

N3 – Research network ‘Routes and Roots in Colonial and Global History’

Histories of slavery and colonial violence: local and global connections

The history of slavery is a buoyant field that interacts with important societal debates. It is also directly related to different forms of colonial and postcolonial violence. This session takes stock of current research in the field, with a particular focus on Asian colonial pasts. Three presenters will discuss how local and colonial practices of enslavement interacted. They will look at how people became enslaved and traded but also at what happened with them after manumission. Their projects are based upon a variety of archival sources such as wills, manumission registers and land deeds. Both case studies and a database project are presented. In addition, we will have a more theoretical reflection on violence undergirding colonial and postcolonial political and social conditions.

Dries Lyna (RU)

On solid ground? Suburban land ownership of freed slaves in 18th-century Sri Lanka

In pre-industrial societies nothing was as essential to survival as the ownership of land. Within colonial structures, some individuals would grant their enslaved upon manumission temporary or life usufruct to a piece of land, or, exceptionally, made them owner permanently. In this exploration, I use last wills and manumission deeds (1702-1765) to chart patterns of donations of land in the coastal areas of 18th-century Sri Lanka. By linking donations to the land registers of suburban districts around Colombo and Galle I aim to uncover what, in the medium to long term, land ownership meant for the manumitted, their children and grandchildren.

Gillian Matthys (GU)

VIOLENCE WORK: Beyond the black box of the oppressive machinery of colonial violence

It is commonly acknowledged that violence was central to colonialism – no colonialism without violence, and colonialism is violence – yet it still seems we do not understand colonial violence very well in its everyday dimensions. We have a good idea about the oppressive machinery, and of bits and pieces of its constitutive elements and practices – for example prisons –, but many of the violent practices colonialism relied on, often informal ones, remain in the dark, especially for the period after the colonial occupation. We also lack a differentiated historical understanding of how it impacted the colonized in their everyday life specifically. And we certainly do not always have the means to understand and explain why colonial violence impacted the colonized differently within and across colonized societies. The purpose of this project is to generate a comprehensive and meticulously researched understanding of the everyday violence work crucial to building the colonial state as well as interrogate the wider implications for the

monopoly on violence in colonial settings. Ultimately, this project aims to recalibrate discussions about the centrality of violence in state-building more broadly by documenting the use of everyday violence by both state agents and ordinary people, and what this betrays about the nature of colonial power.

Alicia Schrikker (LU)

Entwined practices of colonial and local slavery in the Indonesian archipelago 1600 - 1860

The recent growing global – and especially Dutch - interest in the history of slavery, also includes a renewed interest in the history of slavery in Asia. The focus of most of the recent studies is on colonial slavery and focuses on the lives of the enslaved in and around the colonial enclaves such as Batavia, Cochin and Colombo. A question that is often raised, but that seldom answered is how colonial and local practices of slavery interacted and shaped each other. The Indonesian archipelago, with its diverse practices of slavery and bondage and its long colonial history, forms a complex, but fascinating space to rethink this relationship between colonial and local slavery. I will illustrate through a discussion of a number of cases from various regions in the archipelago, from the 17th to the 19th century.

Merve Tosun & Pascal Konings (both IISH)

Exploring slave trade in Asia: fostering new connections through a collaborative database

Scholarship on the history of slave trade in Asia and the wider Indian Ocean region has been steadily developing in recent years, bringing forth important analyses of regional mechanisms of forced labour and relocation. In order to consolidate this research and work towards a more global history of slavery, the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia (ESTA) project has set up a collaborative database that aims to reconstruct the historical slave trade in the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia region. The project invites data contributions and continues to collect, curate, and extract new data on slave trade in Asia, allowing researchers to generate new perspectives on the history of slave trade.