Macao: <https://www.archives.gov.mo/pt/>; Goa: <https://daa.goa.gov.in>; Maputo: <https://www.ahm.uem.mz>; Brasil: Directório Brasil de Arquivos: <https://dibrarq.arquivonacional.gov.br>; Biblioteca Nacional: <https://dibrarq.arquivonacional.gov.br>; Luanda: <https://ana.gov.ao>; Lisbon: Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo: <https://antt.dglab.gov.pt>; Biblioteca da Ajuda: <https://www.palacioajuda.gov.pt/paginas/efbb3cfo-biblioteca-da-ajuda>; Arquivo Histórico da Marinha: <https://arquivohistorico.marinha.pt>; Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino: <https://ahu.dglab.gov.pt>. Please note that this is not, however, a comprehensive list of the relevant archives.

¹⁹ See, for instance: México: <https://www.gob.mx/agn>; Philippines: National Archives of the Philippines: <https://foi.gov.ph/en/agencies/nap/SUCCESSFUL/>; Netherlands: <https://www.nationalarchief.nl/en>; Indonesia: National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia: <https://anri.go.id/en>;

available source materials and assessment of their accessibility is therefore crucial to navigate this wide sea of sources.

In the case of the reconstruction of the trade in people carried out by the Portuguese, either for the Portuguese Crown or privately, being aware of this geographical dispersion is essential, because the reconstruction of routes, the reconstruction of the life of enslaved people, or the study of the processes of identity formation among enslaved and coerced peoples will more often than not require researchers to embark on a periplus through different archives and their collections.

However, the geographical dispersion of archival collections is not the sole problem faced by scholars. Language is a second major obstacle, because documentation to reconstruct the Portuguese slaving activities in maritime Asia (as well as other activities) requires command not only of Portuguese, but also several languages including Spanish, Dutch, French, English, and other European languages, in addition to local languages. After all, the Portuguese and European colonial governments in Asia were not the sole political and administrative units that produced relevant documentation for the study of the topic under scrutiny in this chapter. Being skilled in European and local languages and/or developing close collaboration with local scholars and archivists is paramount to overcome this challenge.

The third main hurdle in terms of source materials for the Portuguese case is the fragmented nature of the collections available. Most of the source collections in the various locations mentioned earlier are incomplete, due to various historical circumstances, such as natural disasters like the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, or due to sea hazard, like the shipwreck of the Indiaman fleet that carried the Goa Inquisition Archive to Lisbon, with most of the documentation that was salvaged ending up in Brazil (currently at the Biblioteca Nacional in Brazil).²⁰ A lot of documentation has also been lost when the archives and collections were relocated between buildings, or simply due to pure theft, or the effects of Asian Monsoon weather.

The fourth main problem is indeed conservation. This is a difficulty that can manifest itself in two rather extreme forms. There are institutions where technicians in charge of conservation are overly zealous, who either keep the documentation inaccessible to scholars, or let researchers examine the documents but not without imposing enormous restrictions. These can go from limiting time for consultation to being physically present during consultation and directly overseeing the handling of the documents by scholars! On the other extreme, there are institutions that due to lack of funding, qualified personnel or simply lack of political will maintain collections with very limited measures to safeguard long-term preservation.

Vatican: <https://www.archivioapostolicovaticano.va/content/aav/it.html>; Spain: <https://pares.cultura.gob.es/inicio.html>. Please note that this is not, however, a comprehensive list of the relevant archives.

²⁰ Biblioteca Nacional Digital, Brazil: <https://bndigital.bn.gov.br/acervodigital>.

Another major issue faced by scholars interested in studying not only slave trade and slavery, but also broader questions concerning Portuguese colonialism in Asia is the limited availability of detailed archival guides for key collections, which can aid scholars in their quest to find pertinent source materials.²¹ For several archives the guides and catalogues were published still during the colonial era and there are even archival collections for which there are no detailed inventories available. Certainly, archival institutions are not entirely responsible for this poor situation in terms of cataloguing and inventories, because more often than not they remain understaffed, and their activities limited due to political decisions and constraints in national budgets.

Despite the difficulties faced by archives, in recent years several institutions containing relevant documentation for the study of the Portuguese empire and the activities of Portuguese subjects in Asia have made an effort to make catalogues available online, to create search engines that allow the use of text mining techniques to search some of the catalogues. Efforts have also been made to digitalise documentation and make it accessible online.²² However, if we compare the accessibility and searchability of key archives and collections for the study of Portuguese activities in maritime Asia, with that of the materials essential to reconstruct the operations of other European countries such as the Netherlands, the difference is staggering in terms of resources available online. Not only have entire catalogues been made available but also digitalised copies of almost complete collections. AI inspired tools have also been developed to allow text searching in the documents, and automated transcriptions. This is a precious tool for bodies of sources that are very large and for which manual search would take too long or would be too complex, as well as for situations where the information researchers are looking for could be anywhere in the entire collection.²³ This type of AI inspired tools also has enormous potential for the fragmented collections of Iberian sources. However, that is an initiative that still needs to be further developed and certainly cannot be done without the collaboration of the archives relevant for the study of the History of the Iberian empires and their subjects' activities in maritime Asia and beyond.

²¹ Herewith some key links to access full or partial inventories in Lisbon: Arquivo Científico Tropical Digital (ACTD): <https://actd.iict.pt>; <https://antt.dglab.gov.pt/pesquisar-na-torre-do-tombo/>.

²² Mexico: <https://memoricamexico.gob.mx/#home>; Spain: <https://pares.cultura.gob.es/inicio.html>; Portugal: <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt>; <https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt>.

²³ For Spain see: <https://pares.cultura.gob.es/pares-htr/>; for the Netherlands, see: <https://www.openarchieven.nl>; <https://transcriptions.globalise.huygens.knaw.nl>.

4. Critical Readings of the Sources

Source materials produced within the framework of the Portuguese Estado da Índia as well as in the context of other European empires in maritime Asia were generated by individuals with an European mindset and European frames of reference in terms of political, legal, social and cultural structures and hierarchies. These obviously also applied to definitions of slave and slavery. This means that those producing the information that historians can access today imprinted their own views and perceptions on the way they categorised and labelled peoples and situations they encountered. In terms of the study of slave trade and slavery this has tremendous consequences, because it implies that the term slave, (slav or slaf) as well as the term slavery, both with a European origin, rooted in Roman Law ended up being transferred and used to define situations where coercion was used over people with the purpose of displacing, commercialising or exploiting their labour power. This entails that different forms of coerced and bonded labour, displacement, trade and exploitation of people in maritime Asia might have been labelled and conflated by the producers of the source materials under the same banners of slave and slavery – and these are the sources that are now available to researchers. This is certainly also true for other parts of the world, where local practices of labour coercion and bondage, the commerce of these people's manpower and exploitation of their labour power have been named and defined using European categories as frames of reference. The multiple forms of slavery and slave trade in Africa are a case in point.²⁴

For scholars aiming to reconstruct the commerce in people and the various forms of enslavement, bondage and coercion they have been subjected to at the hands of the Portuguese (as well as other Europeans) across maritime Asia, it will be paramount to deconstruct the multiple meanings behind the labels of slave, slavery and slave trade attributed by the Portuguese and other Europeans to local relations of dependency and labour coercion, as well as the activities that would emerge around the procurement, displacement and commercialisation, and exploitation of those people. This has been a hurdle faced with success by scholars of African History previously. So, there is no reason why it cannot be done for the different regions of the Indian Ocean Rim, the Southeast and East Asian Seas and the Pacific. Mapping the different types of dependency and coercion, and identifying those involved in those practices seems essential to carry out any reconstruction of the activities of Portuguese (and other Europeans) in terms of procurement of labour (both free and coerced), and its commercialisation and exploitation around

²⁴ See, for instance: Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*.

maritime Asia, either for the construction of their own empires, or on the service and for the benefit of local authorities and polities.

It is equally important to reflect on who produced those sources, for whom and with what purpose. For this is essential to disentangle the activities carried out in the name of the Portuguese Crown, the Catholic Church, the Vatican and specific Religious Orders within the Vatican, and the activities of the subjects of the Portuguese Crown that operated in maritime Asia privately, or those that were not subjects of the Portuguese, but did identify with the 'Portuguese Tribe'. And, finally, there were also individuals that served simultaneously different Lords while safeguarding their own interests. Not all these historical actors produced sources. But those that did, had distinct interests in their production generating reports that were guided by their own aims or the goals of those who they serve. These could be various polities and associated institutions, from the Portuguese Crown and the Catholic Church to rulers of local polities. These questions are crucial to understand what was registered, what was left out, and why? And for whom was this information recorded? If those producing the sources were officials of the Portuguese Crown, they would tend to register what was of interest to this polity. If Portuguese subjects operated on the margins of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, their activities in most cases went unregistered because they had no interest in keeping track of them.

The implications of this for the reconstruction of the activities of the Portuguese in connection with the procurement, transportation, commercialisation and exploitation of people and their labour (either being enslaved, bonded, coerced and/or dependent) in maritime Asia are tremendous. Most of the sources available offer the researcher the insights from men that were serving the Portuguese Crown, and the Catholic Church, and therefore reflecting the interests of these institutions. This means that most of the Portuguese source materials will give us information on these activities from the perspective of the Portuguese Crown, and covering mainly the geographical areas, controlled by the Portuguese authorities – the formal Empire.

In contrast, the activities carried out by private subjects of the Portuguese Crown that operated within and outside of the *Estado da Índia* often went unregistered. Only sporadically do the official documents or accounts give the researchers insights into the Portuguese subjects that engaged in the activities privately, either for their own interests or the interests of third parties, being those of European, Asian or African background. This silence of the Portuguese sources about their activities is in part because more often than not those operations fell beyond the sphere of influence of the Portuguese Crown – the often-named Portuguese Shadow

Empire²⁵. The reconstruction of the activities of these Portuguese subjects acting on their own name or on the name of others within or outside the Estado da Índia can only be reconstructed by resorting to the triangulation of source materials produced within the contexts of several European and Asian empires, as well as in different languages.

5. Towards a Future Research Agenda

To conclude this piece, I would like to look towards the future and reflect a bit on how scholars can move forward the scholarship on the study of the formal and informal role of the Iberian in the development of trade in people in maritime Asia. In view of the various aspects discussed earlier in this chapter, I would argue that this movement forward can only be achieved by a concerted effort that will combine: (i) development of infra-structure that will facilitate accessibility and searchability of source materials, including the use of AI tools; (ii) the development of systematic data collection to be made available in open access to all researchers; (iii) the strengthening of collaboration between Western scholars and researchers and archivists in various regions of the Indian Ocean Rim and the Pacific; and (iv) the drafting of a research agenda for the future that will allow scholars to map and reconstruct the workings of the trade in people carried out in maritime Asia, not only by the Portuguese, and other Europeans, but also all other parties involved in these commercial activities.

In terms of research, the core aim would be to start developing a more comprehensive picture of Iberian engagement in the commerce of people in maritime Asia. For this, I think it will be essential to better our knowledge in terms of:

1. Mapping the regions of enslavement and the slave markets where Portuguese and Spanish procured the enslaved and coerced people they transported, commercialised, and exploited.
2. Developing a typology of the modes of enslavement and coercion that the peoples transported, commercialised and exploited by the Iberians had been subjected to.
3. Developing a typology of the modes of procurement employed by the Portuguese and Spanish to obtain the enslaved and coerced people they transported, commercialised and exploited around maritime Asia.

²⁵ Winius, 'The 'Shadow Empire' of Goa in the Bay of Bengal', pp. 83–101; Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*; Newitt, 'Formal and Informal Empire in the History of Portuguese Expansion', pp. 1–21.

Equally important for a systematic reconstruction of the commerce in people in maritime Asia carried out by the Iberians will be:

4. Mapping the slaving routes operated by the Portuguese and Spanish, either under the guise of the Crowns, or those that were operated in the shadow of the empire, and not only limited to the Estado da Índia or the Spanish East Indies, but also beyond, including activities carried out in connection with other empires and with local polities and merchants.
5. Accounting and/or estimating the number of enslaved and coerced individuals transported by the Iberians in maritime Asia.
6. Mapping the regions that acquired or 'consumed' the labour of enslaved and coerced people transported by the Portuguese and Spanish in maritime Asia.
7. Accounting and/or estimating the number of enslaved and coerced individuals commercialised and exploited by the Iberians in maritime Asia, and
8. Mapping the slave markets where Portuguese and Spanish commercialised, enslaved and coerced people.

Here, researchers should remain attentive in order to avoid falling into the trap of the 'numbers game' that dominated debates in Atlantic slave trade for decades. Which trade was larger, maritime Asian trade or Atlantic? Portuguese, Spanish, British, Dutch, etc.? A second major issue is the risk of getting trade in people in Asia ending tied up to the debate on the profitability of the slave trading. How profitable was the slave trade in maritime Asia comparatively to the transatlantic slave trade? How much did Europeans gain from their involvement? This call for caution does in no way deny the importance of the question of: Who was involved in the maritime Asian trade in people? Equally important is to assess how deeply were the Europeans involved in this commerce, in what ways and capacities? And, what did they gain from carrying out these activities? However, it is fundamental to move beyond the focus on economic profits and start asking broader questions such as what did those involved in the procurement, displacement, commerce and exploitation of people in Asia obtain in terms of political, social and cultural gains?

Also fundamental for the reconstruction of the Iberian commerce in people in maritime Asia will be gathering detailed information on the groups of historical actors involved and their actions, including both those that fell in these webs of human commerce and exploitation, as well as about those that run these networks and sailed the sea-routes that connected the multiple markets of people in maritime Asia. For these purposes, it will be crucial to:

9. Draw the profiles of the different groups of people that entered the Iberian commercial circuits in Asia (including place of origin, ethnic or cultural background, religion, language, etc.).

10. Identity the main activities performed by the peoples displaced by the Portuguese and Spanish, within the Estado da Índia and the Spanish East Indies, and in other destinations within maritime Asia and beyond, with the aims of examining the role of enslaved and coerced people in the building and maintenance of European maritime empires in Asia, and how these people resisted not only exploitation, but also procurement, displacement, commercialisation, and labelling and differentiation within the host societies where they lived and worked.
11. Identify the profiles of the different groups of people involved in the procurement, the financing, the logistics, the shipping, the commerce of the people that were moved around in the webs of the Iberians in maritime Asia and equally the individuals engaged in the exploitation of the labour power of those people.

Here, on the one hand, scholars should remain aware of the danger of replicating the narrative around the experience of enslaved Africans in the Atlantic in maritime Asia, overshadowing the experiences of other population groups also coerced in various ways and that also ended up in the commercial circuits of coerced labour in Asia. On the other hand, scholars should stay alert to the danger of writing a history of commerce of enslaved people in maritime Asia, which is mainly led by Europeans (Portuguese included) and where local actors will end up overshadowed, as African merchants in Atlantic Africa have also been in the transatlantic scholarship, often regarded as second players in the narratives of the Atlantic slave trade – a situation that has lasted until quite recently.

The ultimate goal of such an agenda would be to create the means to further explore the possible adaptations and transformations emerging from the encounter between European, African, Asian and Native American in commercial practices and forms of labour mobilisation, commercialisation, and exploitation, as well as in terms of legal constructs and definitions, and in terms of the social hierarchies that distinguished freedom and unfreedom (in its various shades) in maritime Asia.

Revisiting Indian Ocean History in the Face of the Digital Turn

Mrinalini Luthra, Matthias van Rossum, and Manjusha Kuruppath

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the GLOBALISE project's digitization efforts to innovate how the Dutch East India Company (VOC) archives are accessed, read and researched. GLOBALISE is creating an infrastructure that will allow individuals to read these colonial archives in machine readable text, search the archives for entities and events supplemented with additional historical context, and query relationships between them. To reconceptualize the practice of history in the context of the Indian Ocean world and in face of the digital turn as embodied by GLOBALISE, a key challenge is to decolonize the archive. This needs to be done by critically reviewing the use of the archives, addressing the biases and relational aspects of such digital archival infrastructures, the data derived from it, and the technology used to unlock them. This paper reflects on how we develop critical and inclusive practices of (digital) history writing that mobilizes colonial archives and new techniques, while accounting for the plurality of non-European histories and perspectives? It discusses how we should address colonial and technological biases and how we can spur the writing of Indian Ocean histories in new and desirable directions.

Keywords: VOC, GLOBALISE, early modern, Indian Ocean, digitization, archival projects, bias, decolonization

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the GLOBALISE project, which aims to innovate historical research practices by rethinking the ways in which the Dutch East India Company (VOC) archives are accessed, read and researched. The VOC, as an aggressive colonial power in the Indian Ocean and East Asian Seas region in the 17th and 18th centuries, created archives which are a resource of irrefutable value, offering profound insights into the history of colonial expansion and the societies and polities that both endured and resisted the VOC's dominance. GLOBALISE will create an infrastructure that will enable researchers and the wider public to navigate these archives in machine readable text, allowing them to explore and search, and uncover entities, events and

their interconnections, all enriched by additional layers of historical context. Despite its promises, these possibilities for new research practices come with the caveat that neither sources, technology nor history writing/making are 'neutral'. The VOC archives serve as poignant reflections of the colonial agenda, granting only limited visibility and agency to non-European actors. Moreover, existing historiographies, source publications, and data collections that draw from these archives often perpetuate the very epistemologies rooted in colonialism. Furthermore, technologies such as language models, intended for automated information extraction, bear the risk of encoding biases. To reconceptualise the practice of history in the context of the wider Indian Ocean world and in the face of the digital turn, a key challenge is to decolonise archival and research practices, envisioning new frameworks that transcend the confines of colonial legacies.

This touches upon several pressing questions for writing history in the 21st century. Most importantly, how do we develop critical and inclusive practices of (digital) history writing about this wider Indian Ocean world that mobilises the potential of colonial archives and new techniques, while accounting for the plurality of non-European histories and perspectives? How can we navigate the complexities of both colonial and technological biases, all while avoiding the pitfalls of earlier strands of historiographical approaches such as macro-comparative methods? Furthermore, how can we spur the writing of Indian Ocean histories in new and desirable directions?

Using the GLOBALISE project as a case in point, we will reflect upon these issues by critically examining archival sources and inventories, archive derived datasets, the technologies used to unlock these archives, the biases and relational aspects inherent in such digital archival infrastructures. Our exploration will focus on the presence of biases specifically related to historical persons, particularly those outside the European context, within the archive. We will analyse concrete instances of these biases in three domains crucial for the GLOBALISE infrastructure: archives and inventories, datasets, and digital infrastructure. Beyond merely acknowledging these problems, we will delve into their implications for knowledge production and the writing of history, while also exploring avenues to counterbalance and resolve these biases.

2. GLOBALISE: enabling in-depth exploration of the VOC Archives

The GLOBALISE project aims to create an innovative research infrastructure, granting unprecedented access to facilitate research into VOC archives.¹ These archives, one of the most complete and extensive bodies of sources on early modern world

¹ Petram and Van Rossum, 'Transforming Historical Research Practices'.

history, offer a distinctive lens through which to view the histories and cultures of Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. From the early 17th century onwards, the VOC established an empire that transcended borders, merging the establishment of influential trading posts across a vast expanse from Persia to Japan. Their strategic conquests extended to pivotal ports such as Malacca and Macassar, while exerting extensive territorial control over Taiwan (Formosa), the Moluccas, Banda, Java, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Malabar, and South Africa. The Company archives that were created in the course of its activities are a source for the study of not only the VOC world itself, but crucially also for exploring the all too often under-documented societies of early modern Africa, Asia and Australia, and the many local, regional and global interactions between them.

Because of their huge potential, the VOC archives have captured sustained international scholarly interest since the 19th century. Recent strides in digitisation, aided by the publication of related source editions, research aids, datasets, and the National Archives' digitisation efforts, and even first efforts in text recognition, have enhanced accessibility of the VOC archives.² However, the path to conducting large-scale and comprehensive research within these archives remains a daunting endeavour. Fragmented accessibility and the absence of transcriptions for most scans impede the exploitation of the vast archival corpus. Keyword searches remain elusive, confining navigation through digitised archival material to traditional tools like inventories and indexes. Extracting the contents of scanned materials still necessitates the meticulous perusal of each page by human eyes.

GLOBALISE aims to tackle some of these key constraints to enhance researchability of the digitised VOC Archives. While large-scale digitisation has revolutionised *accessibility* of source materials, further steps are necessary to improve its searchability, let alone its *researchability*. Through a combination of advanced technologies and contextualisation methods, GLOBALISE aims to enable advanced querying capabilities and foster the writing of diverse and representative histories based on the VOC archives.

At the heart of the project lies the endeavour to make the contents of the archival source material, particularly the 'Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren' ('Letters and Papers received', OBP) series, available in a complete handwritten text recognition (HTR) transcription. Subsequently, a dynamic interplay of historical and semantic contextualisation methods is employed. Entities, events, and their contexts are recognised, identified and semantically modelled, enabling complex querying and in-depth analysis of the archival corpus through a user-friendly

² The first million scans of the Overgekomen Brieven and Papieren corpus in the VOC archive were text recognised by the Dutch National Archives in the project *Ijsberg Zichtbaar Maken* [Making the Iceberg Visible].

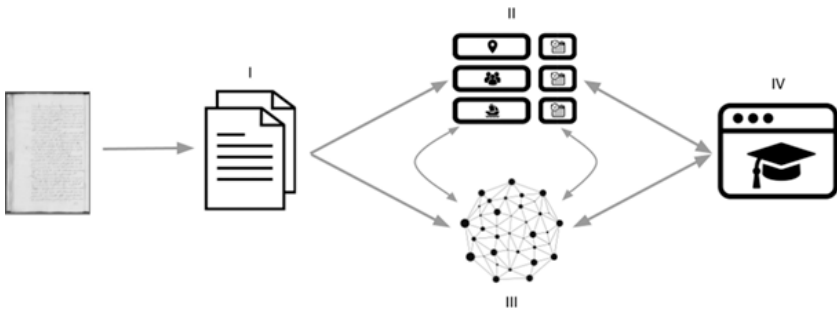


Figure 7.1. The GLOBALISE process from scan to handwritten text recognition (I), and onwards through a process of historical contextualisation (II) interacting with semantic contextualisation (III) to a user-friendly infrastructure for complex querying (IV).

research environment. Distinct yet interconnected, the historical and semantic contextualisation layers play pivotal roles in the research infrastructure. The historical contextualisation layer functions as a ‘digital historical encyclopaedia’, linking entities mentioned in the source texts to a comprehensive collection of curated reference data sourced from existing VOC data and research aids. On the other hand, the project develops a semantic contextualisation layer, training natural language processing (NLP) models to identify entities, events, and dates in the text while extracting the associated contexts. This includes not only recognising a person’s mention but also extracting their actions, attributes, and temporal details. The data extracted from the documents is structured using a dedicated formal ontology, enabling both human and computational reasoning over the vast complexity of information.

By interweaving these historical and semantic contextualisation layers, the GLOBALISE project constructs a research infrastructure that facilitates sophisticated and nuanced querying of the VOC material. Through the semantic contextualisation layer, researchers can effortlessly discover references to specific events such as commodity production or trade at particular times and places with a single query (Figure 7.1, III). These query results are complemented by validated reference data from the historical contextualisation layer (Figure 7.1, II), elevating the significance of textual mentions to relevant ‘historical observations’. A user-friendly interface atop this research infrastructure empowers researchers to explore, query, visualise, and analyse the data, opening new avenues for historical research and understanding (Figure 7.1, IV).

GLOBALISE aspires not only to intervene in the realm of infrastructure and archival practices but also to make significant contributions to digital humanities, historiography, and research perspectives. By advancing researchability and embedding historical contextualisation within semantic frameworks, the project

endeavours to contribute to reshaping the landscape of historical inquiry and unlock the hidden narratives within the VOC Archives.

3. Bias in the archives and inventories

The project focuses on the OBP series which is one of the most interesting and important document series in the VOC archives. The selection that the project works with comprises approximately 6900 inventories of more than 5 million handwritten pages. The OBP contains correspondence and copied local administrations received from Company settlements in the wider Indian Ocean region. The collections of documents were copied and sent to the Company Chambers in the Dutch Republic to provide information to the board of directors (*bewindhebbers*) and serve as institutional memory. The series of ‘copied letters’ (*Overgekomen Brieven and Papieren*) that are best preserved are those that were dispatched to the Company chambers of Amsterdam and Zeeland.³ The archives bears a multitude of genres of reporting, such as the General Letters which were summaries of developments across the VOC’s region of operations drafted in Batavia, reports exchanged between Batavia and those settlements which fell under its jurisdiction and copies of civil and criminal proceedings of the Council of Justice in Batavia. Some of these genres of reports are high-level correspondence and provide highly aggregated, sometimes banal, yet important summaries of happenings. Other genres such as letters of local merchants and rulers, or Company court records, can often provide voices and information that are alternative or even conflicting to what can be regarded as the official Company narratives. Additionally, selections of subaltern correspondence such as daily journals which bristle in the details of the everyday also feature in this archive thereby providing a rich medley of reports offering various kinds of information about interactions involving European and non-European actors throughout the Indian Ocean world in the 17th and 18th centuries.

While the GLOBALISE project offers us the possibility of restructuring access to the archive and how the corpus is searched by historians, it forces us to ask epistemological questions to reflect on the existing archive, its offerings, and drawbacks when accessing the archive. As a historical source, the OBP is a paradoxical complex of problems and possibilities. It holds the promise of presenting a deep technical view of colonial and other actors in the Indian Ocean World that is potentially like no other. Its pages are populated with mentions of sailors

³ The VOC archive also features correspondence received by other Company chambers, but these are smaller collections. The OBP series of the Chambers Amsterdam and Zeeland complement each other and partly overlap.

and fishing communities and speak of merchant groups, agriculturalists, forced labourers and enslaved persons. This archive also tells of the diplomatic acts and antagonisms of its geopolitical actors. It holds information for a wide array of societies and regions for which in many cases little other written source material has been preserved. Just as this archive overflows with the potential of being a rich source for the writing of early modern Indian Ocean histories of non-European agents and societies, there is no circumventing the fact that this archive is first and foremost a record of Company ambitions, anxieties, prejudices and perspectives. Several decades of scholarship, particularly from the legions of post-colonial theory have reflected on the relations of power that dictate the creation of colonial texts and their interpretations and instruct on how to critically interrogate the agendas, gaps and silences in these works.⁴ Evidently constructed with the intention of furthering the Company's interests, the archive casts the Company and its employees as the principal protagonists in their record of events. Although non-European subjects occasionally come to the fore, they mostly lurk in the background of these narratives. The archive is thereby ridden by the curious paradox of the non-European subjects being present in the archive but not being seen.

These are examples of the perspectival distortion of colonial archives, but what truly is the consequence of this epistemological ordering of the archive that privileges specific narratives and sections of people over others? Where alternative non-European sources are lacking that can either provide the large volume of information of the VOC archives or provide the detailed narratives about the themes such as trade, work and everyday life that are reflected in the VOC archives, there is the danger that the Company archives provide a virtually hegemonic construction of the past that is difficult to critically appraise and see beyond. The effects of this dominance have been acutely felt in the realm of historiography. Historiography has cast the same European actors as their protagonists as foregrounded by the colonial archives and Company histories and the histories of its European employees have mostly dominated the historiographical scene.⁵ This has clouded the perspective on the VOC, who for too long have been seen as merely 'merchants' instead of colonisers, and on those who were affected by its activities, as these were not only European sailors, soldiers, artisans and officials, but also the Asian and African employees (sailors, soldiers, artisans) and enslaved, local colonised populations and other non-European societies. Only in the last decades have historians exploited the potential of the archives in unearthing biographies

⁴ Landmark works include Said, *Orientalism*; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

⁵ Some examples of the sustained and unwavering interest in the history of the Company's mostly European servants are Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*; and Bruijn, *Ship's Surgeons of the Dutch East India Company*.

of non-Europeans who feature in the archive, and recovering histories of enslavement, gender and labour relations.⁶ This historiographical failing is mostly to be attributed to the nature of the archive itself.⁷ However, this shortcoming is magnified by a traditional access point to the archive: archival inventories.⁸

Inventories and Inadvertent Histories

Why is it important that we reflect on the inventories – the seemingly inane, harmless signposts to a sea of records of archives which would otherwise be virtually inaccessible? The archives possess tables of contents that were either drawn up in the 17th and 18th centuries when the Company ledgers were compiled, or written out by archivists in the 19th century. These tables of contents that feature in the leather bound company records were first compiled into a typescript inventory from the 1970s onwards.⁹ This endeavour was subsequently expanded and taken over by the TANAP project which released their index (a compilation of the table of contents of a large section of the Dutch East India Company archives) at the turn of the 21st century.¹⁰ The tables of contents were, like the archive itself, drawn up in the interest of the archive creators, and not for the scrutiny of historians and the public. This impacts the information it bears.

In the context of inventorisation, three principal problems come to the fore:

- a) **Double invisibilisation:** The kind of information that tables of contents provide and how informative they are about the contents of the reports they serve to introduce varies wildly in the archive. Admittedly, there are titles in the archive that are extremely revealing of reports' contents like the 'Authentic translation of a Caul in Malay granted by the free 'Boschheer' Nella Maijga Calaka Torin in

⁶ In the context of subaltern gender, see for instance Jones, *Wives, Slaves, and Concubines*; Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*; and Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*.

⁷ The historiographical blind spots caused by the nature of the archive can be remedied by the innovative strategies recommended by post-colonial historians about interrogating the agendas and reading through the silences and gaps in the archive.

⁸ Yet another portal into the archive that has long determined the nature of historical research are source publications. Source publications such as the published volumes of the Generale Missiven (General Letters) have constituted the gateway to the archive and for scores of historians, the General Letters was the oracle that determined whether or not a certain theme was researchable in the VOC archives. We are unable to discuss source publications in this article owing to word limit constraints.

⁹ We thank Lennart Bes for this information.

¹⁰ The TANAP website is no longer online but the inventories and other useful information that featured in the TANAP website can be viewed and downloaded from <https://docs.globalise.huygens.knaw.nl/tanap/>. The TANAP index can also be found at <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/index/ntoo348>.

Odiaarpalium to the Company in the name of Jan Koort, merchant and head in Tegenepatnam...dated 23 October 1688'¹¹ However, such detailed descriptions are hard to come by and the archive mostly teems with descriptions of another kind. One is confronted with titles like the twenty-page report titled 'Missive van den Gouverneur (Ternate) van den 15 September 1767' which is so opaque that it only reveals details about the nature of correspondence, date of composition and authorship.¹² If only the historian had the resoluteness to look beyond the description and read the pages of the report would they realise that it makes mention of the enslaved woman Soengiraja who was gifted to the Company by Prince Terlucco of Gorontalo in Sulawesi.¹³ If the archive therefore invisibilises non-Europeans owing to a bias in subject matter, inventories subject them to a second invisibilisation. Another example of invisibilisation is evident in the report plainly labelled 'Some extracts from the daily journal narrating the most notable news from the court etc from 27th January to 1st May 1740.'¹⁴ Such a description belies the fact that this report bears valuable information about the correspondents of the Dutch factory in Surat like Sampatram who shared relevant information about earth-shattering events that transpired in the Mughal capital of Delhi in the wake of an invasion.¹⁵

¹¹ 'Authenticque translaat van een caul int Maleijts verleent door den vrij boschheer Nella Maijga Calaka Torin in Odiarpalium aan de Comp. op de naam van Jan Korte koopman en opperhoofd tot Tegenepatnam [en Porto Novo, gedateerd 23 October 1688]'. N.A. 1.04.02, Inv. No. 1477, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC). For the actual report, https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/1477/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_1477_1429; For the title of the report as it features in the table of contents, https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/1477/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_1477_0013?page=701. Also see TANAP inventory on the Coromandel, p. 426. https://web.archive.org/web/20180130120355fw_/http://databases.tanap.net/vocrecords/pdf/files/C7B6570AE6B11A4E541912B3507DCFE1.pdf. Accessed on 16th July, 2023. We reckon that the document was originally written in Malabaarse (mostly likely Tamil) and not Malaeijts as written by the scribe. We thank Tom Hoogervorst for his input on the issue.

¹² 'Missive van den Gouverneur (Ternate)' (15 September 1767), N.A. 1.04.02, Inv. No. 8135, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC). For the table of contents see, https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/8135/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_8135_0005. For citation, see https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/8135/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_8135_0188.

¹³ 'Missive van den Gouverneur (Ternate)'.

¹⁴ 'Eenige extracten uijt het lopend dagregister verhalende het notabelste hofnieuws etcetera van den 27 Januarij tot den primo Maij 1740'. Inv. No. 2509, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC). For the table of contents, see https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2509/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_2509_0008; For the narrative, see https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2509/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_2509_1468.

¹⁵ 'Eenige extracten uijt het lopend dagregister verhalende het notabelste hofnieuws etcetera van den 27 Januarij tot den primo Maij 1740'.

- b) **Deceptive categorisation:** The inventory is also ridden by instances of mis-categorisation. While it is indeed possible to speak about a typology of reports within the archive which can have uniform structure and content, categories like the daily journals which are narratives about day-to-day trading, political, weather events and other occurrences in company settlements or aboard naval vessels are in fact sometimes amalgamations of a variety of reports. The four hundred page 'Copy of the Daily journal' of Cochin in 1756–1757 for instance carries more than a hundred letters of Company correspondence with nobility and merchants in Malabar.¹⁶ This renders these letters unlocatable through the use of the inventory alone.
- c) **Titular discrepancies:** There are often glaring inconsistencies in the titles of documents as they feature in the table of contents and in the actual documents themselves. The aforementioned daily journal from Cochin is one such instance. Interestingly, the book bearing this report carries three descriptions of the report of which the introductory table of contents to the book merely lists the report to be a daily journal. While the second title is more illuminating of the contents of the report, it is the title in the actual report itself that is most representative of the contents of the document indicating that it bears 'not only all incoming and outgoing but also other papers and court affairs between the kings and rulers inside and outside the city of Cochin with the departing and new Company Commanders [paraphrased].'¹⁷

These shortcomings evidence the fact that archival inventories do not facilitate the historical scrutiny and the recovery of non-European subjects that it has the potential to allow. Owing to the pervasive impact that the accessibility of the archive

¹⁶ 'Copia Dagverhaal Beginnende Met Primo 8ber 1756 en Eijndigende met 23 Augustus 1757', N.A. 1.04.02, Inv. no. 2906, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC). For the table of contents, see https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2906/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_2906_0005. For the title of the actual report, see https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2906/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_2906_0133.

¹⁷ For entry on the report in the TANAP Inventory, see page 1 of the Malabar inventory. https://web.archive.org/web/20180130120436fw_/http://databases.tanap.net/vocrecords/pdf/files/7D56909EE586A-5B792E2F38DA875C1BA.pdf. Accessed on 16th July 2023. The complete title of the report reads 'Inlands dagregister waar in, op hun tijd aangetekent ende g' extendeert staan, niet alleen alle afgaand en aankomende olaas maar ook andere papieren, en hofsche verhandelingen tusschen de koningen, en vorsten binnen als buiten de stad Cochin met de E.E. aftb heeren Fredrik Cunes afgaand Casparus de Jong aankomend Commandeurs en oppergebieders gegouden, aanvank neemende met' N.A. 1.04.02, Inv. no. 2906, p. 1. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2906/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_2906_0133. For the second title of the report, see N.A. 1.04.02, Inv. no. 2906, folio unnumbered. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2906/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_2906_0122.

has had in determining the nature of historical research that is undertaken and the resulting imagination of the historical past, a radical shake-up involving the reimagination and reorientation of access to the archives is necessary. What can the GLOBALISE project do to remedy the situation?

- a) **Free Keyword Search:** One of the aims of the project is to make the entire archive accessible through a free keyword search. Furthermore, as part of our work in historical and semantic contextualisation, we will record all possible name and spelling variations for a clearly defined set of entities which will include persons names. Consequently, the search results for 'Bindrabon' who served as a Company broker in Bengal in the mid-18th century will not only yield the results for this name in the archive. The search results will also scour the archives and generate results for all other recorded variations of the same name which will include 'Brindhabon, Brindabonnaij and Brindabon'.¹⁸ The project will transform searchability in such a way that inventories no longer need to be relied on to comb the archive for content. It is however important to note that our own efforts too cannot be free from bias. Firstly, searchability within the archive will hinge on the quality of the machine-readable transcripts. Secondly, the references to persons in the archive are so numerous that our own efforts to document name and spelling variations of person names will most certainly be incomplete. The efficacy of this task will additionally depend on the expertise of our annotators to be able to link the name variations to the correct referent.
- b) **Enabling Complex Search:** GLOBALISE aims go beyond the simple search and facilitate complex querying. Users can not merely recover mentions of entities such as persons but can also find mentions of persons who feature in the context of a range of events like transportation, revolt, or trade. Enabling such precision in querying should allow for qualitative improvements in the research undertaken into and the recovery of information about individual and group action in the archive, be it the transportation of enslaved persons, or social upheaval in the form of war and rebellion. This will, we reckon, be hugely transformative in facilitating the writing of individual biographies and social histories.

In view of the searchability that GLOBALISE intends to facilitate, will indexes and inventories become absolutely redundant and lose their relevance as a gateway to the archive? The answer is an emphatic no. Inventories are still irreplaceable

¹⁸ These search results were procured using the first version of HTR of the Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren generated by the project. GLOBALISE project, 'VOC Transcriptions – GLOBALISE' (IISH Data Collection, May 1, 2023), <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/JCTCJ2>.

cogs in the architecture of the archive and provide necessary context for the information procured. They indicate the type of report, provide knowledge about correspondence practices, facilitate trackability of the development of events and event-related information within the archive and reveal crucial links between correspondence and decision making. All of this is vital context for the user of the archive for whom, without these inventories, the archives are merely a non-navigable sea of words. If we agree that archival inventories remain valuable, the project can consider enriching these inventories in two possible ways.

- a) **Recovery and enrichment of report titles (and other document metadata):** As previously mentioned, a noticeable shortcoming of the archival inventories is the occasional lack of correspondence between the titles of reports as they feature in the table of contents and the titles in the report themselves. The project can redress this drawback by providing the original title of the report alongside the title as it features in the table of contents in the archive. This redress will also have the interesting consequence of facilitating research into the compilation of the table of contents, and thereby exposing the chasm that exists between what was recorded in the actual titles of reports and what was interpreted in the table of contents.
- b) **Enrichment of inventories:** Together with the title of the report, the GLOBALISE project could provide a summary of the report, and more importantly make available the entity mentions in the report, such as a list of referents. This will ensure that references to individuals that were previously subject to the whim of the compilers of the table of contents and subsequently omitted are rightfully recovered.

4. Data and datasets

The VOC archives has lent itself not only to inventories, indexes and a vast historiography, but also for the creation of a wide range of datasets. Often developed as part of economic, social or to a lesser extent political and cultural historical research, these datasets have tried to use the detailed and oftentimes structured character of the VOC administration to shed light on different aspects of the histories of the VOC and to some extent also the wider colonial and non-Western world. These have, for example, been developed to reconstruct the history of shipping and trade,¹⁹ the flow

¹⁹ For datasets on the Dutch East India Company, see Bruijn, Gaastra, and Schöffer, 'Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries'; Schooneveld-Oosterling and Knaap, 'Boekhouder Generaal; Van Rossum, *Generale Zeemonsterollen VOC, 1691–1791*, https://dutchshipsandsailors.nl/?page_id=11; Menno Leenstra, 'Dutch Ships in Asian Waters in the 17th Century'; Knaap and Sutherland, 'Monsoon

of financial transactions and bullion,²⁰ labour and labour relations,²¹ wages and prices, demographic developments, and more recently slavery and slave trade.²²

It is crucial to note that all of these datasets were created and shaped by a balancing act between the availability of specific information in the source material and the research interests that produced the need for information. Whereas the information in the archival source material was largely shaped by the contemporary activities of the VOC as a colonial, administrative and mercantile organisation, the research questions were mostly dictated by 20th and 21st century academic and societal concerns. The datasets that have been created based on VOC archives are thus not simply a reflection of what information is available in the source material of the archives, but is just as much determined by what types of information and questions have been deemed relevant, what topics or source material have drawn the attention of scholars, how data was structured and processed, etc.

The influence of the state of historiography on the datasets that have been produced over the last decades, and are now available for the history of the VOC and Indian Ocean, is reflected in their focus and coverage. The lingering historiographic notion that the VOC should primarily be understood as a European ‘merchant’ company active in Asian trade (as discussed in the previous section) is visible in

Traders: 18th Century Makassar Shipping Data’; Brouwer, ‘Non-Western Shipping Movements in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden during the 2nd and 3rd Decades of the 17th Century. According to the Records of the Dutch East India Company: (Part 2)’, Arasaratnam, ‘The Dutch East India Company and Its Coromandel Trade 1700–1740’; VOC: Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffner, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries*; Boekhouder General Batavia, Huygens ING, <https://bgb.huygens.knaw.nl/>; Heerma van Vos et al., *Dutch Ships and Sailors: Generale Zeemonsterrollen VOC as RDF*, <https://research.vu.nl/en/datasets/dutch-ships-and-sailors-generale-zeemonsterrollen-voc-as-rdf>; Leenstra and Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Asian Waters in the 17th Century*, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/YP2COP>; local shipping: Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders*; Knaap, *Shallow Waters, Rising Tide*; Blussé, ‘Junks to Java’; Brouwer, ‘Non-Western Shipping Movements in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden During the 2nd and 3rd decades of the 17th Century. According to the Records of the Dutch East India Company’; Chakraborty, *Empire of Labor*; also the works of Arasaratnam, ‘The Dutch East India Company and its Coromandel Trade 1700–1740’; Prakash, *Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630–1720*.

²⁰ See Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620–1740*; Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia*.

²¹ See for instance Velzen and Gaastra, ‘VOC Opvarenden, versie 6 – januari 2012.’ For an instance of a dataset on ethnic/multicultural composition of ship crews, see L. Heerma van Vos et al., ‘Dutch Ships and Sailors: Generale Zeemonsterrollen VOC as RDF’; and earlier studies by De Hullu, *Op de schepen der Oost-Indische Compagnie*; global collaboratory of labour relations, Heerma van Vos et al., *Dutch Ships and Sailors: Generale Zeemonsterrollen VOC as RDF*, <https://research.vu.nl/en/datasets/dutch-ships-and-sailors-generale-zeemonsterrollen-voc-as-rdf>, as dataset on ethnic/multicultural composition of ship crews.

²² E.g. Van Rossum and Tosun, ‘Acten van Transport Batavia (1664–1780)’; Rossum et al., ‘Slave Transport Permissions – VOC Cochin, 1770–1795’. See also the project *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia*, www.exploringslavetradeinasia.com.

three specific and interrelated biases that characterise the earliest and still most well-known large datasets. These could be described as:

- a) **The ‘maritime’ bias:** there is an abundance of datasets that document shipping movements, maritime workers and maritime trade, shedding light on the functioning of the VOC as a ‘merchant’, but leaving underrepresented the other key roles of the Company, namely those of ‘ruler’, ‘soldier’, and ‘producer’.²³ Even though historiography has been slowly shifting its attention to a wider array of topics, this is not yet reflected in the data production. In contrast to maritime trade, shipping and movement of people, information on developments related to war and conquest, colonial rule, slavery and slave trade, labour regimes, production frontiers, and the mostly non-European populations inhabiting the colonised societies by the VOC is almost absent in the available structured data.
- b) **The ‘intercontinental’ bias:** within the vast majority of data on shipping and personnel, there is a heavy bias towards the intercontinental connections and movements. The VOC shipping between Asia and Europe, for example, is completely reconstructed in the *Dutch Asiatic Shipping (DAS)*.²⁴ For intra-Asiatic shipping of the VOC there is an abundance of datasets produced to complement *DAS*, but these datasets provide only a partial picture, either through the movement of goods to and from Batavia (*Bookkeeper General Batavia, BGB*),²⁵ through the yearly recordings of VOC personnel at sea (*General Sea Muster Rolls, GZM*)²⁶ or because these only cover a specific period (*Dutch Ships in Asian Waters in the 17th Century*).²⁷ For financial history, the dataset on bills of exchange (*wisselbrieven*) reconstructed who was sending back money from Asia to the Dutch Republic.²⁸ Similarly, for the people working under the VOC, the large *VOC Opvarenden* dataset recorded those (mostly) Europeans that were employed on board ships departing from the Dutch Republic, but there is less data on the experiences of these workers in Asia, and on the contract and enslaved workers that came into the service of the VOC in Africa and Asia (*GZM*).
- c) **The ‘European’ bias:** this is connected to an important focus on the ‘European’ that has continued to prevail in historiographic and dataset production. With a few exceptions, almost all datasets are concerned with tracing histories of

²³ Van Rossum, ‘Labouring Transformations of Amphibious Monsters’.

²⁴ Bruijn, Gaastra, and Schöffer, ‘DAS.’

²⁵ Schooneveld-Oosterling and Knaap, ‘Boekhouder Generaal Batavia: The Circulation of Commodities of the Dutch East India Company in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’.

²⁶ See Voss et al., ‘Dutch Ships and Sailors: Generale Zeemonsterrollen VOC as RDF’.

²⁷ See Leenstra, ‘Dutch Ships in Asian Waters in the 17th Century’.

²⁸ See Department of History European Social Fund/DABURH Leiden University, ‘Bills of Exchange of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), 1690–1740’ (DANS Data Station Social Sciences and Humanities, March 1, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-znr-2nk4>.

European personnel, European shipping, and European trade. There have been counter-attempts to produce datasets on e.g., Chinese shipping to Batavia (Blussé), European and non-European shipping movements as administered in specific VOC ports (Java, Coromandel, Yemen, Cochin), and transactions of enslaved (especially South Africa, Cochin), but this has far from balanced the Eurocentric bias in the production of structured data.

This deeply influenced the information that is available on historic persons, both ‘who’ appear in datasets (and who do not) and ‘how’ they appear (and how not). Let us consider the example of information on people in the datasets on shipping. In one of the first large and perhaps most influential datasets created by (Dutch) maritime historians, the so-called Dutch-Asiatic shipping database (1968–1978), for example, only information on ships’ captains (name and origin) and the size and composition of the crew (aggregate numbers of occupational categories, being divided between sailors, soldiers and artisans) were included.²⁹ The DAS would thus record a voyage of the VOC ship *Gansenhoef* departing from the Dutch Republic in May 1707 and arriving in Batavia in June 1708. And it would provide the name of the captain (Daniel Engels), but not of the 70 sailors, 58 soldiers and 1 passenger. The DAS would also record the return voyage of the *Gansenhoef* in December 1711 to Rammekens (Zeeland) in August 1712. Recording all these voyages of the VOC between Europe and Asia, and back, the *DAS* created a breakthrough in quantitative economic and social historical scholarship.

This in turn influenced initiatives such as the creation of the VOC Opvarenden database (2000–2010) that recorded information from the *Scheepssoldijboeken* on personnel recruited in Chamber Cities for outward bound voyages and in Asia. This dataset recorded the names, places of origin, occupations or rank at the time of enrolment, the ship of departure, and information on the return in the Republic (year and ship) or conditions for other ways of contract termination (year, reason and place). The dataset includes 774,574 entries for enlisted personnel, and 75,876 entries for creditors (wives and others) who would receive advances on payment.³⁰ For most of the outward bound voyages between 1680 and 1795, this dataset would give the entire crew. The dataset is not entirely complete. For the case of the *Gansenhoef*, it records the names of the crews in 1705 and 1721, but it does not provide a voyage in 1707. Most notably, it only records who were supposed to be on board, and their formal or ascribed identities. This could lead to distortions especially in the case of people who were hiding and gave out false identities, but

²⁹ Sources for this dataset were the ‘uitloopboeken’, ship registers and documents in the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (OBP).

³⁰ Velzen and Gaastra, ‘VOC Opvarenden, versie 6 – januari 2012’.

also people from outside the Dutch (and wider Baltic Dutch) language area whose names and places of origins were more often written down phonetic or simply wrong, and even female travellers and crew members who turned out to be men.³¹

More importantly perhaps are two major dimensions that are left out of the perspective almost entirely in these datasets: i) the extensive involvement of the VOC in shipping and other activities in Asia; and ii) the work and life of all these other categories of workers that did not enter into the orbit of the VOC through recruitment in the Dutch Republic (and thus stayed out of the administrative lens of the *Scheepssoldijboeken*). For this first concern, it is interesting that the *Scheepssoldijboeken* provided important information that has not been included in the VOC Opvarenden database. The *Scheepssoldijboeken* were used to track the ‘overseas’ careers of VOC workers that would be paid out (upon return) in the Dutch Republic. This was done by extracting information from the *General Land and Sea Muster Rolls (Generale Land- en Zeemonsterrollen)*, which administered the location, rank and monthly salary of everyone employed by the VOC throughout Asia and Africa, and were copied and sent over every year from Batavia to the Chamber Cities in the Dutch Republic. The connection between the *Scheepssoldijboeken* and the *Generale Land- en Zeemonsterrollen* was made based on the name of the worker, the ship and year of the (most recent) outward bound voyage, and the rank during that voyage. It shows that amongst those who survived the initial hardship of the outward-bound voyage (with scurvy being responsible for large losses of life) and of the arrival in Batavia (with malaria being a threat from the early 18th century onwards) a significant portion remained in VOC service in often different parts of Asia for extensive periods and even retired there to become a ‘freeburgher’ (*vrijburger*). This non-intercontinental, but more ‘overseas’ and local colonial side of VOC employment remains largely invisible in the data (except for a mentioning of the ‘reason of end of service’).

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that only information for those who were recruited and paid out in the Dutch Republic was copied into the *Scheepssoldijboeken*. As the *Land- en Zeemonsterrollen* indicate, however, the workforce of the VOC in Asia did not only consist of Europeans recruited in the Dutch Republic, but also of workers recruited outside Europe; sometimes these were Europeans, but more often Asian, African and Eurasian sailors, soldiers and artisans. These were administered in local and general land and sea muster rolls, which have not yet been systematically analysed or processed into structured data, except for the *Generale Zeemonsterrollen* database (but this only contains metadata on the crew members, and mention of some key not individual entries) and a study of the muster rolls of

³¹ There is a whole literature on this on Germans in the service of the VOC; VOC recruitment and employment patterns; women in the service of the VOC.

the VOC settlement in Bengal in the 18th century (but this did not result in a digital structured data collection).³² The *Gansenhoef*, for example, occurs in the *GZM* database during its time in Asia, when it is engaged in intra-Asiatic voyages and not in intercontinental shipping (and is thus not registered in the *DAS*). For June 1709, we find recorded in the *GZM* database that the *Gansenhoef* is in Palembang under the command of captain Jan van Diemen van Rotterdam, with a crew of 68 sailors. The records note that 26 of them are 'inlandse' (inland/native) sailors, of which only the 'Moorse Zarang' (Moor Sarang) Calee and the Moor Sarangsmate Fakier Mameth are named.³³ In other instances, registrations of Asian crews on board VOC ships were sometimes entirely anonymous, but oftentimes with explicit lists of names and origins, and these were not yet entered into datasets.

To give an impression of the wider scope of workers that fall outside the spotlights: at the height of the power of the VOC mid-18th century, at any given moment some 13,000 European workers were estimated to be at sea, either on intercontinental or intra-Asiatic voyages, and another 20,000 European workers worked ashore in Asia and Africa, of which an unknown part was probably recruited 'in Asia'. Importantly, an approximate 12,000 Asian soldiers and 1,000 Asian sailors were employed throughout the VOC empire. These were not recorded in the *Scheepssoldijboeken* but should mostly be recorded in the *Land- en Zeemonsterrollen* (and thus do not occur in any available datasets). Thousands of shoreworkers, often hired on a daily basis locally, and some 7,000 enslaved workers were employed by the VOC directly, but not registered in either of these sources. In addition, thousands of *corvée* workers, drafted from local colonised populations, were used by the Company, but these workers also do not recur in the administrations of personnel.³⁴

These problems can be, and are currently being, counterbalanced, but it should not be underestimated what the magnitude of the challenges is that is being imposed by the source material (the perspective of the Company), the historiography (the pervasive and lasting Eurocentric focus) and even by the possibilities to create new datasets (the complexities of representations of people in the archive). In the last decades, new datasets have been produced that reflect renewed interest in non-European actors, histories of slavery, and more. The dataset by Gerrit Knaap on shipping and trade on Java (1774–1777), for example, covered regional and local shipping to Javanese ports, and included the names of captains and owners of

³² Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azie in de achttiende eeuw, meer in het bijzonder in de vestiging Bengalen*; Rossum, 'Database Generale Zeemonsterrollen', <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-zeu-begb>.

³³ See: https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/11722/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_11722_0244

³⁴ Van Rossum, 'Working for the Devil'.

non-European ships, including references to (normalised) ethnicities that the VOC administered. This leads to references such as ‘Abdul Sale’, being a ‘Banjarees’ on a ‘pancalang’.³⁵ Similar sources on non-European shipping and the people involved are available for regions throughout the VOC empire, as work on Cochin shows.³⁶ In a similar fashion, the Sejarah Nusantara project has produced several datasets that were intended as indexes on the digitised material of the VOC archives in Jakarta, that feature a wider variety of non-European people, mostly rulers, merchants and VOC subjects.³⁷ Historical research into slavery, slave trade and judicial records provides another body of datasets that are either already available, can be recovered as ‘grey’ literature, or will be made available. The production of historical work and data has been most impressive for South Africa and specifically the Cape of Good Hope, with data on slave transactions, lists of convicts and slaves, etc.³⁸ Data on the criminal court record cases preserved for various legal courts of VOC settlements (esp. Batavia, Colombo, Cochin), created by the *Resilient Diversity* project (2017–2022), provide the names, status, the criminal charges, and sometimes additional information such as informal name (*bijnaam*), origin, residency and occupation.³⁹ The datasets on slave transactions and slave export permissions in Cochin, created by the *Between local debts and global markets* project, provides another body of data on non-Europeans, giving names, status, occupations and residency of local buyers and sellers, as well as old names, new names, status (often indications that hint at caste or community), sometimes age, and sometimes even the monetary valuation of the transaction.⁴⁰

The development of such datasets provides one way forward. The counterbalancing of the heavily Eurocentric (and then even biased by the additional ‘intercontinental’ and ‘maritime’) perspectives in the production of data is necessary. And it seems hard to see how this can be done in any other way than producing alternative bodies of data that foreground especially hitherto underrepresented categories of people, such as women, enslaved, soldiers, local populations inside

³⁵ See Knaap, ‘Shipping and Trade in Indonesia’.

³⁶ Arasaratnam, ‘The Dutch East India Company and Its Coromandel Trade 1700–1740’, pp. 325–346; Brouwer, ‘Non-Western Shipping Movements in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden during the 2nd and 3rd Decades of the 17th Century, According to the Records of the Dutch East India Company: (Part 2)’; and more recently, Odegard, ‘Maritime India in Dutch Sources’, pp. 340–348.

³⁷ See: <https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/>, especially the indexes on the Corpus Diplomaticum, the Asian Letters, the Supplements to the General Resolutions and the Marginalia of the Daily Registers.

³⁸ The data collections are too extensive to give a comprehensive overview here. Although it does seem that not all data is easily accessible, preserved in durable formats, or collected in a central location.

³⁹ See Canfijn et al., ‘Early Modern Dutch Colonial Court Records’.

⁴⁰ See Van Rossum and Tosun, ‘Acten van Transport Batavia (1664–1780)’; Van Rossum et al., ‘Slave Transport Permissions – VOC Cochin, 1770–1795’.

and outside VOC colonies, as well as even people of non-European elites, such as merchants, translators, captains, foremen and rulers.

Of course, such data, and the creation of it, comes with its own difficulties. The court records dataset of *Resilient Diversity* figure people such as Sonna, Abdol, Jallal, Dolla, Mannak, Sambang, Tekaija, Juda, Gebrien, Labie, Souwer, Daging and Souasa before the Court of Justice of Batavia in 1732. They are all referred to as 'Vrije Maleijer' (Free Malay), and as male (deduced from the context); but apart from the fact that they were all trialled for 'Ongepermitteerd kruijssen en suspect swerven ter zee' (unpermitted sailing and suspicious roaming at sea), there is little that we know about them. In other instances, a bit more detail is provided, such as in the case of Caba Caba, the slave of the Balinese vaandrig (military officer) named Pinattij, who served as a convict labourer (kettingganger) in the artisan quarter of Batavia. The enslaved Caba Caba was before the court in Batavia in 1734, because he was accused of injuring the mandoor (overseer) Bappa Ramboe and murdering the soldier Matthijs Dirksz van den Hoek van Utrecht. It shows both the richness and potential, as well as the gaps, of datasets that try to reach beyond the ease of the conventional realm of data on European Company servants.

But it is not only the availability, and presence or absence of information, that is the problem. The observations that can be retrieved from the datasets, and in fact from the archive itself, are often also difficult to interpret and contextualise. In the Cochin slave trade database, for example, we encounter people like 'Oloenda' (according to the VOC records her 'previous' slave name) who was renamed in a transaction in 1791 as 'Klarinda'. The records state she was sold by Kanatoe Midien Markaat, a 'Moor' residing in Trikame, to Joseph Perera, a 'Toepas' residing in Naipin (Vaijpeen). Oloenda/Klarinda was mentioned to be 15 years old and to be a 'Poelitijj'. This was one of the many ways in which the VOC records seem to refer to people of the Pulaya caste. This, of course, leads to many questions on what is registered, who we see here, how to make sense of them, and how to capture this in appropriate data structures. Are, for example, the many variants of Poelia, Poelitijj, Poeletje and even Poeletjie actually referring to the same social category, or at these nuanced subdivisions that would be erased by a too simple normalisation? It is important to emphasise that this is of course not unique for data on non-European persons, groups and communities, and is also the case for Europeans. What is at stake here is not only issues of translation and the complexity of trying to read and use the colonial archive against the grain. To some extent there is additionally also the difficulty of trying to understand the complexities of local-colonial historical situations in Dutch periods that have later been overwritten by more dominant English colonial frameworks.

Alongside counterbalancing the Eurocentric data-production, these are challenges that will need to be worked on.

5. Technological bias

Technological bias in digital archival infrastructures refers to biases and limitations that can be encoded or reinforced by technologies used to create, access, and analyse historical archives. While AI and digital technologies provide new opportunities for historical research, they also pose risks of perpetuating or amplifying biases that exist in the original sources and introducing new biases.⁴¹ These biases emerge not only from technical factors like algorithm design and training data, but also from the intersection of historical power structures, institutional practices, and modern computational methods.⁴² When applied to historical archives, these biases can reinforce power dynamics, privilege certain narratives, and marginalise or exclude certain perspectives, such as those of historically marginalised groups. This challenge is especially critical as unexamined biases in institutions, meta-data, and computational tools can transform and amplify historical exclusions.⁴³ Addressing technological bias is crucial for developing more inclusive and accurate historical research practices. This section discusses common technological biases in digital archival infrastructures and provides examples and solutions from the GLOBALISE project.

Ground truth bias

When deploying machine learning models to analyse historical archives – whether for automated transcription or content extraction – one must carefully consider the quality and composition of their training data, known as ‘ground truth.’ Ground truth bias occurs when this training data is itself biased or incomplete, leading to skewed outcomes in the model’s predictions or performance.⁴⁴

1) Selection bias

Selection bias arises when training data lacks representation of certain populations, resulting in skewed predictions.⁴⁵ Consider the VOC archives, where European

⁴¹ Noble, ‘Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism’; Thylstrup, *The Politics of Mass Digitization*; Hicks, *Programmed Inequality*.

⁴² Luthra and Jeurgens, ‘Humanising Digital Archival Practice. Access to Archives Guided by Social Justice’.

⁴³ Fyfe, ‘An Archaeology of Victorian Newspapers’, pp. 546–577; Gabriele, ‘Transfiguring the Newspaper’.

⁴⁴ Crawford, *The Atlas of AI*; Sogaard, Plank, and Hovy, ‘Selection Bias, Label Bias, and Bias in Ground Truth’, pp. 11–13.

⁴⁵ Suresh and Guttag, ‘A Framework for Understanding Sources of Harm throughout the Machine Learning Life Cycle’.

perspectives dominate while other voices fade into the margins. Modern AI systems, trained on such skewed (historical) records, inherit the same blind spots. Buolamwini and Gebru (2018) demonstrate the real-world impact of selection bias: commercial gender classification systems, trained on imbalanced datasets, showed significantly lower accuracy for darker-skinned and female faces, effectively encoding racial and gender biases into technology.⁴⁶

To address selection bias, the GLOBALISE project takes a systematic approach to creating representative training data for tasks such as entity recognition. The project samples across a broad temporal range (17th and 18th centuries) and diverse document types, from General Missives and daily registers to criminal proceedings and commodity lists. This sampling strategy captures varied perspectives across political events, shipping activities, and geographical regions. By thoroughly documenting these sampling decisions, GLOBALISE supports transparency in their decision making by allowing other researchers to critically examine the training data's composition.

2) Metadata and indexing biases

Metadata and indexing biases emerge from critical choices made during digitisation: what to digitise, how to categorise it, and which metadata to assign.⁴⁷ These decisions fundamentally shape how historical records can be accessed and discovered in digital archives. The GLOBALISE corpus illustrates this challenge through its treatment of named and unnamed individuals. Historical documents often name those in positions of power while leaving others anonymous, reflecting and reinforcing colonial power dynamics. GLOBALISE's infrastructure challenges these traditional power structures by recognising both named and unnamed individuals (see Figure 7.2, where all person mentions are highlighted in green).⁴⁸ This approach moves beyond standard named entity recognition frameworks like CoNLL or ACE, which typically limit themselves to simple categories of Person, Organisation, and Location.⁴⁹

Colonial archives contain rich contextual information about historical actors – their roles, gender, legal status, and social positions. Instead of reproducing colonial-era classifications, GLOBALISE's metadata framework employs intersectional categories that highlight individual agency, skills, and contributions. By capturing these nuanced entity attributes, the project recontextualises historical data to foreground human stories rather than merely institutional records. This approach

⁴⁶ Buolamwini and Gebru, 'Gender Shades'.

⁴⁷ Søgaard, Plank, and Hovy, 'Selection Bias, Label Bias, and Bias in Ground Truth'.

⁴⁸ Luthra et al., 'Unsilencing Colonial Archives via Automated Entity Recognition'.

⁴⁹ Doddington, 'The Automatic Content Extraction (ACE) Program: Tasks, Data, and Evaluation'; Sang and De Meulder, 'Introduction to the CoNLL-2003 Shared Task'.

Met dit schip gaen derwaerts Gillis Venant met zijn huisvrouw, item eenen Alberto Gomes met zijn huisvrouw Isabelle de Mato ende haere twee zoonen Johan de Mato ende Thome de Camine haer moeder Lucia Fernandes, mitsgaders ses stuckts slaven ende een slavinne, altesamen over haere delicten ende quade handelingen gerelequeert naer d' Eijlanden van Banda Conform de neffens gaande respectieve sententien soo van Venant als de Alberto Gomes, met sijne familie U.E. gelieve de selve aldaer woonplaetse t'assigneren, ende nae dat sij hen met goede comportedenten waerdich maken U.E. faveur laten genieten.

On this ship are sent Gillis Venant and his housewife, together with an Alberto Gomes and his housewife Isabelle de Mato and her two sons Johan de Mato and Thome de Camine, her mother Lucia Fernandes together with six units of male slaves and a slave woman, all of them have been exiled to the Banda Islands for their offences and wrongful actions. We request your honours that they are assigned accommodation there following the accompanying sentence related to Venant and Albert Gomes and his family, and that you show them your benevolence when they have made themselves worthy of that with their good conduct.

Figure 7.2: Excerpt of persons annotation

enables a more complete understanding of historical narratives, particularly those of marginalised individuals and communities whose voices are often absent from or present in traces in traditional archival structures.

3) Annotator Bias

Just as colonial archives reflect European frameworks of categorisation that distorted local identities and social structures, modern digital archives face a similar challenge through annotator bias. This bias emerges when human annotators, tasked with labelling data for natural language processing tasks, bring their own cultural assumptions and perspectives to the classification process. An annotator's subjective judgments – shaped by their cultural background, language knowledge, and personal beliefs – can significantly influence how historical information is categorised and interpreted, affecting model performance and perpetuating misrepresentations.

GLOBALISE addresses this challenge through several strategies. The project develops detailed annotation guidelines enriched with instructive examples to promote consistent interpretation across different annotators.⁵⁰ It also tracks annotator information by including annotator IDs as features in the training data and carefully separates training set annotators from test set annotators.⁵¹ This systematic approach helps identify and mitigate individual biases while enabling better evaluation of model performance across different annotator perspectives.

To ensure cultural and historical accuracy, GLOBALISE collaborates with area specialists in early modern Indian Ocean histories, gender studies experts, and data

⁵⁰ Parmar et al., 'Don't Blame the Annotator'.

⁵¹ Geva, Goldberg, and Berant, 'Are We Modeling the Task or the Annotator?'.

ethics specialists. This interdisciplinary approach helps develop more nuanced and historically accurate categorisation systems that better reflect local social structures and identities.

Language models and algorithmic bias

GLOBALISE will make use of large language models (LLMs) in its infrastructure to enable various natural language processing tasks. LLMs are computational models that learn patterns and structures in linguistic data, allowing them to generate coherent and contextually relevant text, and be deployed for text and document and text classification tasks.⁵² However, LLMs require careful consideration since they can inherit, perpetuate, and even amplify biases through their training data and algorithmic design.⁵³

1) LMs and low resource languages

The use of LLMs on historic Dutch – as found in the GLOBALISE corpus – pose challenges due to the differences between 17th and 18th century and modern Dutch. Contemporary language models like spaCy and BERTje, trained on 20th-century Dutch news and 19th century books, struggle with historical variations in vocabulary, grammar, and spelling.⁵⁴ However, multilingual models such as mBERT and XLM-R offer promising solutions. Trained on a diverse range of languages, these models exhibit cross-lingual transferability and can capture the language variations found in historical texts. By utilising multilingual models, like mBERT or XLM-R, GLOBALISE can tap into their capacity to learn generic representations across different languages and scripts, making them particularly suitable for analysing historical texts with non-contemporary language and unstandardised spelling.⁵⁵ These models, combined with careful fine-tuning on historical Dutch data, offer more robust solutions for analysing non-contemporary texts.⁵⁶

⁵² Jiang et al., ‘How Can We Know What Language Models Know?’; Vaswani et al., ‘Attention Is All You Need’; Devlin et al., ‘BERT: Pre-Training of Deep Bidirectional Transformers for Language Understanding’.

⁵³ Mehrabi et al., ‘A Survey on Bias and Fairness in Machine Learning’, 115:1–115:35; Baeza-Yates, ‘Bias on the Web’.

⁵⁴ De Vries et al., ‘BERTje: A Dutch BERT Model’.

⁵⁵ Conneau et al., ‘Unsupervised Cross-Lingual Representation Learning at Scale’; Pires, Schlinger, and Garrette, ‘How Multilingual is Multilingual BERT?’.

⁵⁶ Arnoult, Petram, and Vossen, ‘Batavia Asked for Advice’, pp. 21–30.; Vaswani et al., ‘Attention is All You Need’.

2) Language model biases

It is crucial for GLOBALISE to consider and address biases inherited from LMs such as biased training data, biased training objectives or model limitations.⁵⁷ One of the biggest issues is biases inherited from the often unrepresentative, vast, and opaque or ‘unfathomable’ training data of LLMs.⁵⁸ While some biases may originate from the ground truth, the LMs own biases can magnify or reinforce them, such as gender, racial, or cultural biases in the analysis and interpretation of historical documents.

Conducting thorough evaluations of model outputs and analysing the impact of different components (e.g., data sources, training objectives, fine-tuning procedures) can provide insights into the sources of bias. Post-processing techniques, such as debiasing methods or fairness-aware algorithms, can help mitigate biases introduced by the model while being aware of the biases present in the ground truth.⁵⁹ Furthermore, transparent documentation is vital in navigating the biases of LLMs inherited from their training data and the biases within the ground truth.⁶⁰ This combination of technical intervention and transparent documentation enables informed engagement with historical data and its computational processing in GLOBALISE.⁶¹

Environmental and labour inequities in language models

While not a bias in the traditional sense, the environmental and labour costs of LLMs reflect broader power imbalances that parallel the colonial histories GLOBALISE studies. Just as colonial trading companies like the VOC extracted resources and labour from across the Global South, today’s LLMs rely on unsustainable computational resources and often exploitative labour practices. Training a single BERT model consumes energy equivalent to a trans-American flight, while data labelling frequently depends on underpaid workers in poor conditions.⁶²

⁵⁷ Navigli, Conia, and Ross, ‘Biases in Large Language Models’.

⁵⁸ Bender et al., ‘On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots’, pp. 610–623.

⁵⁹ Bolukbasi et al., ‘Man is to Computer Programmer as Woman is to Homemaker?’, Bordia and Bowman, ‘Identifying and Reducing Gender Bias in Word-Level Language Models’; Jin, ‘On Transferability of Bias Mitigation Effects in Language Model Fine-Tuning’.

⁶⁰ Gebru et al., ‘Datasheets for Datasets’, pp. 86–92; Bender and Friedman, ‘Data Statements for Natural Language Processing’, pp. 587–604.

⁶¹ For examples of dataset documentation have a look at the data-envelopes and accompanying documentation for GLOBALISE’s datasets: <https://datasets.iisg.amsterdam/dataverse/globalise>. For instance have a look at the dataset and documentation on Ethnicities, Religious Groups and Castes in the Archives of the Dutch East India Company (1602–1799).

⁶² Strubell, Ganesh, and McCallum, ‘Energy and Policy Considerations for Deep Learning in NLP’; Mohamed, Png, and Isaac, ‘Decolonial AI’, pp. 659–684; Gray and Suri, *Ghost Work*; Perrigo, ‘OpenAI Used Kenyan Workers on Less Than \$2 Per Hour to Make ChatGPT Less Toxic’.

While GLOBALISE has not yet identified open-source models developed under fair labour conditions and with low environmental footprint, we believe it is crucial to acknowledge these inequities, particularly as we use these tools to study historical colonial exploitation. GLOBALISE addresses these challenges where possible by prioritising energy-efficient approaches and ensuring ethical labour standards in its own data annotation processes. We maintain transparency about these limitations and continue to advocate for more equitable practices in AI development.

Problem of less frequent types

Machine learning models often struggle with accurately identifying low-represented types or underrepresented groups in data. Due to imbalances in training data, models perform poorly when encountering less common classes or identities, further amplifying historical patterns of marginalisation.⁶³ For example, when certain social groups or historical actors appear infrequently in colonial records, the models may fail to recognise or properly categorise them in future analyses. GLOBALISE approaches this challenge through targeted data collection strategies and bias-mitigation techniques. This includes enhancing representation in training datasets where possible and developing specialised methods for handling low-frequency cases.⁶⁴ These efforts aim to ensure more equitable treatment of historically marginalised groups in our digital analysis.

Search term bias

Search bias is a prevalent issue in digital archival infrastructures where search algorithms can exhibit biases in determining the relevance and prominence of information. This bias can arise if the algorithm favours Eurocentric keywords or concepts, thereby making it challenging to discover non-European histories or perspectives. Furthermore, the reliance on anachronistic terminology and colonial sources can reinforce colonial naming conventions and limit the searchability for those unfamiliar with the colonial terms used. To address this bias, one approach is to provide alternative labels for concepts. For example, in the case of 'Myanmar,' attaching alternative labels such as 'Burma' and 'Arakan' can enhance searchability and accommodate different historical perspectives.

⁶³ Friedman and Nissenbaum, 'Bias in Computer Systems', pp. 330–347.

⁶⁴ Chouldechova and Roth, 'The Frontiers of Fairness in Machine Learning'; Buolamwini and Geburu, 'Gender Shades'.

However, this strategy of providing alternative labels for similar concepts also comes with its own dangers of reductionism. For instance, consider the following example in Figure 7.3⁶⁵:

Een Banjaanse vrouwe ons van aensienlijke luijden gerecommandt de behulpraame hand te bieden, om haaren zoon, die van 's Comp=s zeemacht genoomen is, weer te bekoomen, heeft ons daar over doen naar Wingurla en Ceylon schrijven gelijk 't ingesloten affshrifte wijst.

A Bania woman, recommended to us by prominent people has asked us [the Company factory in Surat] to lend a helping hand to recover her son who was captured by the Company's naval power. We have written on the subject to Wengurla and Ceylon as the attached copy indicates.

Figure 7.3: Excerpt of persons annotation

In this example the first person labelled is a woman belonging to the caste group Bania.⁶⁶ Some of the spelling variations that the caste name Bania features in the archive are as follows: 'Benjaan', 'Banjaan' and 'Benjaen'. When historians refer to this caste in the early modern period, they are accustomed to using the standard spelling from the present day, Bania to refer to the caste from the early modern period. This is problematic because it can equate early modern castes with their modern-day namesakes.⁶⁷ The other alternative is to use a name and spelling variant of the term as found in the VOC archives. This is also questionable because it renders the caste name less recognisable to the modern reader, and makes us reliant on names as they feature in the Dutch archive. In the case of GLOBALISE, we aim to provide the various spelling variations of the term Bania, accompanied by a disclaimer about the possible conflation with its modern-day namesake. This approach acknowledges the complexities of historical naming conventions while informing users about potential limitations and the need for critical interpretation.

⁶⁵ Originele missive dato primo Junij [1658] haare Ed. uyt Suratte per terra toegesonden, N.A. 1.04.02, Inv. No. 1226, f. 745v. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/1226/file/NL-HaNA_1.04.02_1226_0518. This information was found in the archive using the GLOBALISE project, 'VOC Transcriptions – GLOBALISE.'

⁶⁶ Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*.

⁶⁷ Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750*.

Strategies to mitigate technological bias

In order to address technological bias in digital archival infrastructures, it is imperative to adopt a critical and reflective approach. Drawing from the sections above, here are some strategies to consider:

1. **Diversify training data:** Ensure that the training data used for developing language models and other technologies is diverse and representative of the historical context being studied. Incorporate records, narratives, and perspectives from non-European actors to mitigate biases.
2. **Evaluate and validate results:** Critically assess the outputs generated by technology and compare them with existing historiographical knowledge. Scrutinise potential biases and interpret results in light of the historical and cultural context.
3. **Collaborative approaches:** Involve historians, domain experts, and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds in the development and implementation of digital archival infrastructures. Encourage interdisciplinary collaborations to provide a broader range of perspectives and insights.
4. **Transparent and accountable processes:** Make the processes and algorithms used in digital archival infrastructures transparent and subject to scrutiny. Document and disclose the limitations, biases, and uncertainties associated with the technology and the archival data.
5. **Ethical considerations:** Develop and adhere to ethical guidelines when using technology in historical research. Consider the potential impact on marginalised communities, respect privacy concerns, and ensure that the research serves the interests of inclusivity and social justice.

6. Conclusions and future work

This chapter is in many ways an act of introspection. In creating a research infrastructure that will re-envision the manner in which the VOC archives are accessed and researched, the GLOBALISE project will have deep implications on how this past is read, comprehended and written about. This chapter articulates our concerns with shouldering such a responsibility particularly in the context of recovering marginal historical actors from the archive. It is therefore vital that we adopt a four-step process to combat and mitigate bias in the research infrastructure that we create. The first step is *acknowledging the presence of biases* in the archive, existing datasets and digital infrastructures and recognising the fact that they cannot be entirely eliminated. This chapter makes it apparent that we can devise solutions to consciously mitigate these biases in such a way that the archive,

inventories, datasets and digital infrastructures visibilise marginalised historical actors. The second step is *surveying and inventorying the biases* that either plague or could threaten to affect our research infrastructure. It enables us to keenly perceive issues that we need to be aware of but also consider preliminary solutions that the project can consciously adopt at every stage. As many of the solutions proffered by the chapter are suggestions that the project is presently working on or hopes to execute, the third and future step of the project will be to actively *document* the decisions we make to handle bias in our approach to the archives and the creation of datasets and digital infrastructure *and make transparent* the implications that our actions have on our infrastructure and resultant output. The fourth step is to ensure that this *documentation* is not only presented to users of our interface as auxiliary reports, but that it is in fact critically incorporated into the very design of the infrastructure that informs users of its context, potential biases, and subjectivities.⁶⁸

Importantly, this four-step process must also include critical reflection on our own positionality as researchers. Our identities, institutional contexts, and disciplinary training shape every aspect of how we approach these archives – from why we do the work, to whom we choose to collaborate with, to what we choose to digitise, to how we interpret and present historical actors. Acknowledging this positionality is not merely an academic exercise but essential for developing responsible research infrastructures.

In this period in time when numerous archival digitisation projects are conceived and created, we hope that our chapter on biases in the GLOBALISE project serves as a valuable resource and toolkit for addressing bias in historical research. This chapter should serve as a catalyst to such projects to prioritise and reflect on the issue of bias from the early stages of their endeavours, providing them with guidance on navigating similar challenges. This chapter also highlights the fact that while the issue of bias has been extensively interrogated within the discipline of history and separately within computer science, any rigorous and comprehensive effort to combat bias requires us to transcend these narrow disciplinary boundaries, join forces and thereby think of innovative strategies to handle the problem.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Verhoeven, 'As Luck Would Have', pp. 7–28; Whitelaw, 'Generous Interfaces for Digital Cultural Collections'.

⁶⁹ The insights and questions from this work and the GLOBALISE project more generally, and our stubborn, necessary commitment to prising open these archives with conscience intact gave rise to the *Combatting Bias* project, born from the recognition that the careful work of making visible the invisible in historical records offers vital lessons for contemporary data practices. *Combatting Bias* is now creating systematic guidelines for creating bias-aware data throughout the research lifecycle.

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Integrating the Indian Ocean and Asian Slave Trades into Global History: Creating Trans-Regional Databases

Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Matthew S. Hopper

Abstract

Momentum has been growing in recent years to form a database that would catalog slaving voyages in the Indian Ocean and Asia. This chapter describes the progress, and reflects on the challenges encountered to present. Including the Indian Ocean and Asia on the SlaveVoyages website is crucial in demonstrating the global extent and consequences of transoceanic slave trading. However, one must acknowledge the complexities and challenges involved in doing so. Studies of the Mascarenes and Southern Africa confirm the arrival of enslaved Indians and 'Malays' as well as East Africans and Malagasies in European vessels. These and other examples reveal that to uncover the scale of global slaving one needs to examine how people from all parts of the Indian Ocean were forcibly trafficked across the ocean (and beyond).

Keywords: SlaveVoyages database, Indian Ocean, Asia, global slaving, statistics

The past decade has witnessed increasing interest in the creation of a database of all known Arab, Chinese, European, Indian, Southeast Asian, Swahili, and other slaving voyages in the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia. The need for such a database is mandated by a growing awareness that the transoceanic traffic in chattel and bonded labour between 1500 and the early 20th century was truly global in scope and encompassed the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Asia, and Pacific as well as the Atlantic. This interest may also be traced to various other developments: a growing appreciation among some scholars of the need to transcend the conceptual 'tyrannies' that dominate slavery and slave diaspora studies, that of the Atlantic and that of 'the particular,' i.e., the reluctance to situate the specialised studies that dominate these fields of study in more fully developed local, regional, pan-regional, and comparative contexts;¹ the publication since 2014

¹ E.g., Alpers, 'The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean', pp. 62–81; Zeleza, 'African Diasporas', pp. 1–19; Zeuske, 'Historiography and Research Problems of Slavery and Slave Trade in a

of groundbreaking research on European slave trading in the Indian Ocean and Asia;² the organisation since 2016 of a series of international conferences and workshops on slavery and slave trading in the Indian Ocean and Asia;³ and a growing awareness of the magnitude of this global commerce in chattel and bonded labour and its importance in world history.⁴ Successful funding applications likewise attest to a growing appreciation of this topic's importance to understanding slavery as a global phenomenon.⁵ Among the more recent of these applications is a digital production grant to the authors by the United States National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to create an Indian Ocean and Asia (IOA) database of voyages which transported enslaved African, Indian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian men, women, and children throughout and beyond these oceanic realms that will become an integral component of the open-access *SlaveVoyages* website (slavevoyages.org).⁶

This three-year-long project began on 1 March 2023, and since then we have started the process of merging ten existing datasets into a comprehensive database

Global-Historical Perspective', pp. 87–111; Allen, *Slave, Convict, and Indentured Labor and the Tyranny of the Particular*.

² E.g., Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*; Van Rossum, 'Private Slave Trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean World', pp. 95–116; Chakraborty and Van Rossum, 'Slave Trade and Slavery in Asia: New Perspectives', pp. 1–14; Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Slave Trading in the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830', pp. 273–296; Van Rossum, 'Toward a Global Perspective on Early Modern Slave Trade'; Allen, 'Exporting the Unfortunate', pp. 533–552; Sint Nicolaas, 'Maritime (Im)mobility', pp. 51–75.

³ E.g., workshop on 'Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelagic Worlds (16th to 19th Century: New Research, Results, and Comparisons,' International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 10–11 November 2016; conference on 'Slavery and Bonded Labour in Asia, c. 1250–c. 1900: Continuities and Transformations in Comparative Perspective,' Leiden, 1–3 June 2017; conference on 'Enslavement in the Indian Ocean World,' Linnaeus University, Kalmar, Sweden, 8–9 September 2017; workshop on 'Towards an Indian Ocean and Asian Slave Trade Database,' International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 27–28 September 2018; workshop on 'Recent Research on the Southwestern Indian Ocean Slave Trade,' University of Mauritius, 23 August 2021; 'Global Crossings: An International Workshop on Incorporating the Indian Ocean and Asia into *SlaveVoyages.org*,' Rice University, Houston, TX, 29–30 September 2022; workshop on 'Hidden Archives of Capitalism and Slavery in the Indian Ocean: State, Business, Personal Collections,' Rice University Paris Center, Paris, France, 22–23 April 2024.

⁴ Allen, 'Slavery, Slave Trading, and Bonded Labor Studies in Asia', pp. 13–28.

⁵ E.g., The workshop on 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia: Towards an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slave Trade Database' was funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) Internationalization in the Humanities Grant Program, 2018, <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/slave-trade-asia>.

⁶ 'Global Passages: Creating a Public Database of Slaving Voyages across the Indian Ocean and Asia,' funded by United States National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Projects for the Public Production Grant, 2023, <https://www.neh.gov/news/neh-announces-281-million-204-humanities-projects-nationwide>.

that can be easily accessed and used by scholars, teachers, students, and the general public. These datasets, which are the product of archival and other research conducted over the last 20 years, deal mostly with Arab/Swahili, British, Dutch, and French slave trading in the western Indian Ocean, including Madagascar, the Comoros, the Mascarene Islands of Mauritius and Réunion, Mozambique, the Persian Gulf, South Africa, the Swahili Coast, and India. We are keenly aware of the limitations inherent in this focus on the western Indian Ocean, and an integral component of this project is to enlist the support of scholars with other regional expertise to expand the database's geographical coverage to include all of the Indian Ocean and maritime Asian worlds.

This chapter will report on our team's progress to date, reflect on the challenges that we have encountered so far, and conclude with an invitation to others to collaborate with us in this important undertaking. We believe that incorporating the Indian Ocean and Asia into *SlaveVoyages* is crucial to demonstrating the globality and complexity of transoceanic slave trading between 1500 and the early 20th century in ways that will transform our knowledge and understanding of these trades' dynamics, impact, and legacy.⁷ Doing so requires a willingness to acknowledge the complexities and attendant challenges inherent in any such endeavour, a point illustrated tellingly by what we know about the slave trade to the Mascarenes between 1670 and the early 1830s. During this period, these islands were involved in a minimum of 1,164 confirmed/probable/possible slaving voyages by Arab (probably Omani), American, British, Dutch, French, Portuguese/Brazilian, and Spanish ships, a number which ongoing research will undoubtedly increase. These vessels exported an estimated 336,120–388,260 slaves of diverse origin or ethnicity toward the islands from West Africa (Bambaras, Guineans, Wolofs), Madagascar (13 ethno-cultural communities), Mozambique (14 readily identifiable populations and others whose modern equivalent cannot be determined), the Persian Gulf, India (Bengalis, Tamils, Telegus), Southeast Asia (Balinese, Javanese, Makassarese, Niasans, Sumatrans, Timorese), and China between the 1670s and 1848.⁸

The multidirectionality and complexities of slave trading in the *Mare Indicum* is also revealed by the activities of the British East India Company (EIC) whose ships transported Cape Verdeans, Comorians, Indians, Malagasies, Mozambicans, and West and West Central Africans to its colony of St. Helena in the South Atlantic and various establishments in India (e.g., Bombay, Madras, Tegnapatam, Surat), Java (Bantam), and Sumatra (Benkulen).⁹ Recent scholarship has likewise begun

⁷ E.g., Boswell, *Le Malaise Creole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*; Hamilton, Hodgson, and Quirk, eds., *Slavery, Memory and Identity: National Representations and Global Legacies*.

⁸ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 73–74, 155.

⁹ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 36–38.

to reveal the complexities of slave trading in Southeast and East Asia. Some of the Japanese and Korean slaves who reached the Portuguese *comptoir* at Macau in southern China, for example, were subsequently carried to Manila in the Spanish-controlled Philippines from whence they were shipped, together with Burmese, Chinese, Javanese, South Asian, and other Asian slaves, on the Manila galleon across the Pacific to Mexico and Peru during the 16th and 17th centuries.¹⁰ East Asian slaves also reached other parts of the globe. Enslaved Japanese arrived in 16th- and early 17th-century Portugal and Spain, while Chinese slaves landed in Goa, Mozambique, and Mauritius during the 18th century.¹¹ These examples demonstrate that reconstructing the global traffic in slave and bonded labour is contingent on examining how and why enslaved peoples of such diverse origin were trafficked across the Indian Ocean and maritime Asian worlds between 1500 and the early 20th century.

1. Overview of project goals

While the databases already housed on *SlaveVoyages* – chiefly on the transatlantic and intra-American slave trades – are of unquestioned importance to our understanding of the slave experience, their focus on the Atlantic obscures the globality of transoceanic migrations of forced labour between the early 16th and 20th centuries.¹² An IOA database is accordingly the next logical step in the website’s development and an effective response to a growing awareness of the need to deepen our knowledge of the human experience with slavery in all of its complexity. Because it builds on a successful model, the IOA database will operate as a separate but complementary and integrated component of *SlaveVoyages* which has a proven record of serving the general public, students, teachers, and researchers effectively.

SlaveVoyages currently provides scholars, students, educators, and the public with tools to easily access and engage with information about slave trading across the Atlantic and within the Americas between the early 16th and mid-19th centuries.

¹⁰ Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan*, 293–295, 404–405; Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico*, pp. 73–108.

¹¹ Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade*, pp. 404, 464–477; Boxer, *Fidalgos in the Far East, 1550–1770*, pp. 23–25, 238; Carter, ‘A Servile Minority in a Sugar Colony’, pp. 257–271. Sousa notes that Macau dispatched 450 slave women to India in 1563.

¹² The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, which became available online in 2008, currently contains 36,150 voyages which exported an estimated 12,521,337 African slaves toward the New World. The Intra-American Slave Trade Database (IASTD), added to the website in 2019, currently contains 31,707 voyages which embarked 661,736 slaves destined to other colonies in the Americas between 1561 and 1866. The IASTD is based on O’Malley, *Final Passages*.

The website's most popular feature is the time-lapse map which offers compelling visual evidence of the scale and intensity of this traffic in the Atlantic world. Tables and charts can be easily configured and downloaded by those seeking quantitative evidence for their projects. Three-dimensional video tours of slaving vessels help to bring the past alive for those who visit the website. Because it contains the kind of detailed data that can provide profound insights into the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of the human experience with slavery, the website has played a key role in making the histories of enslaved Africans accessible to the public in a manner that would otherwise be impossible. It has, in short, democratised access to many marginalised communities' history.

The website's interactive time-lapse maps, essays, and sample lesson plans are, however, incomplete because they do not reveal the globality of the commerce in enslaved people. By expanding the geographical scope of *SlaveVoyage's* existing databases visually and textually, the IOA database will demonstrate that millions of Asian as well as African men, women, and children were trafficked elsewhere than in the Atlantic world. The database will, moreover, show that slaves continued to be transported across vast oceanic expanses long after the transatlantic trade ended in 1867. The scale and longevity of these non-Atlantic maritime trades is suggested by estimates that Arab, Muslim, and Swahili merchants exported 4,134,000 Africans from the Red Sea and East African coasts to Arabia, the Persian Gulf, India, and beyond between 800 and 1900, while enslaved Africans continued to be carried across the Red Sea and northwestern Indian Ocean to Arabia and the Persian Gulf until the advent of World War II in 1939.¹³ Indian and Asian merchants shipped at least 600,000 Indian slaves to Southeast Asia between the 15th and 17th centuries, while an estimated 660,000–1,135,000 captives reached VOC possessions in the Indonesian archipelago during the 17th and 18th centuries, perhaps half of whom did so on local vessels and Chinese junks.¹⁴ Southeast Asian slaves likewise reached the southwestern Indian Ocean; some 14,300 'Malays' arrived at the Dutch-controlled Cape of Good Hope between the mid-17th and late 18th centuries, while another 3,800–4,750 were landed clandestinely in the Mascarenes between 1811 and the early 1830s.¹⁵ The 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s in turn witnessed the exportation of 386,000–437,000 slaves from Bali, Batak, Kalimantan, Lombok, Manado, the Mentawai Islands, New Guinea, Nias, Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Timor to other islands

¹³ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. 17, 61, 138; Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*.

¹⁴ Raben, 'Cities and the Slave Trade in Early-Modern Southeast Asia', p. 131; Van Rossum, 'The Dutch East India Company and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago Worlds, 1602–1795'.

¹⁵ Shell, *Children of Bondage*, pp. 40–41; Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', p. 41.

in the Indonesian archipelago, while slave raiders imported 200,000–300,000 slaves from insular Southeast Asia into the southern Philippines' Sulu sultanate between 1770 and 1870.¹⁶

The IOA database will also demonstrate that Europeans trafficked large numbers of slaves elsewhere than in the Atlantic world between 1500 and 1850. The Portuguese, for example, exported at least 42,000–84,000 captives from Mozambique to India, China (Macau), and Japan (Nagasaki) between 1500 and 1834, while Macau received an estimated 16,400–24,000 Japanese and Korean captives from Nagasaki between the late 1550s and 1600.¹⁷ British, Danish, Dutch, French, and Portuguese ships exported a minimum of 101,300–108,700 slaves from South Asia (Arakan, Bengal, the Coromandel and Malabar coasts) to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Southeast Asia, the Mascarenes, and South Africa between 1510 and 1810, an estimate which, given the fragmentary and often problematic information at our disposal, should probably be increased to 200,000.¹⁸ Overall, Europeans shipped a minimum of 450,000–565,000 African, Malagasy, Indian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian captives to their Indian Ocean establishments, a figure which future research will undoubtedly increase significantly. The need to incorporate the IOA into our understanding of European slave trading is further underscored by Europeans exporting 504,000–711,000 slaves from southeastern Africa and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean to the Americas. Enslaved Indians, for example, reached colonial Virginia and Saint Domingue during the 18th century,¹⁹ while the modern descendants of the Malagasy slaves who arrived in North America during the early 18th century continue to maintain a distinctive sense of identity based on knowledge of their ancestors' origins on the Grand Ile.²⁰

The significance of this European activity in the IOA is revealed in other ways. Markus Vink argued more than 20 years ago that the Dutch Indian Ocean slave trade during the 17th century was only slightly smaller in volume than the trans-Saharan slave trade, one-and-a-half to three times the size of the Swahili, Red Sea, and Dutch West India Company trades, and equalled 15–30 percent of the trans-Atlantic trade.²¹ Assessing the Mascarene trade's significance in similar terms is equally revealing. Adding the number of slaves exported to the Mascarenes to French exports across the Atlantic to the Americas increases the total volume of the French slave trade

¹⁶ Bosma, 'Commodification and Slavery in the Nineteenth-Century Indonesian Archipelago', pp. 114–115; Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768–1898*, p. 208.

¹⁷ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 16; Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade*, pp. 293–295.

¹⁸ Allen, 'Exporting the Unfortunate,' pp. 541–542.

¹⁹ Assisi, 'Indian Slaves in Colonial America'; Mettas, *Repertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 1, pp. 613–614.

²⁰ Wilson-Fall, *Memories of Madagascar and Slavery in the Black Atlantic*.

²¹ Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade", p. 168.

between 1640 and 1848 by 28–29 percent and reveals that one-fifth of all French slave trading between the 1670s and early 1830s occurred in the Indian Ocean.²² Research on British abolitionism in India and the Indian Ocean²³ and the ways in which the French Atlantic and Indian Ocean trades were intertwined further illustrates the complexity and globality of European involvement with slavery and slave trading.²⁴ European involvement in the Indian Ocean slave trades is also important in understanding the origins and dynamics of the migration of 3.7 million African and Asian indentured or free contractual labourers throughout the post-emancipation colonial plantation world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁵ In an early attempt to recruit and make use of such labour, some 3,100 indentured labourers were exported to Réunion from the former French slave trading enclaves at Pondichéry, (Puducherry), Karaikal, and Yanam on the Coromandel Coast.²⁶ The *éngagé* system, in turn, entailed the recruitment of 50,000 ostensibly ‘liberated’ slaves and ‘free’ contractual labourers from Mozambique and Madagascar to work on Mayotte in the Comoros, the island of Nosy-Bé off Madagascar’s northwest coast, and Réunion after France abolished slavery in 1848.²⁷

This scholarship will inform the narrative essays that project personnel will write to accompany the IOA database. These essays, modelled on those already available on *SlaveVoyages*, will explain the differences and similarities between slave systems in the Atlantic and IOA, discuss the issues and problems inherent in reconstructing transoceanic slave trading elsewhere than in the Atlantic,²⁸ and compare the life experiences of enslaved men, women, and children in these

²² Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 23.

²³ Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772–1843*; Doulton, ‘The Flag That Sets Us Free’, pp. 101–119; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 141–178, pp. 180–193, pp. 206–229; Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, pp. 142–180; Herzog, *Negotiating Abolition*.

²⁴ Allen, ‘Merchant Capital and Labor Migration in the Colonial Indian Ocean World’, pp. 129–153.

²⁵ For a survey of those who did so under written contracts of engagement, see Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922*. See also Allen, ‘Asian Indentured Labor in the 19th and Early 20th Century Colonial Plantation World’.

²⁶ On early attempts to use Asian indentured labour in the colonial plantation world, see: Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo, *Lured Away*, pp. 14–17; Carter and Ng Fong Kwang, *Forging the Rainbow*, pp. 4–5; Gerbeau, ‘De la traite dans l’océan Indien à l’engagisme’, pp. 54–55; Weber, ‘L’émigration indienne à La Réunion’, pp. 309–310. Pondichéry and Karikal subsequently figured prominently in the migration of at least 79,000 indentured Indians to Réunion, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique between 1849 and the mid-1880s.

²⁷ E.g., Gerbeau, ‘Engagees and Coolies in Réunion Island’, pp. 209–236; Renault, *Libération d’esclaves et nouvelle servitude*; Fuma, ‘La traite des esclaves dans le bassin du sud-ouest de l’Océan Indien et la France après 1848’, pp. 247–261; Monnier, *Esclaves de la canne à sucre*.

²⁸ Gerbeau, ‘The Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean: Problems Facing the Historian and Research to be Undertaken’, pp. 184–207; Allen, ‘Ending the History of Silence’, pp. 294–313.

different parts of the globe. Project participants will also work closely with educators to create appropriate K-12 sample lesson plans that highlight the globality and complexities of the human experience with slavery.

The IOA database will be structured in a manner similar to the databases already housed in *SlaveVoyages* to ensure its compatibility with these databases and facilitate its accessibility and use for comparative purposes. Like these other databases, it will be easily searchable and complemented with images, maps, narrative, explanatory essays, and sample lesson plans that will provide compelling numerical and visual evidence of the pan-regional slave trades that carried millions of African and Asian men, women, and children throughout the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia between the early 16th and early 20th centuries. To this end, the database will include individual entries for each known slaving voyage which will record all available information about the voyage in question such as the ship's nationality, type or rigging, tonnage, captain, crew, and ownership, ports and dates of arrival and departure, dates and places where slave cargoes were purchased and landed, number of captives embarked and disembarked, the demographic structure of these cargoes, voyages' duration, 'refreshment' stops during the voyage, and slave shipboard mortality rates. Each entry will also include primary and/or secondary data points, and scholarly references that will enable visitors to learn more about the voyages uncovered by research in numerous archives around the world.

Users will be able to access this information through an interface that has search parameters for particular data points. This kind of user interaction will bring the numbers reported in the database to life, illustrating not only the global dynamics of this traffic but also the participation of individual actors and national groups. For instance, a visitor of the database might search only for voyages to Mauritius to learn more about the Malagasy, East African, Indian, and Southeast Asian populations that supplied slaves for export to the island. Or a visitor might examine only the voyages that involved US traders and their ships. The results of these searches will be presented in tabular form which users can download, and will also be illustrated by graphs and maps. Visitors from all backgrounds will thus be able to find answers easily to questions they may have or scroll through images, essays, and lesson plans to learn more about enslavement in the Indian Ocean and Asia or explore other topics of interest.

The essays that accompany the IOA database will explain how the database was developed, the rationale for its format, and how and why individual voyages were selected for inclusion in it. Other essays will contextualise the information it contains and demonstrate how these data deepen our understanding of the human experience with slavery and slave trading and their legacy. More specifically, these essays will address the following topics:

1. A chronological overview of transoceanic slave trading in the IOA, its connections to slave trading in the Atlantic world, and its importance in comparative world history.
2. The dynamics and patterns of enslavement in various parts of the IOA and their similarities and differences with enslavement in the Atlantic world.
3. The origins and demographic structure of slave populations being trafficked in the Indian Ocean and Asia compared to the Atlantic.
4. American involvement in the IOA trades from the 1790s to 1860.
5. Slave resistance on board vessels in comparative perspective.
6. The relationship between slave trading and other pre- and post-abolition labour diasporas in the Indian Ocean, Asia, and Atlantic.
7. Similarities and differences between abolitionism in the IOA and elsewhere.
8. The legacy of slavery, slave trading, and abolition in the contemporary Indian Ocean, Asian, and Atlantic worlds.

The sample K-12 lesson plans in the database will suggest how educators can connect American and IOA experiences with slavery. One lesson plan could, for example, have students and teachers compare the ‘middle passage’ during voyages in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Such a comparison, combined with information about shipboard mortality rates, will reveal, for example, that although many voyages in the Indian Ocean world were usually of shorter duration than those across the Atlantic, IOA captives frequently experienced higher death rates, a demographic fact that can encourage discussions about the reason(s) for this difference. Another lesson plan might highlight European involvement in the enslavement of Asian as well as African peoples which will help students to learn about systems of racialised slavery elsewhere in the world and allow them, with the aid of personal narratives, to humanise and compare enslaved people’s experiences in the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds. These narratives could include that of Gabriel, an Ethiopian Jew who reached Portuguese Goa during the 17th century, Panaij van Boegies and other Indonesian captives transported to South Africa during the 18th century, and enslaved men and women in Dutch India.²⁹ Other personal narratives, such as those of Fezzah Khanom and Ziba Khanum, African women in 19th-century Shiraz and Yazd (Iran), respectively, and the 73 Oromo children liberated from an Arab/Swahili dhow during the mid-19th century who ultimately reached South Africa will humanise the lives of the people who remained enslaved after slavery

²⁹ Salvadore, ‘Between the Red Sea Slave Trade and the Goa Inquisition’, pp. 327–360; Groenewald, ‘Panaij van Boegies’, pp. 50–62; Schrikker and Wickramasinghe, eds., *Being a Slave*; Van Rossum, Geelen, Van der Hout, and Tosun, *Testimonies of Enslavement*. Other life histories of interest include: Alpers, ‘The Story of Swema’, pp. 185–219; Wickramasinghe, *Slave in a Palanquin*.

and the slave trade were abolished in the Atlantic world.³⁰ Still other life histories, such as those of Marie Rozette and Madeleine, Indian freedwomen who lived in late 18th- and early 19th-century Mauritius and Réunion, respectively, will reveal the lives that some enslaved persons and their children led following their manumission.³¹ Such narratives can also be combined with contemporary images, many of which are readily available online (e.g., slaveryimages.org), to deepen public understanding of the realities of the slave experience in the Indian Ocean and Asia. We anticipate that the IOA database and its accompanying materials will become accessible online early in 2026.

2. Where we stand and the road ahead

In September 2022, in anticipation of being awarded the NEH grant which occurred in January 2023, we organised a workshop at Rice University, Houston, TX, that brought together a group of distinguished scholars from France, Great Britain, Japan, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, and the United States with expertise on slavery and slave trading in the Indian Ocean world to identify problems that might be encountered in creating an IOA database and develop strategies to address them effectively. Our determination to hold the workshop reflected a keen appreciation of Hubert Gerbeau's trenchant reminder more than 20 years ago that 'L'océan Indien n'est pas l'Atlantique' ('the Indian Ocean is not the Atlantic'), and that if there are similarities between slave trading in these two oceanic realms, there are also important differences.³² The workshop consisted of five roundtables which focused on assessing current knowledge about slave trading in the Indian Ocean and Asia, conceptualising the geographical organisation of the IOA trades, identifying problems and issues in reconstructing these trades, considering the practical aspects of creating an IOA database, and integrating the database into humanistic and public discourses.

The ensuing discussions can only be characterised as very productive, beginning with allowing us to identify books, catalogues, and other published materials with which we were not already familiar that contain data about slaving in the IOA and whose authors could be invited to collaborate with us in developing the database. The participants' expertise played an important role in allowing us to expand and refine a preliminary gazetteer of IOA regions and ports which will

³⁰ Lee, 'Enslaved African Women in Nineteenth-Century Iran', pp. 417–437; Lee, 'Ziba Khanum of Yazd'; Shell, *Children of Hope*.

³¹ Allen, 'Marie Rozette and Her World', pp. 345–365; Peabody, *Madeleine's Children*.

³² Gerbeau, 'L'océan Indien n'est pas l'Atlantique', pp. 79–108.

be merged with *SlaveVoyages*' existing gazetteer; doing so will not only reveal the multitude of ports and regions involved in the IOA trades, but also changes in local, regional, and pan-regional slave trading patterns through time. Other discussions generated suggestions about how best to integrate the IOA database into scholarly and popular discourse about the nature and dynamics of the human experience with enslavement and incorporate such insights into digital and physical public history sites. The workshop's participants also discussed the most effective ways to address the differences between the Atlantic and IOA trades, such as the role that European charter companies and indigenous African and Asian merchants played in this commerce, and the need to distinguish between inter-colonial (e.g., from St. Helena to Benkulen) and intra-colonial slave transfers (e.g., from the Seychelles to Mauritius). These discussions also focused on how best to incorporate other important information, such as shipwrecks, instances of shipboard resistance, the presence of adolescents (e.g., *capors*, *caporines*) as well as adult men and women and children in ships' cargoes, and instances when ships were captured by anti-slave trade patrols, especially those conducted by the British Royal Navy, and subsequently condemned, along with their human cargoes, by colonial and vice admiralty courts of adjudication.

Since this project began on 1 March 2023, we have been actively engaged in surveying our existing datasets, which contain approximately 2,800 voyages, and incorporating a representative sample of them into a prototype database. Doing so has entailed dealing with duplicate voyages and/or reconciling the information contained in multiple and sometimes problematic sources about individual voyages. Research trips by the project's principal investigators to archives in Europe and the Indian Ocean during 2024 should allow us to increase the number of voyages that will be included in the database and extend its geographical coverage when it becomes accessible online in 2026.

We are also currently collaborating with other researchers about expanding the database still further. From its inception, we have envisioned the creation of an IOA database as an inherently collaborative undertaking that will build on and incorporate the work of internationally based scholars who have been able to identify previously unknown voyages and/or can provide additional information about already known ones. This commitment reflects our appreciation that such collaboration has been crucial to *SlaveVoyages*' successful expansion over the years. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, for example, contained 27,233 voyages when it was first published in 1999 as a CD-ROM, a number which increased to 34,490 by the time it was launched online in 2008 and has now reached 36,150 precisely because of such collaboration.

3. Conclusion

In 1971, Joseph E. Harris observed cogently that the African diaspora of slave origin extended eastward across the Indian Ocean to India as well as westward across the Atlantic to the Americas and called on historians to take due note of this historical reality.³³ Three years later, J.-M. Filliot revealed the globality of the catchment area which supplied slaves to the Mascarenes during the 18th century.³⁴ The 1980s and 1990s witnessed increasing interest in the economics of the Indian Ocean trades,³⁵ while historians such as Rudy Bauss, Gwyn Campbell, José Capela, Marina Carter, Hubert Gerbeau, Pier Larson, and Robert Young began to examine the movement of Malagasy, East African, Indian, and other Asian slaves into the wider Indian Ocean world in greater detail.³⁶ The first decades of the new millennium have witnessed a dramatic expansion in our knowledge about the Indian Ocean and Asia slave trades, a trend illustrated by the collection of papers edited by Henri Médard and three colleagues, Pedro Machado's compelling work on Gujarati merchants' involvement in financing the Mascarene slave trade, and Richard Allen's seminal study of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean.³⁷

Missing from this scholarly discourse, however, is a comprehensive catalogue of the voyages by European and indigenous vessels which transported thousands of enslaved Africans, Indians, Southeast Asians, and others from one end of the Indian Ocean world to another each year. In 1967, Mauritian archivist and historian Auguste Toussaint hinted at the potential number of such voyages when he reported tallying 515 voyages which had brought slaves to the Mascarenes between 1773 and 1810; unfortunately, Toussaint did not catalogue these voyages or discuss these ventures in any detail.³⁸ In 1983, James C. Armstrong reported the results of his pioneering efforts to catalogue English and especially VOC-sponsored slaving voyages from the Cape of Good Hope to Madagascar during the 17th century.³⁹ The

³³ Harris, *The African Presence in Asia*.

³⁴ Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle*.

³⁵ Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*.

³⁶ E.g., Bauss, 'The Portuguese Slave Trade from Mozambique to Portuguese India and Macau and Comments on Timor, 1750–1850', pp. 21–27; Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1800–1861', pp. 166–193; Capela and Medeiros, 'La traite au depart du Mozambique vers les îles françaises de l'océan Indien, 1720–1904', pp. 247–309; Carter, 'Indian Slaves in Mauritius (1729–1834)', pp. 233–247; Gerbeau, 'Les esclaves asiatiques des Mascareignes: Enquêtes et hypothèses', pp. 169–197; Larson, 'A Census of Slaves Exported from Central Madagascar to the Mascarenes between 1769 and 1820', pp. 131–145; Young, 'Slaves, Coolies and Bondsmen', pp. 23–26.

³⁷ Médard, Derat, Vernet, and Ballarin, *Traites et esclavages en Afrique orientale et dans l'océan Indien*; Machado, *Ocean of Trade*, pp. 208–267; Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

³⁸ Toussaint, *La route des îles*, pp. 96, 98–99.

³⁹ Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century', pp. 211–223.

publication of Jean Mettas' impressive two-volume compendium of 18th-century French slaving voyages and José Capela's study of the Mozambican trade, both which included information about individual French and Portuguese vessels trading slaves in the western Indian Ocean, revealed the promise inherent in cataloguing slaving voyages in the IOA, while Richard Allen's study of European slave trading demonstrated the many rewards of doing so.⁴⁰

The issue before us is accordingly not whether such a database should be created, but rather how can we build on previous and continuing efforts to document slave trading in the IOA in ways that will allow us to expand, if not transform, our understanding of the global commerce in chattel and bonded labour. Such an undertaking must include a willingness to draw on the insights that cognate disciplines such as archaeology can provide.⁴¹ Excavations at the Shimoni caves on the Kenya coast, for example, have yielded information about how captive Africans were held for export along the Swahili Coast.⁴² The discovery, excavation, and analysis of the artifacts recovered from the wrecks of *Le Coureur*, a notorious slaver which landed 900–1,200 slaves on Mauritius during six voyages in 1819 and 1820, and the Portuguese *São José Paquete d'África*, which carried 512 Mozambican slaves in its hold when it sank near Cape Town in 1794, have shed new light on the details of European slave trading in the western Indian Ocean.⁴³ There can be little doubt that the creation of a fully developed IOA database, like those already housed on the *SlaveVoyages* website, will be a lengthy process that will require a commitment of numerous historians to search out and make informed, creative use of hitherto unknown or underutilised archival and other sources. The success of such a venture will likewise rest on the willingness of this international group of scholars with diverse backgrounds, interests, and expertise to collaborate in ways that will expand and deepen our understanding of the human experience with slavery in all of its complexity and, by so doing, give meaning to the lives of the millions of men, women, and children who endured enslavement in the Indian Ocean world and Asia over the centuries.

⁴⁰ Mettas, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 1, *Nantes*, and vol. 2, *Ports autres que Nantes*; Capela, *O tráfico de escravos nos portos de Moçambique, 1733–1904*; Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

⁴¹ Allen, 'History, Historical Archaeology, and the 'History of Silence'', pp. 121–142. On archaeology's value in reconstructing Indian Ocean history, see also Hauser and Haines, eds., *The Archaeology of Modern Worlds in the Indian Ocean*.

⁴² Kiriama, 'Archaeological Investigation of Shimoni Slave Caves', pp. 157–169.

⁴³ Metwalli, Bigourdan, and Van Arnim, 'Interim Report of a Shipwreck at Pointe aux Feuilles, Mauritius', pp. 74–81; Van Arnim, 'Le Coureur: Recherches historiques et archéologiques sur un navire négrier de Maurice à l'époque de la traite illégale', pp. 40–45; Manfio and Van Arnim, 'Maritime Archaeology of Slave Ships', pp. 492–508; Boshoff, Bunch III, Gardullo, and Lubkemann, *From No Return*.

Identifying and Linking Names, Legal Statuses, and Punishments of the Dutch East India Company Convicts in Early Modern Batavia Using Supervised Named Entity Recognition (NER)

Muhammad Asyrafi and Fathiyarizq Mahendra Putra

Abstract

Under the Dutch East India Company (VOC) colonial law, enslaved and marginalised people were the most susceptible social group to judicial violence, such as corporal punishment and the death penalty. *Criminele Rollen* is one of the archival genres created by the VOC that recorded the information about it and has the potential to reveal the history of convicts, prisoners and death row inmates. As a genre of archives, *Criminele Rollen* has a distinct pattern of recording information. It was written chronologically and contains the names of the members of the Court of Justice (Raad van Justitie) who were present in court, the names of the accused and their legal status, the names of the prosecutors, information regarding cases, and court decisions. It also uses consistent phrases to indicate the sentences and other important information. The National Archives of the Netherlands holds roughly 236 bundles of *Criminele Rollen* sent to the VOC chamber in Zeeland. These archival documents are also part of the digitised archives provided by the De IJsborg Zichtbaar Maken project. The paper aims to uncover the names, legal statuses, and punishments of the slaves, convicts and death row inmates in *Criminele Rollen* using Named Entity Recognition (NER). We exercise EntityRuler and a custom pipeline in this study. By doing this, the article positioned itself as a preliminary attempt to uncover history from below using a digital humanities approach.

Keywords: Dutch East India Company (VOC), *Criminele Rollen*, enslaved people, death penalty, digital humanities, Named Entity Recognition (NER)

1. Introduction

In the early modern period, judicial violence, such as capital and corporal punishment, involved excruciatingly painful and brutal methods. This period was characterised by excessive violence, and scholars such as Michel Foucault and Pieter Spierenburg have extensively studied the violent punishments of this era.¹ However, these studies primarily concentrate on the European experiences of penal development. Meanwhile, the early modern period saw the rise of global networks and commerce, exemplified by the emergence of trading companies. These companies facilitated the spread of Western punitive practices worldwide, often mirroring the violent and painful punishments of Europe. The Dutch East India Company, or the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), was no exception. The VOC was granted octroi rights by the States General in 1602, which included the authority to exert punitive measures.² Addressing the lacunae in penal historiography, in recent years, the study on the VOC penal practice gained more attention.³ This trend offers a new insight into the history of penal practice. The history of penal practice in the early modern period is inseparable from the history of slavery. As a consequence, the study on the VOC penal practice also sheds light on enslaved populations and their struggle.

Operating under the influence of Roman-Dutch law, the VOC established a legal framework in its controlled territories, especially Batavia, which was the centre of the VOC operation in Asia. This system was based on Roman-Dutch legal principles and was crafted to uphold social order and reinforce control. In 1642, the VOC established the Batavian Statutes to regulate issues not addressed by Roman-Dutch law. The Batavian Statutes were applied to all inhabitants of Batavia, regardless of their ethnicity. Robert Cribb regarded the VOC's application of the Batavian Statutes in Batavia as the pinnacle of Dutch legal universalism throughout its colonial rule. Moreover, the application of the Batavian Statutes also reflected the European spirit of the age in Asia.⁴ Aside from the context of legal universalism, the penal practice in VOC-controlled Batavia mirrored the brutal practices of early modern Europe, including breaking on a cross or wheel, beheading, hanging, drowning,

¹ Antony, Carroll, and Pennock, *The Cambridge World History of Violence*; Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*; Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*; Spierenburg, 'Judicial Violence in the Dutch Republic'; Bennett, *Capital Punishment and the Criminal Corpse in Scotland*; King, *Punishing the Criminal Corpse*.

² See Weststeijn, 'The VOC as a Company-State'.

³ Matthias Van Rossum argued that most of the works concerning the VOC's penal history focused on 'banishment' or 'exile'. See Rossum, 'The Dutch East India Company in Asia'; For other works on the VOC's penal history see Ward, *Networks of Empire Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company*; Cribb, 'Convict Exile and Penal Settlement in Colonial Indonesia'.

⁴ Cribb, 'Legal Pluralism and Criminal Law in the Dutch Colonial Order'.

burning at the stake, mutilation, flogging, and branding.⁵ Additionally, the VOC established a judicial system with courts and legal officers who administered these severe punishments to enforce their authority.

The Statutes outlined the legal procedures that needed to be followed before the death penalty could be carried out. This included a formal trial by the Council of Justice (*Raad van Justitie*), where evidence was presented, and the accused had the opportunity to defend themselves. Based on the judge's decision, the council would then deliberate and issue a verdict.⁶ Although the Batavian Statutes formally disregarded ethnicity, in practice, the application of the death penalty in Batavia often depended on the legal status and social rank of the accused. Slaves and marginalised individuals were more likely to receive harsher punishments, including death, compared to free citizens or higher-ranking officials. This discriminatory aspect of the legal system reflected the broader social hierarchies and power dynamics of the colonial context. The Governor-General of the VOC had significant influence over the administration of justice, including the imposition of death penalties. In some cases, the Governor-General could grant clemency or commute a death sentence, although such instances were rare and typically depended on the political and social context.⁷

In some regions, the VOC employed exceptionally cruel methods even by the early modern standard, such as shoving convicts into cannons and shooting them against walls.⁸ Moreover, death did not mark the end of violence toward these individuals; post-mortem punishments were common. The bodies (and often body parts) of convicts were burned or displayed outside the castle walls to demonstrate the colonial government's power and serve as a deterrent to others.⁹ The harsh legal and punitive measures reflected the VOC's broader strategy of maintaining control and instilling fear among the population.

⁵ Asyrafii, 'A Distant Mirror'.

⁶ La Bree, *De Rechterlijke Organisatie En Rechstbedeling Te Batavia in de XVIIe Eeuw*; Ravensbergen, 'Courtrooms of Conflict'; Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company Expansion and Decline*; Balk, Van Dijk, and Kortlang, *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)*.

⁷ Ravensbergen, 'Gered van de koloniale galg koloniaal strafrecht en gratieverlening toegepast op 'Inlanders' en Chinezen in Nederlands-Indië 1819–1848'.

⁸ See for example the execution in Ceylon under Peter Vuyst in Samperman, *De Onregtveerdige Justitie, Uytgevoert Door Den Gouverneur Petrus Vuyst, Tot Ceylon Nevens Het Regtveerdig Vonnis En Regt, Aan Hem Gouverneur Gedaan, Door Den Achtbaren Raad van Justitie Des Casteels Batavia*; VOC, *Kort En Naauwkeurig Verhaal, van 't Leven En Opkomst van Den Heer En Mr. Petrus Vuyst*. Ultimately, Vuyst was arrested and executed in Batavia in 1732.

⁹ Peter Elberveld's gruesome execution and post-mortem punishment in 1722 is one of the infamous executions in Batavia. A monument erected in 1722 to warn people of Elberveld's crime is still standing today in Jakarta. See Horton, 'Pieter Elberveld'.

Batavia was the centre of the VOC's operation in Asia and was founded in 1619. It rapidly grew into a vital trading hub for the VOC, serving as a key node in the global spice trade. Considering Batavia's importance to the VOC, severe penal measures were intended, among other objectives, to keep the peace and order of Batavia. Meanwhile, the city of Batavia heavily relied on the labour of Asian slaves. These slaves, however big their contribution to the functioning of the city of Batavia was, were treated harshly. They were also subjected to an unfair legal system. The slave population in Batavia comprised individuals from various parts of Asia, including India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and the Indonesian archipelago. They were often captured during VOC military campaigns or purchased from slave markets. The VOC also exploited the local tradition of coerced labour. The majority of slaves in Batavia were personally owned.¹⁰ The living conditions for them were generally poor, with many subjected to physical abuse, severe punishment, and inadequate nutrition. Female slaves were often forced to work for prostitution.¹¹ Despite their harsh treatment, the enslaved population played a crucial role in the economic and social life of Batavia, working in households, agriculture, and various trades. Their labour was so essential to the VOC that they were subjected to involuntary migration and transported to any location where labour was needed. Hans Hägerdal described the slave community as 'constantly in flux due to high mortality and involuntary immigration'.¹² On top of that, the legal framework of the VOC offered minimal protection to slaves, and their status made them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harsh disciplinary measures. Under the VOC rule, the marginalised group in Batavia, especially enslaved people, was susceptible to the gruesome penal practice mentioned above. Between 1729 and 1739, while comprising only 30% of the overall population in Batavia, enslaved individuals accounted for 50% of those who were subjected to capital punishment.¹³ The rich and detailed information on the practice of violent punishments is recorded in the VOC colonial archives, particularly the *Criminele Rollen*. Within these documents, the voices of the enslaved population await revelation. Why is it important to extract information from the archive using a new technique? By examining this particular archive using the newly available digital technique, we aim to unravel the hidden information within. The new digital technique also promised to reduce the time needed to analyse the archives.

¹⁰ Kanumoyoso, 'Beyond the City Wall Society and Economic Development in the Ommelanden of Batavia', p. 112; Nicolaas, 'Maritime (Im)Mobility', p. 55.

¹¹ Bosma and Raben, *Being Dutch in Dutch East Indies A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920*, p. 30.

¹² Hägerdal, 'A Slave Economy in the East Indies', p. 93.

¹³ Asyrafî, 'A Distant Mirror'.

2. New digital approach to uncover the Batavian penal history

The past decades witnessed a massive digitisation effort of archival sources.¹⁴ This effort has opened new research possibilities, and in recent years, the digital approach has been gaining more attention in the humanities, including in the field of history.¹⁵ Distant reading, a relatively new technique, is one of the few examples of this digital approach. Franco Moretti coined the term in 2000, initially for literary studies. It was met with both support and criticism.¹⁶ Support and criticism aside, recently, an interesting and promising approach has been proposed by Luthra et al., who have explored the possibility of using Automated Named Entity Recognition to uncover indexes of marginalised peoples in the VOC colonial archives.¹⁷ Our study took inspiration from it and used a similar approach to uncover the names, legal statuses, and punishments of the slaves, convicts and death row inmates in *Criminele Rollen* using Named Entity Recognition.

Named-entity recognition (henceforth NER) is a subtask of information extraction that seeks to locate and classify named entities mentioned in unstructured text into pre-defined categories such as person names, organisations, locations, medical codes, time expressions, quantities, monetary values, percentages, and so on. The goal of named entity recognition is to find all occurrences pertaining to a given class of entities.¹⁸ The application of NER is increasingly popular for identifying an entity or object in documents, one of which is historical data-based research; related research that Won and Murieta conducted provides a NER overview for identifying place names based on historical corpora.¹⁹ This research explains the purpose of exploring and evaluating modern tools that could be used to automate the identification and retrieval of geographic information from historical texts, particularly from the Republic of Letters (RofL) datasets; another study explains using NER for Identified Biodiversity records from the past which uses Images of 20,000 herbarium specimens from the Museum of Human and Nature Activities,

¹⁴ For instance ‘Sejarah Nusantara’, n.d., <https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/>; ‘TANAP’, n.d., <http://tanap.net/>; ‘Delpher’, n.d., <https://www.delpher.nl/>; *Prize Papers Online*, n.d., <https://brill.com/view/package/ppo>; ‘Old Bailey Online’, n.d., <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>; ‘Digital Panopticon’, n.d., <https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/>; Liesbeth Keijser, ‘6000 Ground Truth of VOC and Notarial Deeds 3,000,000 HTR of VOC, WIC and Notarial Deeds’, January 2020, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.6414086>.

¹⁵ This relatively new approach is often referred to as Digital Humanities.

¹⁶ Moretti, *Distant Reading*; Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*; Underwood, ‘Distant Reading and Recent Intellectual History’ p. 530; Moretti, ‘Franco Moretti’, pp. 686–689.

¹⁷ Mrinalini Luthra et al., ‘Unsilencing Colonial Archives via Automated Entity Recognition’.

¹⁸ Hakenberg, ‘Named Entity Recognition’, pp. 1487–1488.

¹⁹ Won, Murrieta-Flores, and Martins, ‘Ensemble Named Entity Recognition (NER)’.

Hyogo.²⁰ The process or methods are varied. In order to perform NER based on classification, we created a corpus of data labels used for test data and training data manually.²¹ Although both datasets are digitised, reprocessing them was required to optimally perform the NER tasks with the available tools for us to evaluate. This process consisted of cleaning the datasets and translating the original markup into textual content that can be taken as input by the NER tools.²²

This chapter aimed to create a NER dataset for historical archives based on the names of the convict, their legal status, the punishments, and the crimes they committed. We want to know how to implement machine learning to find these variables. To achieve its goal, this chapter is structured as follows: we describe the archival source used as the corpus in section 2, and then in section 3, we describe the preparation of data and the software we used. Next, in section 4, we discuss the evaluation of the research. In section 5, we conclude the study by describing the findings and results of the code.

3. Archival sources

The archival source selected to be experimented upon in this study is the *Criminele Rollen* series. The reason behind the selection is the availability of the codex and the importance of the corpus in the study of the history of punishment in the VOC Batavia. *Criminele Rollen* is a genre of legal document produced by the VOC. It is produced by the Council of Justice (*Raad van Justitie*). As a genre of archives, *Criminele Rollen* has a distinct pattern of recording information. *Criminele Rollen* starts immediately with the record. It has no register and contains the essence of the case, verdicts, and court advice. However, the definition of ‘essential’ depends on the case and the council member. *Criminele Rollen* ends on 30 August each year. *Criminele Rollen* has a set of rules for recording information on crimes and court trials. This form or pattern of writing is always obeyed by the officer in charge.

The cases recorded in the *Criminele Rollen* ranged from theft and murder to more complex crimes like treason and rebellion. The detailed nature of these records allows for a comprehensive understanding of the types of crimes that were prevalent and how they were dealt with by the VOC’s legal system. The structure of the case record beginning from the top of the page is as follows:

Some of the distinct features of *Criminele Rollen* are as follows: firstly, the case recording was arranged chronologically in each bundle. One bundle contains

²⁰ Takano, Cole, and Konagai, ‘Advancements in Data Extraction from Natural History Collections’.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Won, Murrieta-Flores, and Martins, ‘Ensemble Named Entity Recognition (NER)’.

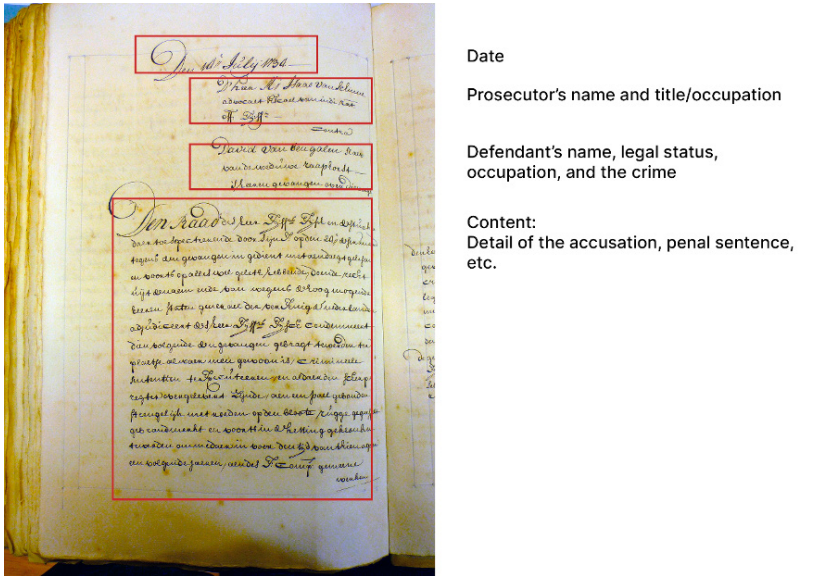


Figure 9.1. The structure of a Criminele Rollen page.

information about criminal cases for one administration year and disregards the importance of each case. For example, if a court meeting, trial, or appeal court was enacted in relation to a criminal case, this *Criminele Rollen* will record the ‘essential’ information about that hearing. If, after the hearing, whether it was on the same day or the next day, another case was tried, this other case would be written just under the previous record. If the verdict did not satisfy, or the judges did not come to a conclusion, and the case continued in the *Raad van Justitie* court, there would be another court.

Secondly, the *Criminele Rollen* was recording not only results but also the process. It means *Criminele Rollen* recorded the whole administration of justice in a full administrative year. This is different to other sub-genres of legal documents. For instance, *Processtukken* recorded in detail one particular case. *Criminele Rollen* recorded not only the verdict but also the process which preceded the verdict. This is important to any researcher who aims to understand the process of the court in the Court of Justice.

Third, the usage of the Latin language. It is a feature unique to legal documents. Particularly in this subgenre of legal document, the *Criminele Rollen*, terms such as ‘*Presentibus omnibus demptis*’ appeared often. This term means that all the members of the council were present except the name mentioned after ‘*demptis*’ or ‘*dempto*’. The name of the absent member then continued by the reason of their absence. The distinct traits of *Criminele Rollen* and the wealth of information it

contains render it a valuable asset for historical research, particularly in the field of penal history.

According to several studies, Named Entity Recognition (NER) for historical research faces challenges related to reference identification. These challenges include a) language spelling changes over time, b) spelling variation, c) OCR errors, d) the use of multiple languages, and e) general ambiguity in language use (Won, 2018, p. 2). Similarly, the study of *Criminele Rollen* encounters these issues along with additional problems: a) several cases of two-column documents, and b) the accuracy of the Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) technology. These two additional challenges will be addressed in the following part.

4. Data and software

The process employed in this study is as follows: first, the corpus was selected based on its availability and relevance to the research topic. Next, the text data from the corpus was cleaned. After that, the labels to be extracted were determined. The cleaned corpus was then annotated based on these label entities. The annotated dataset was exported and used as the foundation for training the machine. Finally, the trained machine was tested, and the results were displayed using displaCy.

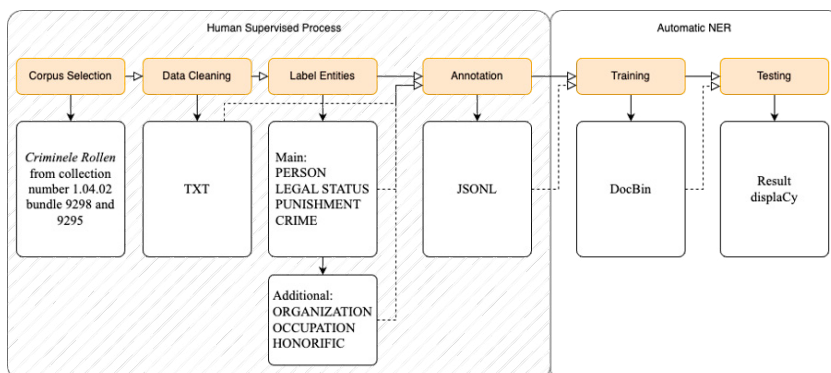
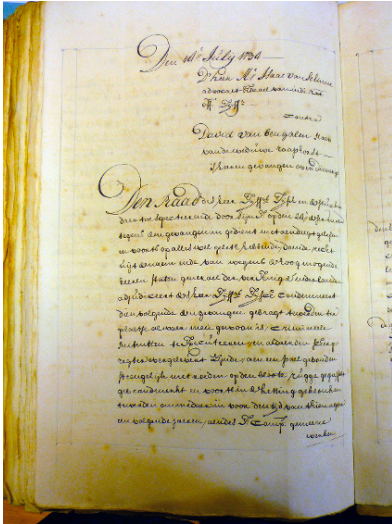


Figure 9.2. Workflow of the semi-supervised NER study for *Criminele Rollen*.

The data used for training and testing are taken from *Criminele Rollen*, which the Nationaal Archief keeps with collection no. NL-HaNA 1.04.02 bundle no. 9298 and 9295. In 2020, the project *De Ijsberg Zichtbaar Maken* (henceforth the *Ijsberg*) successfully digitised and processed a considerable portion of the VOC colonial archives. The project has also published and made the processed documents available to the

public.²³ *Criminele Rollen* documents that have been kept in the Zeeland chamber are included in this digitisation effort. The *Ijsberg* project utilised the Transkribus HTR+ model to turn the scanned and digitised archives into .txt files.²⁴ This study takes the .txt transcription files (henceforth the corpus) published by the *Ijsberg* project and processes them for Named Entity Recognition using supervised machine learning. An example of the corpus compared to the scanned document is below:



Den 14, e Julij 1734.
D' heer M, r Isaac van Schinne
advocæet fiscael van indi rat:
off: Eijss=r
contra

David van bengalen slaev
van de weduwe raaphorst
's heeren gevangen over dieverij
Den Raad des heer Eijss=r Eijsch en de stucken
daer toe spectiveerende door sijn E: op den 24, deser maend
tegens den gevangen in gediend niet aendaegt gelesen
en voorts op alles wel geleth hebbende, doende recht
uijt de naem ende van wegens de hoog mogende
heeren staten generael der verEenig de nederlanden
adjudiceert des heer Eijss=r Eijsch condemneert
dien volgende den gevangen gebragt tewerden ter
plaetse alwaer men gewoon is, crimineele
sententien te Executeeren, en aldaer den scherp,
regter overgelevert zijnde, aen een pael gebonden
strengelijc met roeden op den bloote rugge gegeesselt
gebrandmerkt en voorts in de ketting geklonken
tewerden ommedaer in voor den tijd van thien agter
een volgende jaeren, aen des E: Comp: gemeene
werken

Figure 9.3. A page of *Criminele Rollen* and the text transcription.

4.1. Corpus selection

This study selected 95 pages of *Criminele Rollen* from the collection number 1.04.02 bundle 9298 and 9295 as the training data. We acknowledge that the number of pages used here is underwhelming for a training dataset.²⁵ However, we expected this study to provide the preliminary basis for further research. The testing data is also taken from bundle no. 9298. We selected only the pages that mention corporal and capital punishment to highlight the penal sentence and legal status relation.

²³ Keijser, '6000 Ground Truth of VOC and Notarial Deeds 3.000.000 HTR of VOC, WIC and Notarial Deeds'.

²⁴ <https://readcoop.eu/model/dutch-handwriting-17th-19th-century/>

²⁵ Luthra et al.'s effort makes use of 2500 annotated pages. See Luthra et al., 'Unsilencing Colonial Archives via Automated Entity Recognition'.

4.2. Data cleaning

The corpus needs to be formatted before it is ready for NER, as the NER used in this study is a supervised machine-learning process that requires human supervision. In this study, data cleaning is performed manually. One of the challenges faced by the data cleaners is the format of the *Criminele Rollen* document. The Council of Justice's clerk sometimes wrote the document in two columns. While human readers can easily read the document in this format, the HTR engine reads it line by line, leading to improper transcription. This problem is evident in the following example:

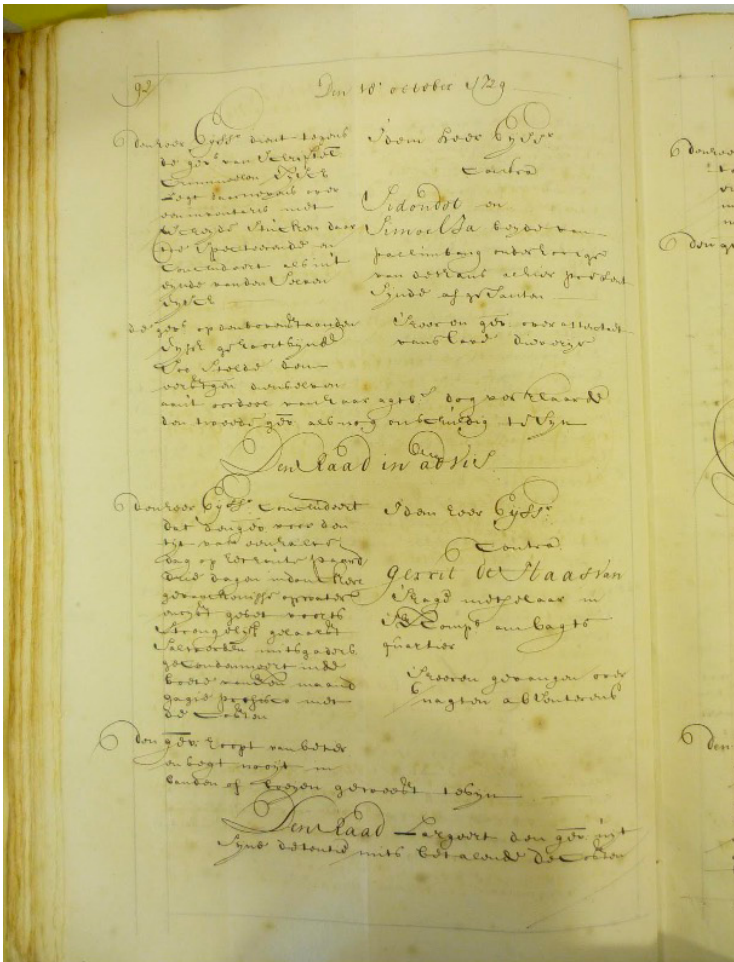


Figure 9.4. A page of *Criminele Rollen* with two columns format.

The transcription of the page provided by the *Ijsberg* project, as shown in figure 9.4, in a .txt format is as follows:

6
de
den
den
92
Den 18:’ october 1729
den heer Eijss:r dient tegens
Idem heer bijss:r
de gev:s van schriftel:
Crimineelen Eijsch
Contra
zegt daarnevens over
een inventaris met
Sidondot en
sscheijde stucken daar
Timoelja beijde van
stde specteerende en
pallimbang onderhorige
Concendoert als in’t
van dethans alhier present
eijnde van den Selven
Eijsch
sijnde afgesanten
gev:s op den bovenstaanden
Cheeren gev: over attentat
Eijsch gehoort sijnde
vanslave dieverije
Soo stelde den
seerstgen: denselven
agtb:s dog verklaarde
aant oordeel van haar
den tweede gev: als nog onschuldig te sijn

in advis
Den Raad
heer bij Es.r concludeert
Idem heer bijss:

dat den gev. voor den
 tijt van een halve
 Contra
 dag op het houten paard,
 Gerrit de Haas van
 drie dagen in donckere
 Rhage metselaar in
 gevanckenisse op water
 en rijst geset voorts
 'sE Comp:s ombagts
 strongelijc gelaarst
 quartier
 saltoerden mits gaders
 gecondemneert inde
 Eheeren gevangen over
 boete van Een maand
 nagten absenterens
 gagie prosisco met
 de costen
 gev: hoopt van beter
 en segt nooijt in
 —
 banden of boeijen geweest te sijn
 Den Raad Largeert den gev: uijt
 sijne detentie mits betalende de costen

As clearly shown above, data cleaning necessitates human oversight, as the intricacies and nuances involved are beyond the current capabilities of the current state of the automated systems. Despite ongoing research and advancements in technology, no fully automated solution has been developed that can match the precision and judgment that human supervision provides in data cleaning.

4.3. *Label Entities*

Similar to the data cleaning process, the annotation process relies heavily on human supervision. The *Criminele Rollen* contains information on persons, legal status, crimes, and punishments. To maximise this information for penal history research purposes, we focused on four key entities: person, legal status, crime, and punishment.

4.3.1 Person

The label “person” encompasses any individual’s name that appears in the corpus. In this chapter, we annotated both European and Asian names. According to the writing system of the document, the convict’s name is always mentioned at the beginning of the record, followed by their legal status or occupation. The name then keeps being mentioned in the following passage, regardless of the legal status. This is dissimilar from the other archival genres, which put more importance on legal status rather than the name of an enslaved person. For example, according to Luthra et al.’s study, the enslaved person’s name is ‘hidden’ in the VOC testaments. The names are changed to simply ‘the slave’ as they were regarded as properties.²⁶ Such practice is not apparent in the *Criminele Rollen*.

It is important to note that the names of slaves were often recorded using names given to them by their slave owners, not the names they were born with. These given names, usually of European origin, were assigned because the slave owners found the slaves’ birth names difficult to pronounce. Thus, enslaved individuals were often recorded with names like Aurora, April, or Augustus. This practice highlights the erasure of their original identities in colonial records. Following the Dutch naming convention, the names of slaves were followed by their place of origin. Thus, typical slave names found in the *Criminele Rollen* include examples such as Aurora van Bugis, April van Malabar, and Augustus van Bali. In this study, we annotated both the name and the geographic surname together. Therefore, ‘Augustus van Bali’ is annotated as a single label entity, rather than just ‘Augustus.’ European names are annotated in a similar manner.

4.3.2. Legal status

The legal status is a crucial piece of information recorded in colonial archives. It helps to identify differences in the severity of punishments based on one’s legal status. For example, it allows us to determine if slaves were more prone to harsh punishments compared to free citizens. However, the legal status of a convict is not always mentioned in the *Criminele Rollen*. If the convict is an enslaved person, the term ‘*slaaf*’ or ‘*slavin*’ always follows. When the legal status is deemed unimportant, for example if a convict is a free person, the *Criminele Rollen* mentions the convict’s occupation instead. Additionally, terms like ‘*gevangen*’ (prisoner) and ‘*vrij*’ (free person) are considered legal statuses and are labelled accordingly in this study. An example from the corpus includes ‘*vrij javaan*’ or ‘*vrij balijers*,’ meaning free Javanese or free Balinese, respectively. It is important to note, as Bosma and Raben explain, that the term ‘free’ typically implied that an individual had previously

²⁶ Ibid.

been enslaved. In other words, being ‘free’ signified that the person was a manumitted slave.

4.3.3. *Crime*

The crime is always mentioned in the *Criminele Rollen*. In early modern Batavia, the judges followed Roman-Dutch law, which manifested in the Statutes of Batavia. The Statutes loosely listed a range of offences that were considered serious enough to warrant the death penalty. These included murder, treason, piracy, theft (especially repeated or aggravated theft), adultery, and certain acts of rebellion or insubordination against the VOC authorities. This particular label entity is straightforward in its writing and typically consists of a single word such as ‘*moord*’ (murder) or ‘*dieverij*’ (theft).

4.3.4. *Punishment*

The punishment is mentioned in the *Criminele Rollen*. The format of the word rarely changes. However, it is usually written in a long phrase which makes it difficult to label. An example of a punishment verdict in the training corpus is as follows:

alle de gevangens gebragt tewerden, ter plaatse alwaar meen gewoon is Crimineele sententien te Executeeren, en aldaar den Scherpregerter overgelevert sijnde den gevangen mantaja met een ijsere pen van onderen Levendig gespit., op een paal geset, en alsoo ter dood gebragt, mitsgaders door de dienaars van de Iustitie so lange bewaert tewerden, tot dat sal sijn gestorven, wijders de gevangens Dormda eerst de regter hand afgehaept, en vervolgens aan een paal getrugt tewerden dather de dood naavoegt Item den gev: Tjinan agterwaarts op een kruijs gebonden en van onderen op levendig gelede braakt tewerden, sonder slagen van gratie, mitsgaders in dien staat naahet buijten geregt gebragt aldaar onder opsigt en bewaringe der dienaren van de Iustitie op een rad geset, en na dat gestorven sal sijn niet en benevens deverdere geexecuteerde lichamen de vogelen des hemels ten sorcoije gelaten tewerden,

The text above discusses various aspects of punishment. There are several overlapping parts. For example, ‘*alle de gevangens gebragt tewerden, ter plaatse alwaar meen gewoon is Crimineele sententien te Executeeren*’ describes the initial court decision to bring all convicts to the execution field.²⁷ Not all convicts received the same method of execution. For instance, in this text, capital punishment ranged

²⁷ The Dutch text can be freely translated as ‘[the council condemns] all prisoners to be brought to the place where it is customary to execute criminal sentences’.

from skewering, body mutilation, and breaking on a cross. The text for each verdict also contains multiple information about the punishment.

The first execution method is recorded as follows: *'en aldaar den Scherpregher overgelevert sijnde den gevangen Mantaja met een ijsere pen van onderen Levendig gespit., op een paal geset, en alsoo ter dood gebracht'*. It details the specific punishment for a convict named Mantaja. Mantaja was sentenced to be skewered from underneath with an iron quill, then set on a stake and brought to death. Labelling these entities can be complex. First, the entire initial part is labelled as 'PUNISHMENT.' Then, the phrase *'met een ijsere pen van onderen Levendig gespit'* is also labelled as 'PUNISHMENT.' Similarly, *'op een paal geset'* receives a 'PUNISHMENT' label, and *'ter dood gebracht'* is labelled as another 'PUNISHMENT.' Therefore, for the first convict we have three 'PUNISHMENT' labels.

The second convict, named Dormda, received different execution methods as described in this sentence: *'wijders de gevangens Dormda eerst de regter hand afgehapt, en vervolgens aan een paal getrurgt tewerden dather de dood naavoegt'*. Firstly Dormda's right hand was cut off, indicated by the phrase *'eerst de regter hand afgehapt'*, which we label as 'PUNISHMENT'. Then the executioner had the bleeding Dormda to be hung on a stake until dead, described by the phrase *'aan een paal getrurgt tewerden dather de dood naavoegt'*, and we label it as 'PUNISHMENT'.

The third convict, named Tjinan, received the following verdict: *'agterwaarts op een kruijs gebonden en van onderen op levendig gelede braakt tewerden, sonder slagen van gratie, mitsgaders in dien staat naahet bujten geregt gebracht aldaar onder opsigt en bewaringe der dienaren van de Iustitie op een rad geset'*. Tjinan was broken on a cross as indicated by, *'agterwaarts op een kruijs gebonden en van onderen op levendig gelede braakt tewerden'*, which we label as 'PUNISHMENT'. The phrase *'sonder slagen van gratie'*, that comes right after it, is also crucial as it refers to the method of execution. In breaking on a cross or wheel, there was a distinction between performing it with mercy and without mercy. *'Sonder slagen van gratie'* means without a mercy blow, indicating that the convict would be struck from below, starting from the legs and moving upwards, prolonging their pain. In the merciful version, the executioner would deliver a blow to the convict's head, causing death before the breaking of limbs. This is also labelled as 'PUNISHMENT'. The post-mortem punishment comes after that with the following text, *'naahet bujten geregt gebracht aldaar onder opsigt en bewaringe der dienaren van de Iustitie op een rad geset'*. The information in this part of the text contains the information telling us that the bodies of the three convicts were brought to outside of the castle and displayed. However, due to the text's length, only *'naahet bujten geregt gebracht'* is labelled as 'PUNISHMENT' to avoid complicating the machine learning process.

4.3.5. Additional label entities

In addition to these four label entities, we included organisation or ‘ORG’ and ‘HONORIFIC’ as label entities for further exploration using custom pipes. For example, honorifics such as ‘Mr.’ or ‘De Heer’ always precede the names of high-ranking VOC officials. In contrast, marginalised individuals, such as slaves or low-ranking soldiers who constitute the majority of convicts, do not have honorifics before their names. The ‘ORG’ label is used for entities like the Council of Justice (*Raad van Justitie*) and the VOC. These additional entities are beneficial in custom pipe settings; for instance, if a person’s name is preceded by an honorific, it can predict that the individual is a high official. Conversely, if the name is not preceded by an honorific, it is likely the name of a marginalised person. These two labels, however, are not the highlight of this study.

4.4. Data annotation

The corpora are annotated manually using Doccano based on the aforementioned label entities.²⁸ After annotation, the corpora are exported as a JSONL file. This JSONL file is then used to train and test the machine. The annotation dataset in the JSONL file is crucial as it serves as the foundation for the machine’s training and testing processes.

Den 12, Decemb, r 1733.
•DATE

D' heer Mij Jsaac van schinne advocaet discael van india rat: off Eijss=r Contra Carel van
•PERSON •OCCUPATION •LOCATION •PERSON

batavia slaev van den gerepatrieerden oudontfanger generael loachim quilbaut. 's heeren
•LEGAL-STATUS •OCCUPATION •PERSON
•LOCATION

gevangen over attentae van moord ontrent desselvs lijfheer.
•LEGAL-STATUS •CRIME

Figure 9.5. Annotation for Person, Legal Status, and Crime using Doccano.

As shown in Figure 9.5, the text contains errors because the corpora were produced using HTR technology. Due to the inaccuracies of HTR, some of the annotated words are slightly incorrect, as shown in Table 9.1:

²⁸ Nakayama et al., ‘Doccano’.

Table 9.1. Inaccuracies of the HTR-based transcription and the corrected labels

Words	Label	Correct Transcription
12,,’ Decemb,,r 1733	Date	12 December 1733
Isaac van schinne	Person	
Advocaet discael	Occupation	Advocaet Fiscael
India	Location	
Carel van Batavia	Person	
Batavia	Location	
Slaev	Legal-status	
Oudontfanger generael	Occupation	
Ioachim quilbaut	Person	
Gevangen	Legal-status	
Moord	Crime	

The corpora are annotated manually using Doccano based on the aforementioned label entities.²⁹ The annotated corpora are then exported as a JSONL file.

4.4.1. Model

This project utilised spaCy to process the corpus into a Recognised Entity or object. SpaCy is one of the libraries that has been developed in Python. It is an open-source Python library for NLP written in Python and Cython, and it offers pre-trained models for multi-language NER, including Dutch, as well as allowing training and deploying custom NER models on domain-specific corpora.³⁰

In this process, we trained several language-dependent NER models with distinctive configurations by using a) non-transformer spaCy small Dutch datasets and large Dutch datasets and b) the transformer model from SpaCy. All experiments were conducted through the command line interface using spaCy’s train, evaluate and other commands. All models were trained on CPU and GPU using the Kaggle environment, and we trained 3 Dutch NER pre-trained models by spaCy with Doccano annotations. The training of the benchmark model was tried in Kaggle. The experiments started with the default model, which also serves as the baseline. We built the default configuration file in two steps: obtaining the base_config.cfg from spaCy’s website as suggested and initialising the base configuration using the init command. The models used in this study are ‘nl_core_news_sm’,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Honnibal et al., ‘SpaCy’.

nl_core_news_md', and 'nl_core_news_lg'. For non-transformers, we are using 'GroNLP/bert-base-dutch-cased'.³¹ After that, we visualise our model using displaCy. DisplaCy is a built-in dependency visualiser that lets us check the model's predictions in a browser.³²

5. Results

5.1. Training

In the training phase, we process JSON data that can read the custom label, such as 'HONORIFIC', 'ORG', 'LEGAL-STATUS', 'DATE', 'LAW', 'DURATION', 'OCCUPATION', 'PUNISHMENT', 'LOCATION', 'PERSON', 'CRIME'. This is necessary before it can be further processed in spaCy. All data files were converted into spaCy's binary data format, a serialised DocBin before being used with the training command and other experiment management functions. The conversion was done using spaCy's convert command through the command line interface and saved into spaCy's DocBin file extension for testing method. In order to incorporate the DocBin during training, we use this command:

```
%%sh
python -m spacy train config.cfg --output ./ --paths.train ./training_data.spacy --paths.dev ./
training_data.spacy
```

This command initiates the training process using the configuration specified in the 'config.cfg' file. The output of this command consists of model files that include the words and labels provided earlier. These trained models will then be compared with unlabelled testing data in .txt file format during the testing phase. Additionally, it is important to note that during the training and testing phases, we will use two different .txt examples that have predefined labels. This allows us to evaluate the model's performance comprehensively, ensuring that it can accurately identify and label data across different datasets. An example of training text contains the following passage:

Den 8:e Iulij 1730. W: m: Isaac Van Schinne advocaat fiscaal van india rat: aff: Eijsscher Contra Jan Samuel Gunter van Sabelits in saven borger en Orenfried Ran uijt Lwickauw in Sapen Corporael ten dienste der E Comp.s en Laast bescheijden geweest aan de nieuwoport

³¹ Vries et al., 'BERTje: A Dutch BERT Model'.

³² <https://demos.explosion.ai/displacy>

deser stad 'sheeren gev:e beijde over morshandel in scomp:s specerijen Den Raad als nu disponeerende op des heer Eijss.rs Eijsch admortem in dato 10 meij Laastleden opende Iegens de gev: gedaen ende genomen Doende Regt, condemneert de gev:e beijde gebragt tewerden ter plaatse, alwaar men gewoon is Crimineele Sententien te Executeeren, en aldaar den Scherpregtter overgelevert sijnde, den eersten gevangen met de roorde om den hals aande galge gestraft te werden, datt er de dood naavolgt, en den tweeden gev: aan een paal gebonden en strengelijk met roeden gegeeffelt tewerden, band voorts hem gev: voor al sijn leven uijt alle steden Corten en plaatsen onder de Iuristictie van dâ€™™ EComp: gehoorende sonder ooijt daar weder in te mogen komen op paue vanswaarder die Straffe Confisqueert voorts de helfte van alle de goederen en gelden vanden eersten gev: om deselve auso verdeelt te werden ontsegt den heer Eijss.r sijnen verderen Eijsch en condemneert de gev: daar en boven in de costen en misen van Justitie Aldus gearresteert n gesententieert op donderdag den 25: meij 1730. bij den Edelen heere m:r Hendrik van Baarle Raad Extraordinaris van nederlands india en president, Item de heeren m:r Jsaak massis m:r gerardus gerlag, m:r gualter schutten, ne Jacob van den 6osch m:r Ian Blaankamer m:r Petrus Reijniers Thoren, m:r Cornelis van gaasbeecq, m:r Ian Andolph Sappius, en m:r Jacob Lakeman raden van Justitie, mitsg: gepromuntieert ende geExecuteert ten dage ende ter presentie als in den hoofde deses.

Furthermore, the training phase includes visualising the predicted entity labels using spaCy. Visualising the results helps in understanding how well the model is performing and in identifying areas where improvements might be needed. By employing spaCy's visualisation tools, such as displacy, we can create clear and intuitive visual representations of the labelled entities within the text. These visualisations provide insights into the accuracy and effectiveness of the model, making it easier to interpret the outcomes and refine the model accordingly.

As shown in Figure 9.6, the training process was conducted over multiple iterations, with key metrics recorded at various checkpoints. These metrics include Loss for 'tok2vec' and 'ner' components, as well as Entity F-score (ENTS_F), Precision (ENTS_P), Recall (ENTS_R), and overall Score. Initially, the model started with a high loss in both 'tok2vec' and 'ner', and an ENTS_F score of 0.00. This is typical at the beginning of the training process. However, the model showed significant improvement as training progressed, with losses dropping considerably and the ENTS_F score reaching as high as 99.87. This improvement indicates the model's increasing proficiency in identifying and labelling entities correctly.

Throughout the training, the model maintained high accuracy, with ENTS_F scores consistently close to 100. Although the final iterations showed some fluctuations in loss, the model overall maintained high precision and recall. The evaluation rate ultimately reached a peak of 1.00, demonstrating the model's robust performance. The learning score has reached a functional level, indicating that

```

[2023-07-16 18:39:43,147] [INFO] Set up nlp object from config
[2023-07-16 18:39:43,180] [INFO] Pipeline: ['tok2vec', 'ner']
[2023-07-16 18:39:43,185] [INFO] Created vocabulary
[2023-07-16 18:39:46,616] [INFO] Added vectors: nl_core_news_lg
[2023-07-16 18:39:46,616] [INFO] Finished initializing nlp object
[2023-07-16 18:39:49,069] [INFO] Initialized pipeline components: ['tok2vec', 'ner']
! Saving to output directory: .
! Using GPU

===== Initializing pipeline =====
✓ Initialized pipeline

===== Training pipeline =====
! Pipeline: ['tok2vec', 'ner']
! Initial learn rate: 0.200
-----
#      LOSS TOK2VEC  LOSS NER  F1TS_L  F1TS_P  F1TS_R  SCORE
-----
0      0            0.00      135.13  0.00    0.00    0.00    0.00
1J     2000        732.5J    586.5J  97.6J   97.38   97.89   0.98
26     4000        64.8J     490.81  99.4J   99.73   99.21   0.99
40     6000        55.65     239.55  99.4J   99.47   99.47   0.99
53     8000        34.57     121.13  99.60   99.47   99.74   1.00
66     10000       71.52     157.90  98.95   98.60   99.21   0.99
80     12000       106.03    181.50  99.87   99.74   100.00   1.00
93     14000       77.76     124.19  99.74   99.74   99.74   1.00
106    16000       92.10     131.67  99.87   100.00   99.74   1.00
120    18000       31.9J     57.0J   99.4J   99.4J   99.4J   0.99
13J    20000       190.5J    203.8J  99.8J   100.00   99.74   1.00
146    22000       76.21     79.16   99.60   99.47   99.74   1.00
160    24000       275.58    213.53  99.60   99.74   99.47   1.00
173    26000       134.56    123.30  99.60   99.47   99.74   1.00
186    28000       550.58    256.99  98.95   98.60   99.21   0.99
-----
✓ Saved pipeline to output directory
model-last

```

Figure 9.6. Evaluation Rate of the Training for spaCy `nl_core_news_lg` Model.

the model is performing well. With the training completed and the results deemed satisfactory, the model is now ready for testing and further validation. Future steps should focus on addressing any remaining issues with custom entity recognition and expanding the training dataset to ensure the model's continued accuracy and effectiveness.

5.2. Testing

A combined passage from bundle 9298 pages is used for the testing text. In this testing phase, we are using custom labels prepared in the previous stage, which are: 'LEGAL STATUS', 'OCCUPATION', 'PERSON', 'CRIME', and 'PUNISHMENT' alongside pre-defined labels from the model and additional custom labels, such as 'HONORIFIC,' 'ORG,' 'DATE,' and 'CARDINAL.' The testing process utilises the 'nl_core_news_lg' model, which is processed using Python in the Kaggle environment. The testing text includes the following passage:

Idem Heer Eijscher contra Martha Bintang van amboina wed:e van den inlands burger Matthijs Lawalatoe. 'sheeren gevange over attentaat van moord ent willen helpen ver-geven van den gerepatrieerden oud ontfanger generael Ioachim quilbant.

Den raad desheer Eijsschers Eijsch ende stucken daer nevens over geleght, met aendaght gelesen en voorts op alles wel geleth hebbende, doende recht uijt de naem ende van

wegens de hoogmogende heeren staten generael der vereenigde nederlanden con-
demneert de gevange gebragt te werden ter plaetse, alwaer men gewoon is crimineele
sententie te Executeeren en aldaer aen den scherprepter overgelevert zijnde agterwaerts
op een kruijs gebonden, en van onderen op levendig gerabraekt tewerden voorts haar
hoofd met een bijl afgekapt, op een pen geset en zoo lange ten toon gestelt te werden tot dat
de justitie omtrent alle de andere gevangens sal wesen g'Executeert om als dan het voors:
hoofd, benevens desselvs lichaem beneden het schavot met den puure verbrand te werden,
ontsegt den heer Eijsscher sijnen anders genoomen Eijsch en condemneert de gevange
daar en boven in de costen en uusen van justitie.

Aldus gearresteert ende gesententeert op dingsdag den 29,, november 1733./ bij den Edelen
heer m,,r Cornelis van gaesbeeck tot thienhoven president / item de heeren m=r gerardus
Gerlag m,,r Ioan Blaaukamer, m,,r Ioan rudolph Sappius, m,,r Jacob Lakeman, m,,r Bernard
Iacob Dellafaille, m,,r Willem Vincent Helvetius/ george Fredrik Haderman, en Andries
Herfort/ raeden van justitie mitsgaders gepronuntieert en geExecuteert ten daege ende ter
presentie als in den hoofde deses.

Heden den 12,,e Decemb,,r 1733./ is voor het aen gaen van de Executie op de propositie van
den heere president goet gevonden de assche van het lichaem van de gev: marthabientang
naa dat het sal wesen verbrand naa dat het sal wesen verbrand naa het buijten geregt
gebragt en aldaar onder de galgsgraeven tewerden

Once the testing text is inputted into the trained model, Displacy is used to render the result. The rendered result is as follows:

Idem Heer Eijsscher contra Martha Bintang PERSON van amboina wed:e HONORIFIC van den inlands burger Matthijs Lawlatoe PERSON , 'sheeren gevange PUNISHMENT over attentaat FAC van moord CRIME ent willen helpen vergeven van den gerespatrleerden oud ontfanger generael OCCUPATION loachim quilbant PERSON .

Den raad ORG desheer Eijsschers Eijsch LAW ende stucken daer nevens over geleg, met aendagt gelesen en voorts op alles wel geleth hebbende, doende recht uijt de naem ende van wegens de hoogmogende heeren staten generael ORG der vereenigde nederlanden GPE condeemneert LAW de gevange gebragt te werden ter plaetse, alwaer men gewoon is crimineele sententie te Executeeren en aldaer aen den scherprepter OCCUPATION overgelevert PERSON zijnde agterwaerts op een kruijs gebonden PUNISHMENT , en van onderen op levendig gerabraekt tewerden voorts haar hoofd met een bijl afgekapt PUNISHMENT , op een pen geset en zoo lange ten toon gestelt te werden tot dat de justitie omtrent alle de andere gevangens LEGAL-STATUS sal wesen EVENT g'Executeert HONORIFIC om als dan het voors: hoofd, benevens desselvs PERSON lichaem beneden het schavot met den puure verbrand te werden, ontsegt den heer PUNISHMENT Eijsscher sijnen anders genoomen Eijsch LAW en condeemneert de gevange daar en boven in de costen en uusen van justitie.

Aldus gearresteert ende gesententeert ORG op dingsdag den 29,, november DATE 1733./ CARDINAL bij den Edelen heer m,,r HONORIFIC Cornelis van gaesbeeck PERSON tot thienhoven president / item de heeren m=r HONORIFIC gerardus Gerlag m,,r HONORIFIC Ioan Blaaukamer PERSON , m,,r HONORIFIC Ioan rudolph Sappius PERSON , m,,r HONORIFIC Jacob Lakeman PERSON , m,,r HONORIFIC Bernard Iacob Dellafaille PERSON , m,,r HONORIFIC Willem Vincent Helvetius/ george PERSON Fredrik Haderman PERSON , en Andries Herfort/ PERSON raeden van justitie ORG mitsgaders gepronuntieert PERSON en geExecuteert ORG ten daege ende ter presentie als in den hoofde deses.

Heden den 12,,e Decemb,,r DATE 1733./ CARDINAL is voor het aen gaen van de Executie op de propositie van den heere PERSON president goet gevonden de assche LOC van het lichaem van de gev: LEGAL-STATUS marthabientang naa dat het sal wesen verbrand naa dat het sal wesen PUNISHMENT verbrand naa het buijten geregt gebragt PUNISHMENT en aldaar onder de galgsgraeven tewerden

Figure 9.7. The Rendered Result Using Displacy.

The result is satisfactory, with a few inaccuracies. For example, the word ‘overgelevert’ is labelled as PERSON, ‘g’Executeert’ as HONORIFIC, and ‘Aldus gearresteert ende gesentiert’ as ORG. We believe that a larger dataset can lead to more precise outcomes. The evaluation for this attempt is not included in this chapter due to the limited resources. However, the dataset and codebase for this experiment are publicly available on Kaggle.³³ The accuracy of the result can be seen in the following table:

Table 9.2. The accuracy of the NER results

Word	Automated Label	Accuracy	Correct Label
Martha Bintang	PERSON	Correct	
Wed:e	HONORIFIC	Correct	
Matthijs Lawalatoe	PERSON	Correct	
Gevange	PUNISHMENT	Correct	
Attentaat	FAC	Correct	
Moord	CRIME	Correct	
Ontfanger generael	OCCUPATION	Correct	
Ioachim Quilbant	PERSON	Correct	
Den Raad	ORG	Correct	
Eijsch	LAW	Correct	
Staten generael	ORG	Correct	
Verenigde Nederlanden	GPE	Correct	
Condemneert	LAW	Correct	
Scherpregter	OCCUPATION	Correct	
Overgelevert	PERSON	Incorrect	PUNISHMENT
Op een kruijs gebonden	PUNISHMENT	Correct	
Hoof met een bijl afgekapt	PUNISHMENT	Correct	
gevangen	LEGAL-STATUS	Correct	
Sal wesen	EVENT	Correct	
G’Executeert	HONORIFIC	Incorrect	LAW
Desselvs	PERSON	Correct	

³³ Asyrafi and Mahendra, ‘NER Dataset for VOC Archives Criminele Rollen’.

Word	Automated Label	Accuracy	Correct Label
Beneden het schavot met den puure verbrand te werden, ontsegt den heer	PUNISHMENT	Correct	
Eijsch	LAW	Correct	
Aldus gearresteert ende gesentieert	ORG	Incorrect	LAW
29 november	DATE	Correct	
1733	CARDINAL	Incorrect	DATE
M,,r	HONORIFIC	Correct	
Cornelis van geasbeecq	PERSON	Correct	
M=r	HONORIFIC	Correct	
M,,r	HONORIFIC	Correct	
Ioan Blaaukamer	PERSON	Correct	
M,,r	HONORIFIC	Correct	
Ioan Rudolph Sappius	PERSON	Correct	
M,,r	HONORIFIC	Correct	
Jacob Lakeman	PERSON	Correct	
M,,r	HONORIFIC	Correct	
Bernard Iacob Dellafaille	PERSON	Correct	
M,,r	HONORIFIC	Correct	
Willem Vincent Helvetius george	PERSON	Correct	
Fredrik Haderman	PERSON	Correct	
Andries Herfort/	PERSON	Correct	
Raeden van Justitie	ORG	Correct	
Gepronuntieert	PERSON	Incorrect	Not labelled
geExecuteert	ORG	Correct	
12,,e Decemb,,r	DATE	Correct	
1733	CARDINAL	Correct	
Den heere	PERSON	Correct	
Assche	LOC	Correct	
Gev:	LEGAL STATUS	Correct	

Word	Automated Label	Accuracy	Correct Label
Naa dat het sal wesen	PUNISHMENT	Correct	
Naa het buijten geregt gebragt	PUNISHMENT	Correct	

The model also missed some words that are supposed to be labelled. Based on the testing, the model has some difficulties recognising the custom entity 'PUNISHMENT'. We suspect this is due to the length of the text describing the punishments. Additionally, the model missed the 'LOCATION' entity '*Amboina*,' which is a standard spaCy label. This is likely because '*Amboina*' is an old spelling for what is now known as Ambon. The name '*marthabientang*' was also not recognised as a 'PERSON,' most likely due to a spelling error caused by HTR inaccuracy. Table 9.3 illustrates these issues:

Table 9.3. Unlabelled entities with their correct labels

Unlabelled Words	Correct Label
Amboina	LOCATION
Inlands Burger	LEGAL-STATUS
Gebragt te werden ter plaetse alwaer men gewoon is crimineele sententie te Executeeren	PUNISHMENT
Van onderen op levendig gerebraekt tewerden	PUNISHMENT
Op een pen geset en zoo lange ten toon gestelt te werden	PUNISHMENT
Marthabientang	PERSON

6. Conclusion

This study offers an innovative approach to reading and processing historical sources, specifically focusing on extracting historical data from early modern court records using supervised Named Entity Recognition (NER). Focusing on the *Criminele Rollen* from VOC-era Batavia, we demonstrated how NER, when carefully adapted, can yield meaningful structured data from unstructured colonial sources. Despite the specificity of our focus – capital punishment for enslaved persons in Batavia – the methodology developed here holds broader relevance. In doing so, this study offers both a) key insights into the challenges of historical data extraction and b) concrete recommendations for improving future digital humanities research.

One key insight from our research is that existing Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) technology, such as the Transkribus HTR+ model used by the IJsberg project,

is not yet sufficient for immediate NER application. The structured yet inconsistent nature of *Criminele Rollen* entries – along with issues such as multilingual text, column formatting, and HTR errors – necessitates manual correction and supervision. While *Criminele Rollen* documents follow specific recording rules, any deviations can lead to disorganised HTR results, which hinder the effectiveness of the NER processes. The challenge we faced, in particular, was the extraction of the ‘PUNISHMENT’ label, which often appears in long and ambiguous forms. For example, the training corpus includes sentences describing multiple punishments, such as ‘...en van onderen op levendig geraebraekt tewerden voorts haar hooft met een bijl afgekapt,’ which translates to ‘...and from below, the living body is broken on the wheel before the head is beheaded with an axe.’ The machine struggles to label the correct length of the punishment phrase. In addition to that, it is hard for the machine to determine whether breaking on the wheel and beheading with an axe are one or two punishments in this verdict. This example illustrates the complexity of distinguishing between capital punishment and post-mortem punishment within a single phrase.

Despite facing several challenges, our research shows that a tailored NER pipeline for early modern Dutch texts is feasible and yields promising results. These challenges can be broadly divided into two categories: a) general challenges common to HTR-based corpora, such as multilingual text, irregular column formatting, and transcription errors, and b) task-specific challenges unique to this study, particularly the extraction of complex entity labels like ‘PUNISHMENT,’ which often appear in long, ambiguous sequences. This study successfully visualised the annotated data and tested our model using spaCy and Displacy, even if challenges remain in evaluating custom label performance due to gaps in spaCy’s documentation. These limitations point to the need for larger and more diverse training datasets, improved HTR outputs, and further experimentation with other NLP libraries that may offer better customisability.

More broadly, this project demonstrates how digital humanities tools can be used not only for technical exploration but also to recover voices long silenced in colonial archives. The structured extraction of personal names, legal statuses, and punishments allows researchers to trace patterns of marginalisation and legal violence embedded in bureaucratic language. While our case focuses on Batavia, the workflow is applicable to similarly structured archives elsewhere – be it in Southeast Asia, Africa, or the Americas – offering a reusable model for scholars working with early modern or colonial records. Future research should continue expanding the training corpus, improving model generalisation, and developing better tools for evaluating custom entity recognition. Interdisciplinary collaboration between historians, linguists, and data scientists will be essential for unlocking the full potential of machine learning in historical research.

Shifting the Tide: Data, Findings and Future of the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia Database

Pascal Konings, Merve Tosun, and Matthias van Rossum¹

Abstract

The chapter discusses information that can be obtained by an analysis of materials from a database. The authors share their experience in processing huge amounts of data about slave trade in the Indian Ocean World, in a wide geographical sense. As they explain, the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia (ESTA) project aims to remedy the discrepancy between the wealth of existing data and sources that document slave trade in the region, and the lack of resources to make detailed interregional and comparative quantitative analyses. The principles for the database are presented, and the possibilities are demonstrated by examples from places like Malabar, Lampung, and Bali where figures from European trading companies, in the first hand the VOC, highlight the structures of the slave trade.

Keywords: ESTA, Asia, Indian Ocean World, database, trading companies

1. Introduction

Decades of collaborative research efforts to extract archival data culminated in the launch of the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, which ushered in a new era of slave trade research. Documenting the details of the coerced transportation of more than 12 million enslaved Africans (2024 estimate) across the Atlantic, the database allowed unprecedented public access to information on slave trade voyages and has become a core reference for anyone studying the Transatlantic slave trade. This led to more detailed reconstructions of this trade and its patterns, as well as insights into the various agents in this trade since the recent launch of the

¹ We are also heavily indebted to everyone who contributed by providing data and intellectual input in various stages of this project. Most notably, we would like to thank in that respect: Samantha Sint Nicolaas, Ulbe Bosma, Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, Mike de Windt, Rafaël Thiebaut, Jane Hooper, Wil O. Dijk, Gerrit Knaap, Heather Sutherland, Menno Leenstra, Claude Chevaleyre, Hans Hägerdal, Stephan Conermann, Richard Zijdeman, Maartje Hids, Sam Miske, Hannah de Korte, Giacomo Mastrogregori and Aleksandra Modelina.

Enslaved and *Enslavers* databases. Yet, for Asia and the wider Indian Ocean world, slave trade is still understudied, even though we will see that recent estimates seem to confirm notions that human trafficking in the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia was likely as extensive as, if not more so than, the Atlantic slave trade.²

Scholars have increasingly noted that slavery and slave trade were widespread across maritime Asia from the 16th well into the 19th century.³ Re-evaluations of existing data and understudied sources have led to a surge in new insights into the mechanics of slave trade in regions, but these have focused especially on the Western Indian Ocean, and, to a lesser extent, on different parts of South and Southeast Asia.⁴ Some of these studies have also produced new data, especially on the structural European involvement in an extensive system of intra-Asian slave trade.⁵ However, the invaluable data that recent studies present remain geographically, periodically, and thematically fragmented.⁶

The uneven state of the field has limited the ability to properly analyse cross-regional structures, patterns, and connections, and make global comparisons and analyses. This is an especially pressing issue for the study of slave trade, which operated within a global network of interconnected structures of forced labour and relocation. Evidently, an important step towards integrating the field of Asian (and by extension global) slave trade studies is to set up an infrastructure to collect, connect and curate existing and new data. These quantifiable figures and reconstructions are paramount to coming closer to a more comprehensive and detailed insight in the size, structure, and patterns of slave trade in Asia beyond rough estimates.

Most of the current data collections draw on European (company) archives, which still hold a great wealth of detailed and yet understudied sources documenting the slave trade in Asia. These range from systematic demographic documentations of enslaved populations to daily logs of ship movements and cargoes to notarial deeds recording (re)sales including involved agents and sale

² See among others: Allen, 'Satisfying the 'Want for Labouring People'', pp. 45–73; Knaap, 'Slavery and the Dutch in Southeast Asia', pp. 193–206; Welie, 'Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire', pp. 45–94.

³ Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', pp. 131–177; Stanziani, *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia*; Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*; Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*; Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*.

⁴ See among others: Hooper and Eltis, 'The Indian Ocean in Transatlantic Slavery', pp. 353–375; Harries, 'Middle Passages of the Southwest Indian Ocean', pp. 173–190; Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*; Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*; Subrahmanyam, 'Between Eastern Africa and Western India', pp. 805–834.

⁵ For numbers on French slave trade in the Western Indian Ocean, see Thiébaud, 'French Slave Trade on Madagascar', pp. 34–65. For numbers on price developments, see Rossum, 'Towards a global perspective on early modern slave trade', pp. 42–68.

⁶ Chakraborty and Van Rossum, 'Slave Trade and Slavery in Asia – New Perspectives', pp. 1–14.

prices. With the possibilities that digital tools and techniques increasingly provide to extract relevant data from these rich sources, it becomes all the more urgent to locate and dive into these sources. Not only European, but also non-European local archives still hold much of the yet untold histories of slavery and slave trade in the region.

The *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* (ESTA) project aims to redress this discrepancy between the wealth of available data and sources describing the historical slave trade in this region and the lack of resources to perform detailed interregional and comparative quantitative analyses with.⁷ The project is hosted by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and consists of a data project and an international network of scholars that study slavery and slave trade in Asia. In this chapter, we would like to present some initial data analyses resulting from the first phase of the database project after a short account of several challenges and choices that have led the project to this point.⁸ Even though the following data survey is only a starting point for further research, we can already identify slave trading routes, mechanisms of private and Company slave trading, patterns of gender and age distribution, and fluctuations therein emerging from the current data corpus. In this way, the analyses also provide an urgent case for collecting and integrating more data into the Database.

⁷ The ESTA project was developed through collaborative efforts of colleagues of the International Institute of Social History (IISH, KNAW), ENS Lyon (Claude Chevalere), Linnaeus University (Hans Hägerdal), and the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies; further shaping the project, workshops were organised in Amsterdam, Kalmar, and Lyon between 2016 and 2019. At the IISH, those involved include Samantha Sint Nicolaas (coordinator 2019–2020), Merve Tosun (coordinator 2020–current), Ulbe Bosma (applicant ESTA grant Dutch Science Foundation NWO), Matthias van Rossum (co-applicant), Filipa Ribeiro da Silva (co-applicant), and Richard Zijdeman (co-applicant). Notable contributors of data and datasets on slave trade include Wil O. Dijk, Jane Hooper, Gerrit Knaap, Menno Leenstra and Robert Parthesius, Ronald van der Spiegel, and Rafaël Thiébaud, to whom we are most grateful. Between 2017 and 2020, data was further collected through several projects at the IISH by Alexander Geelen, Bram van der Hout, Matthias van Rossum, Merve Tosun, and Mike de Windt. In 2021, four student assistants (Maartje Hids, Pascal Konings, Hannah de Korte, and Sam J. Miske) were employed for the first large-scale data effort; resulting, too, in the aforementioned article ‘Exploring Slave Trade in Asia: First Steps towards an International Database’. In 2022, two internship projects by Alexander van Dijkman and Giacomo Masrogregori followed, as well as Pascal Konings’ work as junior researcher (2022–current) and coordinator (2024–current). More collaborative, international data entry and curation is expected in the (near) future; for more information, see <https://esta.iisg.nl>.

⁸ Sint Nicolaas, ‘Towards an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slave Trade Database’; Hids et al., ‘Exploring Slave Trade in Asia’, pp. 153–172.

A collaborative effort

The ESTA Database was initiated within an international network of slavery scholars with the goal of providing the field with quantifiable data for new research. The project aims to collect, connect, and curate existing data on slave trade around the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia, and explore the still obscured information contained in various archives to add to the data corpus.⁹

The first phase of the project was dedicated to data collection and the development of a database structure that addressed both i) the diversity of source materials and the types of information they provide, and ii) the complexities of slave trade voyages undertaken throughout the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ Forced transportations of people across the Indian Ocean and Asia transpired in a variety of (often interconnected) contexts, ranging from commodified and legalised slave trade to 'illegal' (private) human trafficking, and tributary exchanges between polities to penal slavery. In order to understand the interactions between different manifestations of slave trade and their connections to other forms of bondage and coercion, it is important to record these distinct but connected forms of slave trade in as much detail as possible. This is paramount to getting a better grasp on the structures of slave trade in this region.¹¹

An additional challenge to creating a data model was brought forth by the multidirectional and interconnected character of forced relocations in early modern Asia. Even though the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* serves as an important example, its structure would severely limit the reconstruction and analysis of the complex and multidirectional slave trading voyages around the Indian Ocean. The relational ESTA Database has therefore developed an advanced model that centres around the 'subvoyage' as the main unit of analysis to allow for a detailed record of each singular journey from one location to the next. These individual journeys are then linked together with a specification of their relation to each other to form an overarching voyage. Conversely, we define the voyage as a chain of interlinked subvoyages. This allows for recording (sub)voyages between different locations in any complex series. The structure of the ESTA Database thus ensures the compatibility of the ESTA data with its Atlantic inspiration (through the level of the voyage), while allowing for a more refined documentation and analysis

⁹ Data contributions are durably stored and accessible in a dedicated section of IISH Dataverse: <https://datasets.iisg.amsterdam/dataverse/IOMASTD>.

¹⁰ This first project phase was funded by the NWO *Internationalisation in the Humanities* Grant Programme (2018–2020).

¹¹ A compelling recent case for a more global and connective approach to bondage and coercion: Ekama, Hellman, and Van Rossum, 'Slavery and Labour Coercion in Asia', pp. 1–16.

of the ‘many’ and multidirectional ‘middle passages’ of the wider Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago world.

Each subvoyage contains information on dates, means of transport, the actors orchestrating the transport (whether that is a private person or a group of people), enslaved people, and cargo (see Figure 10.1). Information on enslaved people is recorded at the supra-group level, when we are only given numbers of transported enslaved, and at the group level for more detailed records of ethnicities, genders, age groups, and mortality. Importantly, each subvoyage also specifies the type of forced relocation in order to accommodate these different forms and facilitate more accurate analyses. Several fields are included to denote (un)certainties around for example departure and arrival dates / locations or the status of a slaving voyage arising from source materials.¹²

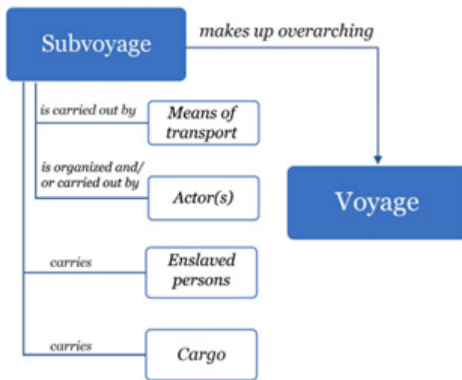


Figure 10.1. The ESTA Database's simplified data model.¹³

This model allowed us to curate data from six independent, separately structured datasets that researchers generously contributed to. After collection, these sets were then curated and (wherever possible) standardised over the period of roughly a year. This first collection of data is focused primarily on available data drawn mostly from French and Dutch Company archives. Consequently, this highlights slave trading activities of mostly European actors around Madagascar, in the Bay of Bengal, and across the Indonesian Archipelago. Apart from the six sets that were published with the launch of the ESTA Database Viewer (December 2023), three new

¹² For more detailed information on our data model, see: Sint Nicolaas, 'Towards an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slave Trade Database; Hids et al., 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia'.

¹³ Published before in Hids et al., 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia', p. 160.

sets have been collected and curated; these will be included in the ESTA Database soon. These sets, too, draw partly from VOC source material, although they tend to focus much more on private Asian slave traders, as well as early 17th-century VOC involvement in slave trading. An important inclusion, however, is a dataset on Portuguese observations of slave trade in 16th and 17th-century Japan, the Philippines, East Africa and Mauritius.

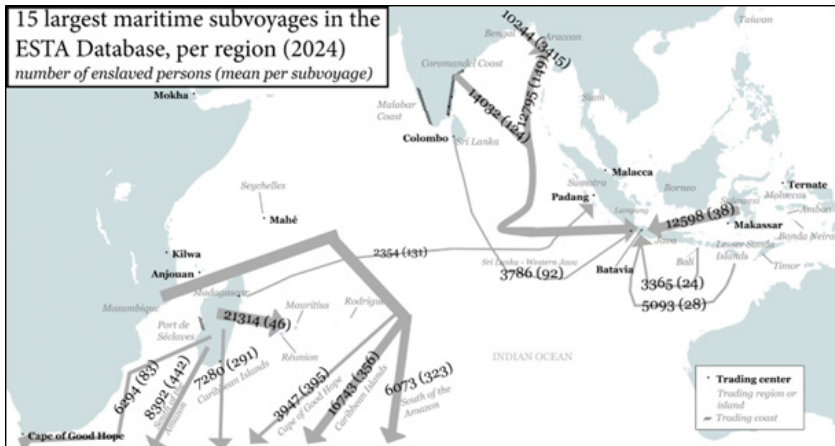
Activities of other European traders in enslaved people, such as the Spanish and British, have not yet been included. At this point, it also leaves regions with a structural slave trade such as the South China Sea out of view, although a dataset on Chinese slave trade is currently being curated. Therefore, the (published and unpublished) sets in the current Database are not representative of the total slave trade in Asia. Yet, by bringing together the previously scattered data, the Database does provide a breakthrough in Asian slave trade studies. And so, for the first time, we can undertake quantitative, interregional, comparative studies of slave trade in Asia over a period between the 16th and 19th centuries.

2. Preliminary passages

In December 2023, the ESTA project presented the first version of the Database with more than 4,000 slave trading voyages, and the transportation of an estimated 340,000–342,500 enslaved persons between 1621 and 1856.¹⁴ Currently, as this chapter is written (late December 2024), the ESTA Database contains explicit references to the coerced transportation of at least 420,000–425,000 enslaved persons between 1520 and 1856, based on both published (six) and unpublished (three) datasets. Implicitly, this number rises to an estimated 690,000 enslaved persons, signalling an upper range estimate still based upon minimum numbers. If the current data in the ESTA Database would represent even 5 percent of maritime Asian and Western Indian Ocean-based slave trade (though it is most likely less), then these implicit numbers confirm the aforementioned notion that slave trade around the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia was as extensive as its Atlantic counterpart. Origin-wise, the majority of cases of the published datasets in ESTA are currently based on either French, Dutch or Portuguese colonial sources, and are mainly split between the French East India Company (Cdi), the Dutch East India Company and private (French, Dutch, and Asian) traders. Although bringing such a collection of data

¹⁴ This version of the dataset is available for searching and browsing here: <https://exploringslavetradeinasia.com>. More information on the data can be found in Hids et al. 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia'.

together means a major leap forward in scholarship, it also leaves open significant gaps that can and will need to be filled in the decades to come.



Voyages	4,758
Subvoyages	8,538
Explicit number of enslaved	Between 420,547 and 425,280 ¹⁵
Implicit number of enslaved	Between 477,000 and 690,000 ¹⁶
Mean number of enslaved per voyage	Between 69 and 70 ¹⁷
Time range	1520 to 1856
Number of datasets	9

Figure 10.2. Overview and scope of the ESTA Database (2024 data).

As shown in Figure 10.2, the largest confirmed maritime subvoyages transporting enslaved persons in ESTA are centred around several slave trade hubs or regions. Per route on the map, a total number of enslaved persons is displayed, as well as a mean number in parentheses. Although a significant portion of the ESTA Database

¹⁵ This number represents bare minimums; qualitative denominations have been curated for this purpose at its minimum (for instance, 'esclaves' will result in a minimum of a plural, i.e., 2; 'dizaines' (tens) will result in '20'; and so on).

¹⁶ Estimate based on frequencies of subvoyages and its missing data.

¹⁷ Weighted mean. The ESTA average was based on a cut-off point of 1167 as the maximum number of enslaved persons per subvoyage, based on the highest capacity of slaving vessels present in the published ESTA Database (the *Zeelandia*, 1622); other large-scale estimates (mostly third-party observations) have been largely disregarded.

revolves around Batavia (20 percent) and the Indonesian Spice Islands (14 percent), much of its focus is on Madagascar (61 percent). Here, 69 percent of slave trade traffic coming to or going from the island was passing through the Mascarene Islands (Mauritius and Réunion), as well as via other ports on Madagascar itself. Other noteworthy Malagasy flows depart for the Americas, although missing data – mostly numbers of enslaved people aboard particular vessels – indicate that Asia-bound voyages formed a substantial portion of Madagascar's slave trade, particularly towards South and Western Asia. In contrast, Batavia operated primarily as an arrival hub for slave trade, from where the VOC pursued stimulation and regulation of the trafficking of enslaved persons.¹⁸

The ESTA Database holds more information on these areas as a result of its underlying corpus of data, consisting of datasets that cover mainly colonial French and Dutch sources. This emphasises the need for more scholarship to further collect data from e.g. Portuguese, British, Spanish and vernacular source material. At the same time, the more advanced state of the data from the French and Dutch sources is deceptive, and does not mean work here is complete. The frequencies of subvoyages with missing data from Madagascar to the Mascarene Islands and vice versa, as well as intra-Madagascar slave trade routes, suggest for example that at least twice as many enslaved persons were transported along these routes than currently recorded in ESTA. And despite the rich scholarship relying on the archives of the Dutch East India Company, several important gaps are distinctly visible. Our recent work with the data entry environment that we have developed for the ESTA Database, TIDES, has made clear that even for the well-documented Dutch slave trade from the Bay of Bengal, especially the Coromandel coast and Arakan in the 17th century, many hitherto undocumented slave trade voyages can be traced.¹⁹ In similar fashion, it can be established that various well-known slave export regions in the Indonesian archipelago are still lacking or underrepresented in the current Database. Such gaps are even clearer when we look at the wider slave trade in Asia. Notably absent from the ESTA Database are flows between South Asia and Africa, as well as the extensive slave trade in the South China Sea referenced in literature.²⁰

¹⁸ Sint Nicolaas, 'Maritime (Im)mobility', 55.

¹⁹ This has been made possible by the work of a number of IISH colleagues, especially Britt van Duijvenvoorde.

²⁰ Chatterjee and Eaton (eds.), *Slavery and South Asian History*; Mbeki and Van Rossum, 'Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world', pp. 95–116; Subrahmanyam, 'Between Eastern Africa and Western India', pp. 805–834; Schottenhammer, 'Slaves and Forms of Slavery in Late Imperial China', pp. 142–152; Chevaleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China', pp. 150–177.

Complexities concretised

What can the current body of data in the ESTA project tell us about the slave trade in the wider Indian Ocean, Indonesian archipelago and East Asian seas? Already the fifteen largest enslaved subvoyages displayed in Figure 10.2 indicate the high level of complexity of the slave trade in maritime Asia and the wider Indian Ocean region. Whether we consider the multidirectionality of routes, the frequencies, total and mean numbers of enslaved persons per route, and even more so patterns in age and gender of the enslaved, there is not one story to tell. Some of these aspects will be addressed later in this chapter. Let us first consider what this complexity and multidirectionality entails, especially when compared to the rather concrete triangular patterns of the Transatlantic slave trade.

The southwest coast of the Indian subcontinent, the so-called Malabar Coast, cantered around what now would be called the state of Kerala, was for a long time a major hub for (European) slave trading. This was also one of the main regions of departure for Dutch ships transporting enslaved people across the Indian Ocean region, leaving us with detailed source material for (aspects of) the slave trade. Cochin (Kochi), where the Dutch settled in the second half of the 17th century, was at the centre of these transactions and transportations. Private slave trade by *burghers* and Company personnel played a crucial role here. With mediation of local merchants, they could extend their reach to the wider Malabar world. The institution of slavery and slave trade was therefore also strongly regulated and controlled by the VOC. The Company archives hold a large collection of notarial sale deeds and transport permissions that allude to the mechanisms that the VOC put in place to control the trade and movement of enslaved persons.²¹

This is how we know that VOC official Reinier van Harn had bought some 70 enslaved persons between 1770 and 1786, including a three-year-old boy named Thebben. Records of his transactions illustrate the multidirectionality of slave trade in this region. In May 1780, for example, Van Harn bought twelve enslaved men, women and children, seven of whom were sold at the estate sale of the major of Cochin's Company militia.²² This major had only recently moved to Cochin from Batavia, and at least three of the enslaved people auctioned in Cochin were also brought over from Batavia. Amelia van Cochim was one of them. The toponym to her given name suggests that she was transported first from Cochin to Batavia (in or

²¹ Mbeki and Van Rossum, 'Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world', pp. 95–116.

²² M. van Rossum, A. Geelen, B. van den Hout, M. Tosun, 'Slave Transactions (Acten van Transport) – VOC Cochin, 1706–1801', <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/CH97SF>, IISH Data Collection, V1 (2018), ID's 886-133-1, 957-91-1, 957-92-1, 957-93-1 and 957-94-1; National Archives (The Hague), 1.04.02 (VOC), inv. no. 14763, scan 669; M. van Rossum et al., 'Slave Transactions', ID's: 1126-92-1, 1126-86-1, 1126-85-1.

before 1769), and then back to Cochin again a decade later.²³ Amelia's case is an individual and direct illustration of the multidirectionality of slave trade in this region.

In other, less-overt regions in Asia, the impact of slave trade could also be felt ubiquitously. For example, in Lampung, the southernmost part of Sumatra that belonged to the Sultanate of Bantam, *mardijker*²⁴ Zacharias Jansz and his group were held in slavery. Around May 1712, Jansz (whose fate was briefly discussed in an earlier ESTA paper²⁵) set sail in his 'prauw conting', a local type of vessel characterised by its sloped sail. Leaving Batavia for his hometown of Bantam, along with his sons Jacob and Israel, his acquaintance Domingo and his slave Jan, enslavers raided their ship halfway, and the group was taken to the Lampung settlement of Nibung and subsequently sold into slavery.

A descendant of enslaved people as well as an enslaver, Jansz found himself stuck in this Lampung slave trade network. The Bantam-to-Lampung route was a popular choice among local enslavers, showcasing the extensive use of the Sultanate's trade networks. Regularly, subjects of Company territories disappeared into these networks; very much against the sore leg of the VOC, whose officials had complained as early as 1684 about this practice.²⁶ Soon losing track of Domingo and Jan while being taken further inland, Jansz personally met or heard of 'countless stolen people, both freemen as well as slaves'.²⁷ Eventually, Jansz encountered a Bantam acquaintance of his by chance in Putih. This captain, a Malayan by the name of Padaesra, agreed to manumit Jansz. Free once again, Jansz sailed from Telukbetung back to Bantam, leaving behind his sons, Domingo, and Jan in Lampung. When VOC officials recorded his account in October 1716, he had been sold and bought no less than nine times.

Overall, the level of detail in Jansz's account is remarkable. For instance, he remembered the locations where he was transported, the names of buyers and sellers, and even the prices paid for him. Notably, Jansz's 'value' seemed to increase with each transaction, demonstrating how enslaved individuals were often treated as investment assets. Most importantly, his account underscores the intricate nature of the many (sub)voyages documented in ESTA, highlighting how enslaved individuals were fragmented into distinct journeys, thus resulting in separate sub-voyages. While the traceability remains relatively intact in this particular instance due to said details – names, origins, locations – on involved individuals, it raises

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Term used in Company territories to denote a group of freed, mostly Christian slaves and their descendants.

²⁵ Hids et al., 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia', pp. 153–172.

²⁶ NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv. no. 7662, fo. 261/scans 513–514.

²⁷ NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv. no. 7673 ('Register van sodanige brieven en voorname bijlagen als in desen sijn ingeschreven en successievelijk ontfangen van Bantam'), fo. 6–9/scans 306–309.

the question of how to deal with instances of subvoyages that contain numerical data alone. Currently, we address this issue by assigning ID numbers to (groups of) enslaved individuals if their identities are ascertainable, thereby facilitating traceability across various (sub)voyages.

3. Sizeable sails

The map in Figure 10.2 already brought to light some interesting patterns of trade. Besides highlighting the routes carrying the largest numbers of enslaved people, its display of voyage frequencies and mean numbers of enslaved people on these routes can be used to analyse the types of trading carried out across the wider Indian Ocean region. Based on the data that the Database currently holds, we can also identify fluctuations in time, as well as mass and trickle trading patterns. From large scale transportations of enslaved people from war-torn regions, to private traders circumnavigating Company regulations – the following will present some of our preliminary analyses of types of slave trading activities based on current data.

Prisoners of war for profit

‘Regarding the purchase of enslaved persons, you are admonished and commanded to satisfactorily continue gathering them and sending as many of them as the ships are able to transport to [Batavia] at every possible opportunity’, Jan Pietersz. Coen wrote to Marten IJsbrandtsz, the VOC’s governor to Coromandel, in June 1628.²⁸ In other words: the demand of enslaved persons in the recently founded Batavia was high and, much like Coen’s aspirations for Company dominance, nevertheless ambitious. As the topmost VOC official in Asia, Coen saw plentiful business opportunities around the Bay of Bengal, as a large-scale war was raging between the states of Araccan (nowadays in Myanmar) and Bengal, roughly current-day Bangladesh. And though Coen ceded that ‘in Bengal it was impossible to trade, since the country was war-torn and in turmoil’, it did provide the Company with a steady influx of enslaved people into Batavia, which were mostly Bengali prisoners of war – much to Coen’s and the Company’s benefit.²⁹ This flow of slave trade, which ran directly via Araccan or through the Indian coastal region of Coromandel, can clearly be traced in ESTA’s Database, shown by Table 10.1 that summarises the distribution of departure locations of individual subvoyages to Batavia.

²⁸ Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen*, vol. 5, p. 296.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Table 10.1. *Departure regions/locations of Batavia-bound subvoyages, 1621–1660 (2024 data).*

Departure region/location	Enslaved persons	Percentage of total
Coromandel Coast	14,197	50.3%
• <i>Masulipatnam</i>	2,161	7.7%
• <i>Pulicat</i>	3,138	11.1%
• <i>Coromandel (no specifics)</i>	4,635	16.4%
• <i>Fort Geldria</i>	4,263	15.1%
Araccan	8,641	30.6%
Strait of Malacca	1,852	6.6%
• <i>Malacca</i>	759	2.7%
Madagascar	487	1.7%
Lesser Sunda Islands	366	1.3%
• <i>Pulau Solor</i>	256	0.9%
• <i>Timor</i>	108	0.4%
Other locations/regions	2,682	9.5%
Total	28,225	100%

The ESTA Database currently shows that between 1621 and 1660, no less than 80 percent of all enslaved persons to Batavia were transported either via Coromandel or Araccan. The rather high mean number of enslaved people per subvoyage from these regions – 131 and 147 respectively – indicates that enslaved people were mass-transported to Batavia, mainly by Company ships of sufficient capacity. This first phase should be seen in light of the development of Batavia as the Company’s Asian headquarters and the initial expansion of Company markets, when Batavia required massive amounts of manpower for various purposes, such as the construction of trade-related and administrative buildings like offices and warehouses, military structures such as forts and redoubts, and city infrastructure and drainage works. Furthermore, Batavia opted to use enslaved labour for the development of agriculture in the Ommelanden, its rural surrounding area.³⁰ In line with these physical labour-fuelled ambitions, there was a large-scale influx of enslaved labour. The supply of enslaved people from Araccan and Coromandel was also preferred by the VOC due to its administrators’ fear of mass escapes and social unrest, were the Company to make use of enslaved Javanese instead.³¹ Other regions – apparently deemed sufficiently removed from Java – that supplied

³⁰ Van Rossum, ‘Global Slavery, Local Bondage?’, pp. 701–702.

³¹ Abeyasekere, ‘Slaves in Batavia: Insights from a Slave Register’, p. 286.

enslaved labour included the Strait of Malacca (5.6 percent) and the Lesser Sunda Islands (2.1 percent), notably Pulau Solor.

To the mineworks

Another route with large mean numbers of enslaved on ships is the one from Madagascar to Western Sumatra. For certain 'projects' in the VOC's Asian colonies, Company directors opted to recruit enslaved labour from specific areas, instead of using local or regional networks. The exploitation of the gold and silver mines at Sillida, coerced into the Company's possession in the 1660s and unprofitably exploited until the 1690s, was to be reinstated from the 1720s onwards. Now, the choice was made to employ enslaved Malagasy in these Western Sumatran mine-works, instead of European miners who had been working there previously, and who were prone to illnesses. Interestingly, while most VOC directives to their ships have been lost, the one to the ship *Binnenwijzend* has survived. This vessel was sent from the Cape of Good Hope to Madagascar to purchase enslaved persons for the mines.³² Company directors were very clear to the *Binnenwijzend's* crew about their slaving mission: 'It will not be necessary to remind you that you should always prefer strong enslaved males above females and children; and young, strong and sturdy black persons above old and weak ones – because, as you know, these enslaved will be sent to the mineworks for hard labor'.³³

The same directive also voiced the VOC's opinion that enslaved Malagasy would make an excellent fit for Sumatra's humid climate, as well as the Company's intentions with females and children, should they be bought; the directors mainly saw a specific 'use' for them in future continuation or preservation of the enslaved population at the mines. In other words: the intended employment for the enslaved – hard physical labour for the adults, who had child 'substitutes' working beside them – and the particularities in health, age and gender set out by VOC directors dictated the form of these slaving voyages. Of course, the conditions in the mines of Sillida were hazardous to the enslaved Malagasy as well, and many died quickly. The total and mean number of enslaved persons per subvoyage on this route indicate furthermore that the VOC was not particularly successful at this trade, especially compared to the Transatlantic slave trade, including the other routes from Madagascar to the New World.³⁴ The *Binnenwijzend's* ship log, which has also been preserved, shows why: they had little experience and network contacts in Madagascar, while the ship was suboptimal for transporting hundreds of enslaved

³² ESTA voyage ID #4037.

³³ NA, VOC (The Hague), 985, fo. 65/scan 93–94.

³⁴ Thiébaud, 'De Madagascar à Sumatra: une route négrière peu commune', § 26; § 37–38; § 49.

persons.³⁵ Of the 190 enslaved people that were transported on the *Binnenwijzend* to Sumatra, 36 (19 percent) died during the crossing. It must be noted, however, that the VOC regularly sent enslaved Malagasy via the Cape of Good Hope to various other destinations in Asia; therefore, it cannot be ruled out that enslaved persons from Madagascar were transported to Western Sumatra indirectly – much like Amelia van Cochim was.

Trickle-trading turmoil

In total, 3,409 enslaved persons from Bali have been recorded in the ESTA Database as coercively transported between 1646 and 1724. Figure 10.3 demonstrates that the trade in enslaved people from Bali to Western Java (predominantly Batavia) steadily picked up after the 1660s. From the *Babads*, the genealogical narratives or state chronicles recorded across Indonesian archipelago states, it is known that Balinese power relations began to shift rapidly after 1650 from the centralised Gelgel kingdom to ‘nouveau riche’ kingdoms that were based on Bali’s coastal areas: the so-called Gelgel revolt (1650–1686).³⁶ Afterwards, though power formally and ritually remained with the Gelgel line of the now-new Klungklung *negara*³⁷, their influence was henceforth severely limited.³⁸ The impact of the revolt was nonetheless tangible in Western Java, as various upcoming Balinese kingdoms such as Badung and Mengwi sought ways to accumulate wealth in order to cement and reflect their newfound position as independent states. And as elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago, slave trade presented a sure-fire way of amassing wealth for the Balinese nobility.

Before the revolt, slave trade on Bali was already deeply rooted in the factional political situation on the island; the various Balinese kingdoms – especially those with access to Bali’s shores – were enslaving and subsequently selling their subjects *en masse*. Especially poignant here is the mean number of enslaved per subvoyage (23), mainly indicating a ‘trickle trade’ pattern in which enslaved persons were being transported in relatively small numbers yet in high frequencies. Usually, this pattern suggests private trade due to their use of relatively small vessels. The Bali–Java slave trade was characterised by the prominent role of local and regional traders. Unlike European trading companies, they operated smaller vessels and often organised fleets of ships rather than sailing individually. On average, 2.2

³⁵ NA (The Hague), VOC, 11257.

³⁶ Schulte Nordholt, ‘Origin, Descent, and Destruction’, pp. 27–58, 38–39.

³⁷ Term used to denote a precolonial Indonesian state.

³⁸ Schulte Nordholt, ‘Origin, Descent, and Destruction’, p. 42; Vickers, *Bali: A paradise created*, p. 58.

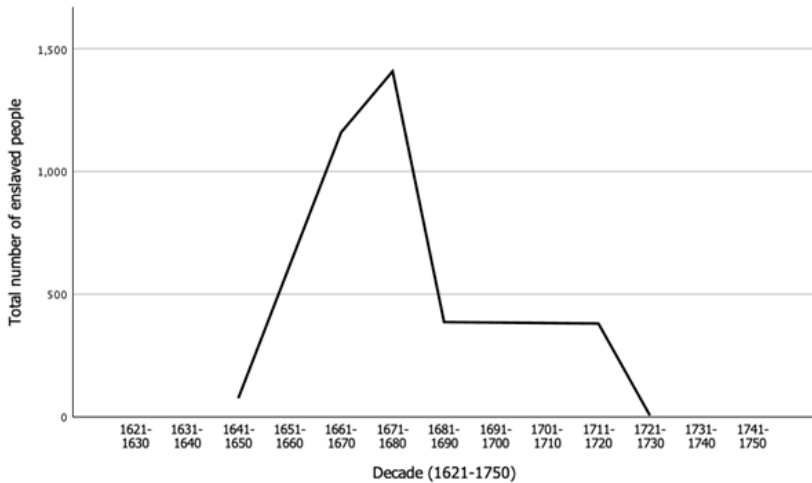


Figure 10.3. Total number of enslaved persons from Bali in the ESTA Database per decade.

vessels with 22.2 enslaved Balinese persons on board left Bali for either Batavia or Bantam during the Gelgel revolt. These ships and their crew originated from all over the Indonesian archipelago, such as Sulawesi, Southern Sumatra, or Bali itself. While typical private vessels partaking in Balinese slave trade were generally relatively small, larger vessels were employed as well. For instance, an ESTA-recorded voyage saw three ‘native vessels’ arrive in Batavia from Bali in 1665 with 215 enslaved men and women aboard. And even in the case of smaller vessels, large-scale slave trade was undertaken. A voyage in September 1672 demonstrates how the sheer size of a fleet, totalling 10 to 12 vessels from Macassar, amounted to the mass transport of about 300 enslaved Balinese individuals to Bantam.³⁹

Interestingly, the character of Balinese slave trade seems to have shifted again post-revolt. Most of the slave trade to Western Java seems to have been carried out by Balinese traders then, instead of the regionally diverse traders that were partaking during the revolt. This might indicate that by the time the revolt was over, Balinese internal tensions had reduced. Perhaps reclaiming their transport agency, the Balinese trade in enslaved people continued. For instance, local Balinese chief Bappa Diera from the town of Sukawati (Southern Bali) transported 101 enslaved men and women to Batavia in two vessels in 1718.⁴⁰ To Balinese private traders, Western Java clearly remained an important market for their enslaved kinsmen. In

³⁹ ESTA voyage #3463.

⁴⁰ In NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv.no. 7545, the captain is called ‘parbachel’, meaning chief or administrator.

fact, in the fall of 1717 alone, 216 enslaved Balinese men, women and children were transported to Bantam by Balinese vessels.⁴¹ If this early-18th-century Bali–Bantam trade was performed on a regular basis – which is yet unclear – it would equate to about six times the recorded annual average of the revolt-era Bali–Batavia route, showing the sheer scale of this Bali-initiated transport. Important to note, however, is that the demand for enslaved labour in Batavia caused many regulations to be relaxed by 1720, although this is hardly visible in *Image 16*.⁴² This means that either Bantam remained in place as a ‘transit port’ for Batavia, or that there is a lot of missing data on Bali–Batavia routes in the Database.

Similar trickle-trade patterns could be discerned in other regions in the Indonesian Archipelago as well, such as the Lesser Sunda Islands and Sulawesi. The island of Sulawesi formed one of Batavia’s – and more generally, Western Java’s – main suppliers of enslaved labour: nearly 23 percent of the total number of enslaved persons transported there originated from Sulawesi. But although this route was a high frequency one, it is also typical of a trickle-trade route, pointing again towards the prevalence of private trade here. Both Asian, Company and *burgher* private traders were active in the Sulawesi to Java slave trade, with at least half of the known vessels belonging to Asian private traders. The VOC tried to actively regulate these flows by several measures, such as bans on Sulawesian enslaved adults to Batavia in 1685 by Governor General Joannes Camphuys and again in 1740 by Adriaan Valckenier.⁴³ As a result, surviving VOC court cases shed some light on how these patterns were formed, and how the perceived (il)legality of enslaved routes impacted both the lives of enslaved and the colonial society that sought to benefit from them.

For example, a 1743 court case against a Company ship surgeon who was caught smuggling a group of enslaved people into inner-city Batavia underscores ESTA’s pattern in which enslaved Sulawesians were very frequently transported, yet in smaller numbers.⁴⁴ Aboard the vessel *Gaasperdam*, ship surgeon Van Diepe smuggled eight girls and two men, while 39 others may have been either on the same Company vessel or on another anchored at Batavia’s roadstead; all were caught in the course of several days in mid-July 1743. They had attempted to enter Batavia by crossing the river blockade next to Batavia’s Castle, the city’s main seaward entrance. While it is known that Company personnel participated in private trade of all kinds and rather substantially in enslaved persons, the precise mechanisms

⁴¹ NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv.no. 8085, scans 130, 132, 155, 164–166, 170–171.

⁴² Sint Nicolaas, ‘Maritime (Im)mobility’, p. 70; Kanumoyoso, ‘Beyond the City Wall’, p. 111.

⁴³ Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, vol. 3, pp. 147–148; vol. 4, p. 519; *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden* (GM), vol. 10, p. 574.

⁴⁴ NA (The Hague), VOC, 9405, scans 653–656.

behind that are severely understudied – after all, private Company traders had plentiful reasons to keep their additional earnings out of the Company’s books, and consequently, out of today’s sources.⁴⁵ This court case, therefore, provides some insights into similarities and differences marked by ESTA between routes and vessels of Asian and Company private traders.⁴⁶ And not only the testimonies and the verdict (the forfeiture and sale of the enslaved) survived, but also the estimated ages of the enslaved (on average, they were perceived as 37 years old). The purchase deeds for Van Diepe’s claimed group of enslaved were included as well, indicating that he had purchased them in Makassar, and that they were mostly Buginese people. This court case furthermore indicates that enslaved routes that were – at least, in the VOC’s view – considered illegal might tend to follow broader lines of the ‘regular’ trafficking of enslaved people. Elements such as ethnicity, religion, age, and gender played central roles in the monitoring and regulating of slave trade and enslaveability in Company territories and have been included in ESTA’s Database, as well.

4. Incomplete identities

Even though historical sources do not disclose much information on the people transported in slavery across Indian Ocean settlements, they often do record minimal information on gender, age and (in even rarer cases) ethnicities and physical dispositions of people. These were deemed important signifiers for agents of this trade, especially as indicators of a person’s ‘enslaveability’ and ‘worth’. For example, the VOC institutionalised their perceptions of local customs regarding ‘enslaveable’ social groups in South Asia through laws, recordkeeping, and surveillance.⁴⁷ Recent research also indicates the importance of categorisation of people into gender and age groups (man vs. woman; child vs. adult) for price assessments of enslaved persons in the Indian Ocean world.⁴⁸ There is nevertheless still a paucity of studies into the patterns of gender, age, and other identifiers, in slave trading activities around the Indian Ocean – and how they interact and fluctuate. The mechanisms of determining and registering information around gender and age (perceptions) also need much more scrutiny. However, the Database might be

⁴⁵ Van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*, pp. 45–48.

⁴⁶ The similar mean numbers of enslaved persons in private Asian and Company-personnel-initiated maritime trade might be attributed to the former mostly employing smaller vessels, and the latter carrying enslaved persons ‘on the side’, either as contraband or not.

⁴⁷ See: Van Rossum et al., *Testimonies of Enslavement*.

⁴⁸ Van Rossum, ‘Towards a global perspective’, pp. 42–68.

able to provide a starting point for further research and analyses of gender and age patterns. Keeping in mind that gender and age categorisations were not consistently recorded, the data collection does allow for preliminary analyses based on various routes where this information is available.

A gendered gulf

Going forward, it is important to point out that the ESTA Database shows a disparate overall gender pattern compared to existing literature, as enslaved (adult) men dominate across all regions and routes covered in the Database. This is especially pronounced around the Arabian Sea region. Data for voyages departing from the Arabian Sea region show a remarkable gender pattern of almost exclusively adult men (83 percent of all known cases). Most of these men would either arrive in Sri Lanka or Java.

Indeed, enslaved persons from the Malabar Coast were mainly transported to Sri Lanka, the Indonesian archipelago, and the Cape of Good Hope, whereas Sri Lanka served as a port of call on the way to Indonesia or the Cape.⁴⁹ As it stands currently, of the 89 voyages recorded as departing from the Malabar Coast in the Database, 45 were destined for the Indonesian archipelago transporting at least 1,612 people between roughly 1700 and 1750. The second largest route with 37 voyages was destined for Sri Lanka, mainly around the second half of the 18th century, transporting 754 enslaved persons. The average number of transported enslaved persons on each voyage ranges between 34 and 44 people, who were almost all adult men. This preference for enslaved men from this area is also attested to in sale transactions recorded by the VOC, but the mechanisms behind this pattern need to be further studied.⁵⁰

Bypassing bureaucracies?

We can see that for voyages departing from the Spice Islands, there is a relatively equal gender ratio. However, more than half of all transported individuals have no gender registration (i.e., ‘unknown’). In the case of Bali, specifically, we see an interesting development in these registrations that might be related to the 1665 VOC ban on the transport of Balinese enslaved men to Batavia (Table 10.2). Enslaved Balinese men were regarded as being ‘of wicked disposition,’ frequently rebelling and rioting.⁵¹ Moreover, enslavers and transporters were ‘constantly risking the

⁴⁹ Mbeki and Van Rossum, ‘Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world’, pp. 108–109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107 and p. 110.

⁵¹ Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, vol. 2, p. 405.

loss of life and means due to the impertinence and murderousness of that nation'. These perceptions primarily reflect the scale of internal conflicts among the various Balinese kingdoms, which were in a de facto state of civil war. However, enslaved males from Bali were still being brought into the Company's territories in high numbers. For example, the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (OBP) collection shows that private traders – regional Asian traders, *burghers* and Company officials alike – saw plenty of opportunities to bypass VOC regulation, for example via the Sultanate of Bantam. Consequently, the Sultanate could unintentionally benefit from Company regulations such as these, as closing off Batavia for Balinese enslaved males only meant a shift to ports such as Bantam. From Bantam, they could subsequently be transported to Batavia.

Of course, circumvention also must have happened by 'illegal' means. Interestingly, a pattern is discernible in registrations of age groups of enslaved people coming from Sulawesi after Batavia's 1685 ban on the import of enslaved adults from the island.⁵² Of the 205 transported enslaved in the period 1646–1685 (before the ban), 48.3 percent were adults and 48.3 percent have been marked as 'unknown'. In the period after the ban up until 1789, there was a striking shift in these registrations, with 90.6 percent of all 160 transported enslaved having no known age group attached to them. The shift in gender registrations that comes to light from the data might signal strategies of circumventing restrictive regulations. Of course, more data and further research is needed to confirm this thesis.

Table 10.2. Enslaved groups from Bali per gender in the ESTA Database, 1661–1724.

	Mixed	All male	All female	Unknown
1661–1665 (28)	67.9 %	0.0 %	7.1 %	25.0 %
1666–1670 (35)	28.6 %	0.0 %	62.9 %	8.5 %
1671–1675 (30)	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100 %
1676–1680 (28)	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100 %
1680–1724 (23)	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100 %

⁵² Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, vol. 3, pp. 147–148. This ban mentioned similar motives as the ban against Balinese enslaved, as Sulawesi enslaved were 'prone to violence' because they would 'settle very difficultly for slavery', as they had been 'free-born people' that had been robbed, transported, and brought to slave markets.

Approaching age

A relatively high number of enslaved children are recorded to have been traded around the Indian Ocean islands and to southern Africa: more than a third of the total number of transported enslaved within the Indian Ocean islands and from the islands to southern Africa. How childhood was defined and operated within systems of slavery around the Indian Ocean is still a relatively underdeveloped section of scholarship on Asian slavery. Conceptualisations of age were connected to physical attributes, gender, and ideas about (re)productivity. For the Dutch Transatlantic slave trade, it has been pointed out that the age of 15 was seen as a demarcation between a (less productive) child and (more productive) adult in slavery. These age conceptions would, of course, vary across settlements and over time. On 19th-century Surinamese plantations, for example, enslaved women and men were considered adults at 16 and 18 years respectively, while British traders used height to determine age.⁵³ These fluctuating methods and guidelines make it difficult to extract a generalised definition of age, but this should not deter researchers from peeling the layers of archival records – especially considering the importance of age conceptions in sale and employment patterns.

5. Conclusion

As we are moving towards more global approaches to the history of slave trade, the need for data and tools to perform comparative analyses with becomes more apparent. Collecting and curating this data for the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia region is necessary to understand the scale, structures, and connections of regional slave trade systems as well as mechanisms of slave trade worldwide. The crux of this exercise lies in, amongst others, accounting for regional differences in manifestations of slave trade and the diverse recordkeeping practices across the region. The *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* project provides a general structure for a collective database to record as much data on the various slave trading activities across the regions, and aims to locate new sources for further data extraction and addition to the database.

The preliminary analyses of the data collected thus far in the ESTA Database provide fruitful ground for further research and data collection. We now have quantifiable data on types of slave trade activities and age and gender distributions on certain routes, while these routes can be characterised by examining patterns over time. The ESTA Database shows clear distinctions between trickle and mass slave trade patterns (mainly divided between routes inside and outside

⁵³ Negrón, 'Pieter Volkmar, Amsterdamse handelaar in slaafgemaakte kinderen', pp. 123–124.

of the Indonesian Archipelago), and shows how private local/regional/*burgher* and Company-initiated trade affected the form and frequency of slave trade routes. The Database proves to be a solid instrument to examine mechanisms behind slavery and slave trade, such as the impact of local or regional developments – wars, revolts, regulations – on societies that are associated with enslavement, slave trade or the assimilation of enslaved people in colonial systems. Fluctuating patterns of slave trading activities across the Indian Ocean region clearly had far-reaching effects on populations and social relations in both regions of departure and arrival that should be further examined. The Database's results furthermore interact with existing literature, deepening our understanding as well as highlighting contradictory patterns, such as the unexpected dominance of enslaved males instead of females and children on many of ESTA's routes. In addition, we pointed out possible signs of tension between the registration of transported enslaved groups and individuals in colonial sources and the regulation of slave trade by colonial authorities, connected as well to the realms of private trade and smuggling. Lastly, as illustrated in this chapter, the Database can also form an entryway into individual histories of slavery and displacement, whilst providing contextualising data for these stories.

On top of that, the Database shows us more clearly where we lack data and formulates practical ways forward. For example, we still need data on well-known but missing slave trade routes like the South China Sea trade, and more complete survey of archives known to hold data on slave trade. For one, the Dutch VOC archives have not yet been fully inventoried for data on slave trade. Finding such references to slave trade in the Dutch archives will become easier through the GLOBALISE infrastructure that combines HTR and NLP techniques to make the archives more searchable.⁵⁴ The ESTA project will collaborate with GLOBALISE to locate relevant documents and (automatically) extract as much relevant data from the Dutch colonial archives as possible. In the coming year, ESTA and GLOBALISE will also collaborate with the IISH/Radboud University research projects *The Global Business of Slave Trade* and *Voices of Enslavement* in creating more text recognition (HTR) of Dutch and other European digitised colonial archives to aid the search for slave trade observations.⁵⁵ Still, it is important to locate and inventory other archives in Europe, Africa, and Asia for data extraction. We especially lack insights into (and from) non-European archives on histories of slave trade. Finally, in order to ensure durability and compatibility, we continue to collaborate on research projects with a (slave trade) data component and invite researchers to contact us for new collaborations.

⁵⁴ For more information on the GLOBALISE project, see: <https://globalise.huygens.knaw.nl>.

⁵⁵ More information: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/blog/global-business-slave-trade-patterns-actors-and-gains-early-modern-dutch-and-iberian-slave> and <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/Voices-of-Resistance>.

Reflections on Reconstructing Slavery and Slave Trading in Early Modern and Colonial Asia

Richard B. Allen

The first decades of the new millennium have witnessed a significant expansion in our knowledge and understanding of slavery and slave trading in early modern and colonial Asia.¹ This renaissance reflects historians' willingness to embrace the diversity of the slave experience in the Indian Ocean and Asia (IOA) and deal creatively with the problems inherent in reconstructing even the more visible aspects of that experience such as the trafficking of the 2.2–2.8 million African and Asian men, women, and children currently estimated to have been transported across and beyond this oceanic world between 1500 and 1900.² Doing so has entailed expanding research horizons to include previously ignored peoples and regions, exploring the complexities of local and regional systems of slave and coerced labour in greater detail, challenging long-standing beliefs about slavery and slave trading in parts of the IOA, developing new conceptual and methodological approaches to studying bonded and forced labour in this part of the world, and searching out new sources of information or making innovative use of underused archival sources already at our disposal. The fruits of such endeavours include important research on topics such as slavery in Ming and Qing China, India, Japan, Korea, and colonial Vietnam,³

¹ Allen, 'Slavery, Slave Trading, and Bonded Labor Studies in Asia', pp. 1–13.

² Gerbeau, 'The Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean', pp. 184–207; Alpers, 'The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean', pp. 62–81; Allen, 'Ending the History of Silence', pp. 294–313.

³ E.g., Kim, 'Nobi: A Korean System of Slavery', pp. 155–168; Delaye, 'Slavery and Colonial Representations in Indochina from the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth Century', pp. 129–142; Chatterjee and Eaton, eds., *Slavery and South Asian History*; Nelson, 'Slavery in Medieval Japan', pp. 463–492; Kim, 'Debt Slaves in Old Korea', pp. 165–172; Lessard, *Human Trafficking in Colonial Vietnam*; Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China*; Zurndorfer, 'Economic, Social, and Legal Aspects of Slavery and Indentured Labor in Late Ming China (1550–1645)', pp. 131–149; Lovins, 'Korea: A Slave Society', pp. 178–200; Chevaleyre, 'Slavery in Late Ming China', pp. 297–317.

the abolition of slavery and slave trading in British India and China,⁴ the structure, organisation, and impact of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean world and Asia,⁵ and the commerce of enslavement in Central, East, and South Asia.⁶

The contributions to this volume reflect these trends. Angelina Kalashnikova's chapter demonstrates the need to include Siberia in discussions about servitude in northern Asia, acknowledge that Russia as well as Britain, France, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain was a colonising power in Asia, and pay greater attention to the role that gender played in shaping the slave experience in Asia.⁷ Filipa Riberio da Silva reminds us that the Portuguese and Spanish as well as the British, Danes, Dutch, and French traded slaves within and/or beyond the IOA, a point illustrated by the Manila galleon transporting thousands of enslaved South, Southeast, and East Asians across the Pacific to Mexico and Peru between the mid-sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸ Lodewijk Wagenaar and Hans Hägerdal in turn provide more detailed insight into how and why the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC) made extensive use of slave labour in, respectively, Sri Lanka and the Malukus. Priya Kapoor's chapter on coolies in modern Shimla reminds us that the abolition of slavery did not bring an end to various forms of bonded or coerced labour in the IOA,⁹ and that the continued existence of 'slavery,' especially in parts of Asia and the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf region, in the early twenty-first century remains a subject of vigorous discussion and debate.¹⁰

⁴ E.g., Major, *Slavery, Abolition, and Empire in India, 1772–1843*; Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*, pp. 141–178, 180–219; Chevaleyre, 'The Abolition of Slavery and the Status of Slaves in Late Imperial China', pp. 57–82; Herzog, *Negotiating Abolition*; Ling, 'The Abolition of Slavery, Constitutional Reforms, and Modernity in Late Qing China', pp. 201–225.

⁵ E.g., Allen, *European Slave Trading*; Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan*; Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Slave Trading in the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830', pp. 273–296; Allen, 'Exporting the Unfortunate', pp. 533–552; Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Labor Migration in the Colonial Indian Ocean World/Capital mercantil y migración de mano de obra en el Océano Índica colonial', pp. 129–153; Zurndorfer, 'Human Trafficking and Piracy in Early Modern East Asia', pp. 908–931.

⁶ E.g., Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550–1900*; Stanziani, ed., *Labour, Coercion and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th–20th Centuries*; Stanziani, *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*; Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia*; Chevaleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China', pp. 150–177.

⁷ For an overview of slavery studies in Asia, see Allen, 'Slavery, Slave Trading, and Bonded Labor Studies in Asia', pp. 5–13. For a survey of the literature on gender and slavery in Asia, see Herzog, 'Gender and Slavery in Asia', pp. 77–108.

⁸ Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico*.

⁹ Renault, *Libération d'esclaves et nouvelle servitude*; Gerbeau, 'Engagees and Coolies in Réunion Island', pp. 209–236; Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922*; Monnier, *Esclaves de la canne à sucre*.

¹⁰ E.g., Quirk, *The Anti-Slavery Project*; Bales, *Disposable People*; Kara, *Modern Slavery*.

As Hubert Gerbeau observed more than 45 years ago, a major problem in reconstructing slaving and slave trading in the IOA is the relative dearth of archival and other sources compared to those which exist for the Atlantic world.¹¹ Addressing this problem requires not only searching out previously unknown or unexplored archival and other sources, but also making innovative use of the underused materials already at our disposal.¹² As the chapters by Mrinalini Luthra, Matthias van Rossum, and Majusha Kuruppath on the one hand and Muhammad Asyraf and Fathiyarizq Mahendra Putra on the other demonstrate, one way to do so involves the careful application of new technologies to access, read, and research the ways in which Europeans thought about, recruited, and treated the chattel labourers upon whom their colonial establishments usually depended for survival. This information is important because of what it reveals about the nature, structure, and dynamics of slavery in the IOA, and how we understand the post-emancipation migrant labour systems which flourished in the British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonial empires in the Americas and Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Reconstructing slavery in the IOA has also entailed efforts to deepen our understanding of the commerce of enslavement in this part of the globe since 1500. While the illegal slave trade in the western Indian Ocean has long been a subject of scholarly interest,¹³ Michael Reidy's account of British merchant Michael Hogan's activities at the Cape of Good Hope reveals how individual entrepreneurs participated in this illicit commerce and, in so doing, sheds the kind of light on this trade's dynamics that only micro-histories can reveal. His case study underscores the importance of efforts to expand on pioneering work on reconstructing the volume, dynamics, and impact of European slave trading in the IOA and the need to appreciate that this commerce was a global, and not just an Atlantic, phenomenon.¹⁴

¹¹ Gerbeau, 'The Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean'. For more recent discussions, see: Alpers, 'The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean'; Allen, 'Ending the History of Silence'.

¹² See the forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Global Slavery* (2026) on 'Hidden Archives and the Commerce of Enslavement in the Indian Ocean and Asia' edited by Richard B. Allen, Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Matthew S. Hopper.

¹³ E.g., Gerbeau, 'Quelques aspects de la traite illégale des esclaves à l'île Bourbon aux XIX^e siècle', pp. 273–308; Gerbeau, 'L'océan Indien n'est pas l'Atlantique', pp. 79–108; Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave Trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1835', pp. 873–894; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 141–168; Gerbeau, *L'Esclavage et son ombre*, vol. 1, pp. 368–473.

¹⁴ E.g., Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIII^e siècle*; Hubert Gerbeau, 'Des minorités mal-connues', pp. 160–242; Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century', pp. 211–233; Carter, 'Indian Slaves in Mauritius (1729–1834)', pp. 233–247; Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*; Armstrong, 'Ceylon and the Slave Trade during the Dutch East India Company Period'; Allen, 'A Traffic of Several Nations',

Pascal Konings, Merve Tosun, and Matthias van Rossum's chapter introduces the online *Exploring the Slave Trade in Asia* database (ESTA),¹⁵ inaugurated in November, 2023, and highlights this database's potential to deepen our knowledge about slave trading, especially in South and Southeast Asia, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *Global Passages* database project discussed by Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Mathew S. Hopper promises to expand our understanding of slave trading in the IOA by various indigenous (e.g., Arab, Swahili, Indian) peoples as well as Europeans and, by extension, the globality of European transoceanic slave trading when it is inaugurated as an integral part of the open-access *SlaveVoyages* website.¹⁶

If these chapters attest to the promise inherent in IOA slavery studies as the second quarter of the twenty-first century begins, they are also reminders of the problems which continue to plague this field of study, not the least of which is the Atlantic-centrism which dominates slavery studies in general.¹⁷ This 'tyranny of the Atlantic' reflects the continuing scholarly preoccupation with slavery in the Americas and the Atlantic world and an attendant propensity to apply Euro-American models of slavery and coerced labour to studying slavery and bonded labour elsewhere in the globe.¹⁸ The same holds true for post-emancipation indentured labour studies which remain heavily influenced by Hugh Tinker's argument more than 50 years ago that the indentured Indian labourers who replaced African slaves in colonial sugar cane fields were the victims of a 'new system of slavery.'¹⁹ However, as many Asianists and Africanists have long appreciated,

pp. 157–177; Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', pp. 33–50; Allen, 'Carrying Away the Unfortunate', pp. 285–298; Carter, 'A Servile Minority in a Sugar Island', pp. 257–271; Allen, 'Children and European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', pp. 35–54; Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

¹⁵ <https://exploringslavetradeinasia.com>.

¹⁶ The *Global Passages: Creating a Public Database of Slaving Voyages across the Indian Ocean and Asia* project was funded by a United States National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Advancement Grant between its inauguration on 1 March 2023 and the grant's summary termination on 2 April 2025 pursuant to a presidential executive order. The project is continuing with support from the *SlaveVoyages* Consortium and will be inaugurated in 2026. In the interest of transparency, I note that I am one of the project's four principal investigators together with Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Jane Hooper, and Matthew S. Hopper.

¹⁷ Alpers, 'The African Diaspora', p. 89.

¹⁸ Recent examples include: Eltis, 'Is the *SlaveVoyages* Database Useful for Scholars of Slave Trading in the Wider Indian Ocean World?', pp. 762–772; Patterson, *Enslavement*. Other discussions of this issue include Van Rossum, 'Slavery and Its Transformations', pp. 566–598.

¹⁹ Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. On the Tinkerian paradigm's legacy, see: Allen, 'Post-emancipation Labor Studies in the Early Twenty-First Century', pp. 43–59; Allen, 'A New System of Slavery at Age Fifty', pp. 961–969.

Western-inspired definitions and perceptions of 'slavery' and cognate labour systems are usually inadequate, if not inappropriate, to understanding slave and coerced labour in many parts of Africa and the wider Indian Ocean world.²⁰ These Western paradigms nevertheless continue to shape scholarly research on and discourse about slave and post-emancipation labour systems beyond the Atlantic. Doing so invariably entails ignoring, or at least discounting, the existence of different 'slaveries' around the globe in favour of reified, universal models of servitude which obscure, if not deny, the complexities inherent in the human experience with slave, bonded, and coerced labour.²¹

This 'tyranny of the Atlantic' is emblematic of another serious problem in early twenty-first-century slavery studies, namely many scholars' reluctance to look beyond the chronological, geographical, and conceptual confines of the specialised case studies which dominate this field of study and situate their studies in more fully developed local, regional, global, and comparative contexts.²² This conceptual 'tyranny of the particular' manifests itself in various ways, perhaps most obviously in the continuing propensity to study the IOA British, Danish, Dutch, French, and Portuguese slave trades in isolation from both one another and the transatlantic trades. This tendency to treat these trades in the Atlantic and IOA as phenomena separate and distinct unto themselves obscures the development of an increasingly complex global commerce of enslavement and cognate forms of labour between the fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries.

The need to transcend this particularism is demonstrated by recent research which reveals some of the ways in which the European slave trades in the IOA were entwined with one another, other local and regional commercial networks, and the larger historical processes which characterise early modern and colonial history in this part of the globe. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, witnessed the increasing intertwining of the slave, convict, and indentured labour trades in the IOA.²³ Examples of this interconnectivity include French

²⁰ More recent discussions include: Campbell, 'Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World', pp. vii–xxxii; Miers, 'Slavery: A Question of Definition', pp. 1–16; Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History*; Toledano, 'Shifting Patterns of Ottoman Enslavement in the Early Modern Period', pp. 199–220; Reid, 'Slavery and Forced Labour in Asia', pp. 33–48.

²¹ Zeuske, 'Historiography and Research Problems of Slavery and the Slave Trade in a Global-Historical Perspective', pp. 87–111.

²² Allen, *Slaves, Convicts, Indentured Laborers and the Tyranny of the Particular*.

²³ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 3, 193–206; Anderson, 'Convicts, Commodities, and Connections in British Asia and the Indian Ocean, 1789–1866', pp. 205–227. On the indentured and convict labour systems, see: Northrup, *Indentured Labor*; Anderson, *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies*; Yang, *Empire of Convicts*; Anderson, *Convicts*. For an overview of the indentured labour system, see Allen, 'Asian Indentured Labor in the 19th and Early 20th Century Colonial Plantation World'.

slave traders acquiring human cargoes destined for the Mascarene Islands of the Ile de France (Mauritius) and the Ile Bourbon (Réunion) with the acquiescence, if not active cooperation, of Dutch and Portuguese authorities in India, Mozambique, and elsewhere.²⁴ In addition to forming partnerships with Portuguese merchants in Mozambique, Mascarene-based merchants maintained extensive commercial ties throughout the Indian Ocean and deep into the Atlantic.²⁵ Gujarati merchants based in Mozambique likewise participated in the Mascarene trade during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as financiers and independent entrepreneurs, sometimes in partnership with Portuguese merchants in Mozambique.²⁶ The origins of the indentured labour system which flourished in the colonial plantation world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the ways in which indentured labourers were processed and treated cannot be understood without reference to abolitionism in the IOA and the transportation of Indian convicts to British colonies in the region during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁷ That this commerce of enslavement involved more than just the procurement and shipment of human cargoes is revealed by evidence that slave trading in the colonial IOA was frequently associated with the provisioning trades which supplied European establishments with the large quantities of food-stuffs they needed to sustain the chattel work forces upon which their survival depended.²⁸

These new insights are the product of making innovative use of already known but underused archival collections and searching out hitherto unknown archival and other source materials.²⁹ Equally important is the need to draw on the information and insights provided by cognate disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, and sociology.³⁰ The extensive body of scholarship on the

²⁴ Souza, 'French Slave Trading in Portuguese Goa (1771–1793)', pp. 119–131; Carreira, *Globalizing Goa (1660–1820)*, pp. 190–202.

²⁵ Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 84–100; Allen, 'Merchant Capital and Labor Migration'.

²⁶ Machado, *Ocean of Trade*, pp. 208–267.

²⁷ Anderson, 'Convicts and Coolies: Rethinking Indentured Labour in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 93–109; Allen, 'Slaves, Convicts, Abolitionism and the Global Origins of the Post-Emancipation Indentured Labor System', pp. 328–348.

²⁸ Allen, 'Feeding Slavery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1500–1850'. On African and Asian slaves' role in creating and maintaining European establishments and empires in the IOA, see, for example: Allen, 'Slavery in a Remote but Global Place', pp. 151–176; Hassel, *Slavery and Religious Conversion in Portugal's Indian Empire, 1500–1700*.

²⁹ Allen, Domingues da Silva, Hooper, and Hopper, 'Hidden Archives.' Examples of such scholarship include: Zurndorfer, 'Economic, Social, and Legal Aspects of Slavery'; Chevaleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China'.

³⁰ Allen, 'History, Historical Archaeology and the 'History of Silence'', pp. 121–142; Allen, 'The Poverty of Archival Riches', pp. 328–344.

archaeology of slavery in the Americas confirms that the excavation and analysis of material culture associated with enslaved people can shed important light on aspects of slave life rarely, if ever, mentioned in the documentary record.³¹ While archaeologists have paid considerable attention to the western Indian Ocean,³² the archaeology of slavery in the IOA remains in its infancy.³³ The value of such research is demonstrated by research on the activities of slave washerwomen in South Africa,³⁴ the Shimoni caves on Kenya's south coast where slaves were held for export,³⁵ the *watoro* or fugitive slave communities in coastal East Africa,³⁶ the strategies used by the enslaved Malagasies and Mozambicans marooned on the 200-acre islet of Tromelin between 1761 and their rescue in 1776,³⁷ and the belief system of early nineteenth-century Mauritian free(d) people of colour.³⁸ Maritime archaeologists, in turn, have begun to reveal hitherto hidden details about slave trading in the western Indian Ocean through their excavation of the wrecks of the French slaver *Le Coureur* (1821, Mauritius)³⁹ and the Portuguese *São José Paquete de Africa* (1794, near Cape Town),⁴⁰ and preliminary work on the wrecks of the

³¹ Recent examples include: Marshall, ed., *The Archaeology of Slavery*; Bates, Chenoweth, and Delle, eds., *Archaeologies of Slavery and Freedom in the Caribbean*; Petley and Lenik, eds., *Material Cultures of Slavery and Abolition in the British Caribbean*.

³² See Seetah, *Connecting Continents*, especially the chapters by Anderson, Camens, and Clark ('Investigating Premodern Colonization in the Indian Ocean', pp. 30–67); Horton, Crow, and Boivin ('Facing Mecca from Africa: Islam and Globalization on the Swahili Coast during the First Millennium CE and Beyond', pp. 68–91); Lane ('The Archaeology of Colonial Encounters in Coastal East Africa: Recent Developments and Continuing Conceptual Challenges', pp. 143–170); and Paterson ('Historical Archaeology of Pearlring in the Indian Ocean: Through the Lens of North West Australia', pp. 171–203). On archaeology's potential contribution to Southeast Asian history, see: Lape, 'Political Dynamics and Religious Change in the Late Pre-Colonial Banda Islands, Eastern Indonesia', pp. 138–155; Lape, 'On the Use of Archaeology and History in Island Southeast Asia', pp. 468–91; Lape, 'A Highway and a Crossroads: Island Southeast Asia and Culture Contact Archaeology', pp. 102–109.

³³ Kusimba, 'Archaeology of Slavery in East Africa', pp. 59–88; Walz and Brandt, 'Toward an Archaeology of the Other African Diaspora', pp. 246–268.

³⁴ Jordan, 'Unrelenting Toil', pp. 217–232.

³⁵ Kiriama, 'Archaeological Investigation of Shimoni Slave Caves', pp. 157–169.

³⁶ Marshall, 'Fugitive Slave Communities in 19th Century Kenya', pp. 21–29; Marshall, 'Spatiality and the Interpretation of Identity Formation', pp. 355–381.

³⁷ Marriner, Guérot, and Romon, 'The Forgotten Slaves of Tromelin (Indian Ocean)', pp. 1293–1304; Laroulandie and LeFèvre, 'The Use of Avian Resources by the Forgotten Slaves of Tromelin Island (Indian Ocean)', pp. 407–416; Béarez and Bouffandeau, 'Fishing for Survival', pp. 487–498.

³⁸ Seetah, 'Objects Past, Objects Present', pp. 233–253.

³⁹ Metwalli, Bigourdan, and Van Arnim, 'Interim Report of a Shipwreck at Pointe aux Feuilles, Mauritius', pp. 74–81; Van Arnim, '*Le Coureur*', pp. 40–45.

⁴⁰ E.g., <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/factsheets/history-s-o-jos-slave-ship-and-site>; <https://slavery.iziko.org.za/2015/07/23/sao-jose-paquete-de-africa/>.

French slavers *La Victoire* (1804, Mauritius)⁴¹ and *L'Aurore* (1790, Mozambique Island).⁴²

The social sciences' ability to deepen our understanding of the movement of slave and bonded labour populations in the IOA is attested to in other ways. Genetic and isotopic analysis of slave skeletal remains recovered in Cape Town⁴³ and from the 'Liberated African' graveyard on St. Helena⁴⁴ have yielded important information about the lives of the men, women, and children who reached these locations. DNA research has deepened our understanding of the modern Mauritian population's multi-ethnic origins,⁴⁵ confirmed the East African slave origin of modern Siddi communities in southern and western India and the Makrani community in Pakistan, and revealed some of their interactions with local populations through time.⁴⁶ Anthropological and sociological fieldwork has also figured prominently in deepening our understanding of slavery's legacy in places such as Mauritius, Madagascar, and elsewhere.⁴⁷

Establishing and maintaining IOA slavery studies' credibility and significance in academic and public fora will require doing more, however, than situating individual case studies in broader local, regional, global, and comparative contexts. Equally important is the need to make careful, informed use of the sources available to us. As Luthra, van Rossum, and Kuruppath and Asyraf and Putra's chapters remind us, applying new technologies to access, read, and research

⁴¹ Manfio et al., *Reconnaissance Study of the Victoire Shipwreck, Pointe aux Canonnières*.

⁴² <https://core.tdar.org/collection/71542/the-underwater-archeology-of-a-french-slave-ship-in-northern-mozambique?lauror#...:text=On%2017th%20February%2C%201790%2C%20L'Aurore%20was%20hit%20by,fate—in%20the%20morning%20331%20of%20them%20had%20perished.> On slave ship archaeology in the Indian Ocean, see Manfio and Van Arnim, 'Maritime Archaeology of Slave Ships', pp. 492–508.

⁴³ E.g., Cox and Sealy, 'Investigating Identity and Life Histories', pp. 207–224; Kootker et al., 'Dynamics of Indian Ocean Slavery Revealed through Isotopic Data from the Colonial Era Cobern Street Burial Site, Cape Town, South Africa (1750–1827)'.

⁴⁴ E.g., Pearson et al., *Infernal Traffic*; MacQuarrie and Pearson, 'Prize Possessions', pp. 45–72; Sandoval-Velasco et al., 'The Genetic Origins of Saint Helena's Liberated Africans'; Sandoval-Velasco et al., 'The Ancestry and Geographical Origins of St. Helena's Liberated Africans', pp. 1590–1599.

⁴⁵ Fregel et al., 'Multiple Ethnic Origins of Mitochondrial DNA Lineages for the Population of Mauritius'.

⁴⁶ E.g., Gauniyal, Chahaland, and Kshatriya, 'Genetic Affinities of the Siddis of South India', pp. 251–270; Gauniyal, Aggarwal, and Kshatriya, 'Genomic Structure of the Immigrant Siddis of East Africa to Southern India', pp. 427–442; Narang et al., 'Recent Admixture in an Indian Population of African Ancestry', pp. 111–120; Shah et al., 'Indian Siddis', pp. 154–161; Laso-Jadart et al., 'The Genetic Legacy of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade', pp. 977–984.

⁴⁷ E.g., Boswell, *Le Malaise Créole*; Hamilton, Hodgson and Quirk, eds., *Slavery, Memory and Identity*; Regnier, *Slavery and Essentialism in Highland Madagascar*. See also Schrikker and Wickramasinghe, eds., *Being a Slave*.

archival sources must include a keen awareness of the limitations inherent in using these technologies, especially when the sources in question are themselves problematic.⁴⁸

Such analytical rigour is especially important when dealing with quantitative information because of the common tendency to accept statistical data at face value. This is particularly important in efforts to quantify transoceanic slaving voyages in the IOA, efforts which can elicit serious reservations or at least scepticism about the viability and value of such projects.⁴⁹ The limitations of many of the sources upon which we must rely require, for example, careful differentiation between confirmed, probable, and possible slaving ventures if we want to establish the credibility of arguments based on these data.⁵⁰ The need to raise this issue is prompted by the problems which surround the ESTA database.⁵¹ While the information contained in this database is of unquestioned importance in helping to reconstruct the commerce of enslavement in the IOA, its value is unfortunately compromised because it has been poorly curated. A systematic review of all 4,226 of its entries reveals, for example, high duplication rates in which a single voyage by a vessel is reported as two or more separate voyages; in one case, that of the *Hazenbergh* (or *Hasenbergh*) in 1677, the same voyage is recorded on five separate occasions.⁵² The compilation of master voyage lists by region reveals redundancy rates of 9.7 percent for voyages in Southeast Asia, 16.7 percent in South Asia, and 19 percent for voyages associated with the Cape of Good Hope.

Other problems, both large and small, abound. Of particular concern is the database's treating all voyages involving Madagascar and especially those between the Mascarenes and the Grande Île as confirmed slaving ventures even though

⁴⁸ See also Chevaleyre, 'Slaving and Trafficking in Ming China' in the forthcoming *Journal of Global Slavery* special issue on 'Hidden Archives and the Commerce of Enslavement in the Indian Ocean and Asia'.

⁴⁹ E.g., Eltis, 'Is the *SlaveVoyages* Database Useful'.

⁵⁰ Allen, 'Conceptualizing an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slaving Voyage Database', paper presented to the workshop 'Towards an Indian Ocean and Asian Slave Trade Database', International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 27–28 September 2018. I distinguished between these three types of voyages on the basis of the following criteria: Confirmed voyage – archival or other sources include explicit reference to the vessel carrying slaves or trading for, purchasing, or otherwise acquiring slaves during the course of its voyage; Probable voyage – there is strong circumstantial evidence that the vessel traded for slaves or carried slaves as part of its cargo, e.g., it is known to have traded slaves before or after the voyage in question, it was commissioned or otherwise authorised to trade for slaves, it remained in a known slave trading port or area for an extended period of time, etc.; Possible voyage – there is weak circumstantial evidence that the vessel traded for slaves, e.g., it visited ports or places where slave trading is known to have occurred.

⁵¹ <https://exploringslavetradeinasia.com>.

⁵² ESTA voyages 2679, 3672, 3669, 3995, 4147.

contemporary sources and published scholarship demonstrate that many such voyages sought only to procure the provisions, especially rice, cattle, and comestibles such as salt meat, needed to feed Mauritius and Réunion's resident populations or sustain French ships operating in the Indian Ocean during times of war or on their return voyage to France.⁵³ The four convoys/squadrons of Compagnie des Indes and French royal navy ships which sailed from Mauritius and stopped at Foulpointe on Madagascar's east coast before proceeding to Pondichéry, the seat of French power in India, during the mid-eighteenth century are a prominent case in point. Two of these convoys/squadrons – in 1746 (9 ships) and 1748 (7 ships) – sailed during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48) when France actively challenged the British in India,⁵⁴ while the other two sailed in 1757 (8 ships) and 1759 (14 ships) during the Seven Years' War (1756–63) when France once again fought Britain for dominance in South Asia.⁵⁵ That these ships called at Foulpointe primarily to procure provisions is illustrated by the fact that none of the 24 ships in the 1746, 1748, and 1757 convoys are known to have embarked slaves. Of the 14 vessels which left Foulpointe together on 2 August 1759, all 14 carried live cattle in their holds (a total of 912 head) while eight carried cargoes of rice as well; only four had slaves (a total of 27) on board. An argument that the three French royal navy ships which departed Foulpointe for France on 2 October 1761 had Malagasy slaves on board stretches the limits of credulity,⁵⁶ all the more so since the transatlantic slave trade database reveals that only five French ships, all privately-owned, landed African slaves in France, mostly between 1679 and 1739.⁵⁷

Other sources provide additional confirmation that not all ships which reached the Mascarenes from Madagascar or even from Mozambique and the Swahili Coast carried human cargoes. After the Ile de France's colonial assembly banned slave imports in 1794, ships sailing from Port Louis to Diego Garcia, India, Madagascar, Réunion, and the Seychelles had to post bonds for as much as 10,000 piastres (Spanish silver dollars), a staggering sum of money at the time, to

⁵³ On Madagascar's role as a provisioning stop for European ships operating in the Indian Ocean, see Hooper, *Feeding Globalization*. Hooper notes that many of the ships which called at the Grande Île were not interested in procuring slaves and that even if they wanted to do so, they were not always able to procure the human cargoes they sought.

⁵⁴ These voyages are: 1746 – ESTA voyages 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 663, 665, 667; 1748 – ESTA voyages 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688.

⁵⁵ These voyages are: 1757 – ESTA voyages 841, 842, 844, 846, 850, 851, 853, 857; 1759 – ESTA voyages 896, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 905, 906, 907, 910, 912, 913, 914, 915.

⁵⁶ ESTA voyages 958, 959, 960.

⁵⁷ <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>: voyages 34784 (1679); 33731 (1680); 33732 (1680); 30339 (1739); 34748 (1827).

guarantee that their return cargo did not include slaves.⁵⁸ Four and a half years later, on 9 January 1801, the French *chassemarée* *Thomas* arrived at Port Louis from Mozambique with a cargo consisting only of general merchandise that included tobacco, coal tar, and sail cloth; a week later, the French brig *Favorite* arrived from Kilwa with a cargo consisting only of tortoises.⁵⁹ In 1822, Mauritian police chief Edward Byam reported that 39 of 100 coasting voyages which reached the island did not include slaves among their cargo, a striking assertion at a time (1811–c.1832) when a flourishing clandestine trade was responsible for landing a total of some 107,000 slaves on Mauritian and Réunionnais shores.⁶⁰

These problems are compounded by the database organisers' failure to curate the information contained in each entry carefully. Reports about the quantity of a ship's cargo frequently do not indicate the unit of measurement of the commodity in question. The practice of treating each leg of a voyage as a separate sub-voyage makes it difficult to identify the African and/or Malagasy ports or locales where slaves were embarked with any certainty, especially when the ship called at several different ports during the course of its voyage. The same can be said about whether slaves were disembarked at either or both Réunion and Mauritius when the ship's itinerary indicates that it called at Réunion before continuing to Port Louis. This confusion extends to the *balles* (bales) of coffee contained in slave ships' holds when they arrived at Port Louis after stopping at Réunion; only those very well versed in Mascarene economic history will know that this commodity was grown only on Réunion, and that Réunionnais planters normally shipped their crop to Port Louis from whence it was exported to France and elsewhere.⁶¹

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Our knowledge of slavery in the IOA has clearly expanded dramatically since I first became involved in Indian Ocean studies more than half a century ago. The pioneering work of scholars such as Edward A. Alpers, Frederick c. Cooper, and

⁵⁸ E.g., Mauritius National Archives (hereafter MNA): NA 37/7C/112, 7 fructidor An IV [24 August 1796]; NA 37/7C, 26 fructidor An IV [12 September 1796]; NA 48/7C/138, 1 vendémiaire An V [22 September 1796].

⁵⁹ Respectively: MNA: F 4/883, 19 nivôse An IX [9 January 1801]; F 4/886, 26 nivôse An IX [16 January 1801].

⁶⁰ National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew: CO 172/38, Three Years Administration of the Isle de France (otherwise called Mauritius) and particularly in those Parts in which the Commissary of Police (Byam) has been connected with some Reference to the whole Administration of Sir R. Farquhar since the Commencement of his Government, 259. For a fuller discussion of the illegal trade, see Allen, *European Slave Trading*, pp. 141–178.

⁶¹ Allen, 'Plantation Economy and Slavery in the Mascarene Islands (Indian Ocean)'.

Abdul Sheriff on Indian Ocean East Africa and James L. Watson, Anthony Reid, and James Francis Warren on Southeast Asia has inspired others to investigate slavery throughout the IOA.⁶² The 1970s and 1980s also witnessed groundbreaking work by historians such as J.-M. Filliot, Hubert Gerbeau, James C. Armstrong, and William Gervase Clarence-Smith which began to reveal the extent and complexities of the commerce of enslavement in this oceanic world.⁶³

Despite this expanding body of scholarship, research on slavery and slave trading in the IOA has not had the impact on global history and slavery studies that one might otherwise expect it to have. Recent histories of the Indian Ocean, for instance, pay little substantive attention to the commerce of enslavement despite emphasising the importance of trade and commerce in shaping the region's history.⁶⁴ The need to acknowledge this activity's importance is underscored by estimates that 2,392,000 Africans were exported across the Red Sea to the Middle East and India between 800–1900, while Arab, Swahili, and European merchants exported approximately 2 million East African and Malagasy men, women, and children to the Middle East, South Asia, and the Indonesian archipelago during the same period.⁶⁵ In addition to exporting hundreds of thousands of slaves to Central Asia, Indian and other merchants shipped at least 700,000 South Asians to the Indonesian archipelago, the Mascarenes, and South Africa between the fifteenth and late eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Well-developed commercial networks also moved hundreds of thousands of enslaved persons throughout and beyond the Indonesian archipelago. Bali exported an estimated 100,000–150,000 slaves between 1620 and 1830,⁶⁷ while 660,000–1,135,000 slaves are projected to have arrived in the VOC's Southeast Asian establishments between 1600 and 1800, perhaps one-half of whom did so on indigenous 'Malay' vessels and Chinese junks.⁶⁸ Slave raiders imported 200,000–300,000 slaves from insular Southeast Asia into the Sulu sultanate in the southern Philippines between 1770–1870, while the 1820s through 1840s witnessed the exportation of some 386,000–437,000 slaves from Bali, Batak, Kalimantan,

⁶² Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*; Watson, ed., *African and Asian Systems of Slavery*; Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768–1898*; Reid, ed., *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*.

⁶³ See n. 14.

⁶⁴ E.g., Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*; Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean*.

⁶⁵ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. 27, 46, 138; Allen, *European Slave Trading*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Perret, 'From Slave to King', p. 164; Allen, 'Exporting the Unfortunate', pp. 541–542.

⁶⁷ Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade.' Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the India Ocean', p. 144; Raben, 'Cities and the Slave Trade in Early-Modern Southeast Asia', p. 131; Hägerdal, 'The Slaves of Timor', p. 21; Lobato, 'War-Making, Raiding, Slave Hunting and Piracy in the Malukan Archipelago', pp. 73–103.

⁶⁸ Van Rossum, 'The Dutch East India Company and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago World, 1602–1795'. See also Sint Nicolaas, 'Maritime (Im)mobility', pp. 51–75.

Lombok, Manado, the Mentawai Islands, New Guinea, Nias, Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Timor to elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago.⁶⁹

The number of Asian men, women, and children who experienced slavery and associated forms of bonded or coerced labour far exceeded these transoceanic estimates. Between 6.0–6.5 million enslaved Asians are believed to have been traded in Central Asia between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁰ Slaves comprised 10, 15, and as much as 30 percent of pre-colonial populations among, respectively, groups on Sarawak, the island of Nias, and among the Batak and Toraja on Sulawesi.⁷¹ The number of bondmen and -women in insular Southeast Asia remains difficult to ascertain, but perhaps 701,500–970,500 did so in the early nineteenth century, while the Indonesian archipelago (excluding Java and Madura) may have housed 567,000–806,000 in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷² At least 2 percent, or 3.0–3.2 million, of early seventeenth-century Ming China's population of 150–160 million were described as 'slaves' or 'bonded' persons, while approximately 30 percent of Korea's indigenous population, estimated at 14–16 million during the late seventeenth century, was held in bondage between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries.⁷³ Millions more belonged to India's so-called 'slave castes' which accounted for at least one-fifth of Mughal India's population of perhaps 140–150 million during the seventeenth century.

Despite such evidence, a nagging question remains: Why does slavery in the IOA remain marginalised in global history? The continuing 'tyranny of the Atlantic' in slavery studies is clearly partially to blame. Let me suggest, however, that the continuing failure of many Indian Oceanists and Asianists to situate their studies in more fully developed local, regional, global, and comparative contexts plays an equally, if not ultimately more, important role in perpetuating this state of affairs. Their ability to do so requires not only a thorough command of relevant scholarship, something that is not always present in the specialised case studies which characterise this field of study, but also a willingness to develop a broader, more comprehensive sense of the slave experience in this part of the globe. Such contextualisation is crucial to addressing a basic question that all historians must answer: *Why* should others be interested in what we do? Failure to answer this question

⁶⁹ Warren, *The Sulu Zone*, 2nd ed., p. 208; Bosma, 'Commodification and Slavery in the Nineteenth-Century Indonesian Archipelago', pp. 114–115.

⁷⁰ Stanziani, *Bonded Labor*, p. 90.

⁷¹ Reid, 'Closed' and 'Open' Slave Systems in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia', p. 161.

⁷² Bosma, 'Commodification and Slavery', pp. 114–115.

⁷³ Zurndorfer, 'Economic, Social, and Legal Aspects of Slavery'; Chevaleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China'; Lovins, 'Korea: A Slave Society'; Kwan and Shin, 'On Population Estimates of the Y-Dynasty, 1392–1910,' pp. 289–330, cited in Bae and Kim, 'History Lessons from the Late Joseon Dynasty Period of Korea', p. 1314.

in a compelling manner confirms the widespread scepticism that exists in many quarters about the heuristic value of history and slavery studies. Unfortunately, we live at a time when the humanities in general and history in particular are viewed as irrelevant by many people within as well as outside academe who believe that education should be all about producing ‘worker bees’ versed in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics but little else. Such attitudes are reminiscent of the ancient Indian parable about the blind men and the elephant, the moral of which is that true knowledge and understanding requires us to look beyond specialised ‘truths’ and contextualise the world in which we live. As we continue further into the twenty-first century, understanding the nature, dynamics, and legacy of the metaphorical ‘elephant’ that is the complex global human experience with slavery means that we must vigorously embrace that much-feared axiom in the age in which we live: *Non solum dare scire, sed etiam intelligere*, dare not only to know, but also to understand.

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Short Biographies

Richard B. Allen is the editor of Ohio University Press's Indian Ocean Studies series and a professor emeritus of history. In addition to editing *Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia, 1250-1900* (Brill, 2022), he is the author of *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850* (Ohio University Press, 2014), and more than 80 articles, book chapters, and essays on slavery, slave trading, abolition, and post-abolition labour systems in the Indian Ocean and Asia. He is currently writing a book on global slaveries.

Muhammad Asyraf is a promovendus at the Historical Institute, Leiden University, the Netherlands, and has written on postcolonial archaeology. His research is currently focused on judicial violence under the VOC in the Southeast Asian Archipelago.

Daniel B. Domingues da Silva is an Associate Professor of History at Rice University, U.S.A., and host of the renowned website SlaveVoyages.org. He is the author of *The Atlantic Slave Trade from West Central Africa, 1780-1867* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and of numerous articles published in peer-reviewed journals, including *Slavery & Abolition*, *Atlantic Studies*, and more recently *Monsoon: Journal of the Indian Ocean Rim*.

Hans Hägerdal is a Professor in History at Linnaeus University, Sweden, and has written extensively about East and Southeast Asian history, including Vietnam, Bali, Timor, and Maluku. Among his monographs are *Lords of the Land, Lords of the Sea: Conflict and Adaptation in Early Colonial Timor, 1600-1800* (KITLV Press, 2012), *Held's History of Sumbawa* (AUP, 2017), and *Savu: The History and Oral Traditions on an Island of Indonesia* (with Geneviève Duggan; NUS Press, 2018). He has published several articles on slavery in eastern Indonesia.

Jane Hooper is Professor in History and the Director of Undergraduate History Programs at George Mason University, U.S. She has published widely about the history of Madagascar and the Indian Ocean World, and presently conducts work on a slave trade database that documents movements of enslaved people in the Indian Ocean World. Among her works are *Feeding Globalization: Madagascar and the Provisioning Trade, 1600-1800* (Ohio University Press, 2017) and *Yankees in the Indian Ocean: American commerce and whaling, 1786-1860* (Ohio University Press, 2022).

Matthew Hopper is a Professor in History at the California Polytechnic State University, U.S. His areas of interest are Africa and the Indian Ocean. Specifically, his research focuses on the history of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean and the comparative history of slavery and abolition. He has written numerous articles and book chapters, and the monograph *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (Yale University Press, 2015).

Angelina Kalashnikova is a postdoctoral researcher and KiTE (Kiel Training for Excellence) fellow at Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel. Her research focuses on the history of Muscovy in the 15th–17th centuries, with particular expertise in source studies, diplomatics, and palaeography. She investigates themes such as judicial procedure, the incorporation of Siberia into Muscovy, processes of (de) colonisation, interethnic marriages, and slavery.

Priya Kapoor is Professor of Communication and Media in the Department of Politics and Global Affairs at Portland State University, and her research interests span grassroots social movements globally. The chapter in this published volume on coolie labour in Shimla and modern slavery, is the outcome of an ongoing research project involving archival and field-based work. She is currently studying the community radio movement in South Asia, especially India, and how other local movements supporting environment and sustainability struggle to find voice in an age of the digital divide. Dr. Kapoor has published in the area of Critical/Cultural Studies, race, class and gender in the media, and research methods. Some of the publications are available at <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/>.

Pascal Konings is a junior researcher and coordinator of the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia (ESTA) Database Project at the International Institute of Social History, The Netherlands. He is also a PhD student at the IISH and Radboud University. His PhD research focuses on patterns of enslaved maritime mobilities and enslaved experiences during these mobilities across colonial Dutch Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Manjusha Kuruppath is a researcher at Huygens Institute, the Netherlands. She is an early modern historian whose fields include early modern global history, cultural history using VOC archives, and the history of disease.

Mrinalini Luthra is a data ethics specialist at Huygens Institute, the Netherlands.

Fathiyarizq Mahendra Putra is a graduate student in the Master Program in Computer Science, at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta interested in Data Mining. He is currently working on multilabel sentiment analysis using supervised learning

Michael C. Reidy is a doctoral student at the Australian Catholic University, Australia. He has published about slave trade in the western Indian Ocean World.

Filipa Ribeiro da Silva is a Senior Researcher at the International Institute of Social History, The Netherlands. She is specialized on Economic and Social History, with a focus on global labour history, slave trade, slavery, colonialism, and business history. Ribeiro da Silva has published extensively on slave trade, other forms of coerced mobilities in the Atlantic and Asia, including *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange: Slave Trading in the South Atlantic, 1590-1867*, co-edited with David Richardson (2014).

Matthias van Rossum is a Senior Researcher at the International Institute of Social History, The Netherlands. His main areas of interest are Global Labour History with a focus on maritime labour history, coercion in labour relations and the dynamics of labour conflicts and social relations. He has published widely on Asian slavery and slave trade, including *Kleurrijke Tragiek. De Geschiedenis van Slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Verloren, 2015).

Merve Tosun is a historian with expertise in early modern colonial and slavery history, and currently works as policy advisor at the Dutch Research Council (NWO). She has formerly worked at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

Lodewijk Wagenaar has been a Senior Lecturer (Docent) in History at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and a curator of Amsterdam Museum. He has published widely on the early modern history of Sri Lanka, including *Aan de overkant: Ontmoetingen in dienst van de VOC en WIC (1600-1800)* (Sidestone Press, 2015) and *Cinnamon & elephants: Sri Lanka and the Netherlands from 1600* (Rijksmuseum, 2016).

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