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Revisualizing Slavery
Revisualizing Slavery

Visual sources on slavery in the Indonesian Archipelago & Indian Ocean

Edited by
Nancy Jouwe
Wim Manuhutu
Matthias van Rossum
& Merve Tosun
This volume originated from follow-up discussions to a 2016 workshop on slavery in the Indonesian archipelago. The workshop was entitled ‘Mapping slavery in the Indonesian archipelago under Dutch colonial rule’ and took place at the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on the 21st and 22nd of October 2016.

The workshop was an initiative of the research project Mapping Slavery and was organized by Wim Manuhutu and Nancy Jouwe, in collaboration with historian Professor Bambang Purwanto, affiliated with the UGM.

Speakers were historians Susan Legêne, Bambang Purwanto, Matthias van Rossum, Henk Niemeijer, Sri Margana, Sjoerd Jaarsma, Wim Manuhutu, and Nancy Jouwe, archaeologist Widya Nayati, and (non)fiction authors Reggie Baay and Iksana Banu.

Some of the insights which emerged from the workshop were that, judging by the figures, VOC slavery grew faster and earlier than WIC slavery; plantation slavery started earlier in the Indonesian archipelago – namely in Banda – than in the Caribbean; Dutch knowledge transfer moved from East to West, from the Indian archipelago to the Caribbean; and the VOC provided a structure for slavery, but many enslaved people were traded via private European and Asian parties (although these were often employed by the VOC).

One year later, this workshop was followed by an afternoon workshop at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, in October 2017, during which a group of (art) historians, heritage specialists and curators exchanged views on visual sources in the East. The aim was to outline what visual and material sources can say about the history of slavery, particularly in and around former VOC territories in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. Subsequently, after a period of fundraising, this volume was compiled.

We would like to thank Professor Purwanto and the team at Gadjah Mada University for their hospitality and pleasant cooperation, and we are extra grateful to the students who gave the workshop their very best care and attention.

We thank the Rijksmuseum and especially Eveline Sint Nicolaas for facilitating the workshop in Amsterdam. Thanks also to Lodewijk Wagenaar.

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Introduction

This publication explores the Dutch history of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and Indian Ocean, taking visual sources as its starting point. With the focus on visual sources, we try to open up views on this history of slavery and to reflect on the interaction between word and image. Thanks to new historical research, perspectives on the colonial history of slavery in particular are shifting. It is important to look critically at our image of this past, in particular at visual representations and what they signify.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the VOC was active in an area that stretched from South Africa to Japan, from Persia to Madagascar, and from Taiwan to Papua. In the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of the Netherlands directly administered colonial rule over an immense territory, primarily in the Indonesian archipelago. Over time, the area in which the Dutch colonial empire was active also shifted, due to constant conflict, first with the Portuguese and Spanish, later mainly with the English. Therefore, for the sake of convenience, the term ‘the East’ is often used. In this publication we will refer to the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean.

Research into written sources increasingly points to the complex diversity of forms of slavery and other types of unfree labor in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean world, in many cases to the harsher aspects and similarities with the Atlantic past of slavery. At the same time, the depictions and visual representations of this past have not yet been sufficiently scrutinized. What can we learn about slavery from visual sources? What picture do they paint? And how should we understand these visual representations in relation to insights from written historical sources? What role might visual depictions have played in shaping and reinforcing traditional representations of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean area? And how can visual sources help break the visual silence?

In this book, we have attempted a polyphonic exploration in which historians, heritage specialists, cultural scientists and art historians all have their say. The objective was to use the versatility, the eloquence, as well as the silences of visual sources to cast a new light on our past of slavery. We were also curious to know how these visual representations and perceptions relate to the everyday cultural and political realities from which these images originate. This is a complex issue that will be revisited throughout this book.
Social and scientific debates

This visual exploration is an important step towards making histories of slavery that are not so deeply engrained in public memory comprehensible and transparent. It is true that, in academic circles, the historical existence of slavery in the Indian Ocean region has never been swept under the carpet. Nevertheless, in comparison with the Atlantic world, the focus in academic research on the slave trade, slavery and forced labor in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean is negligible. In social circles, too, the absence of these histories of slavery is often conspicuous. The fact that slavery and related forms of coercion were widespread in local societies and in the European colonial empires around the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago was never entirely unknown to the wider public. Yet the ‘silence’ surrounding this legacy of slavery is much greater than the silences, now forcefully broken, that surrounded the Atlantic past of slavery. Many societies in the Indonesian archipelago and Indian Ocean are strongly influenced by their intertwined local and colonial slavery histories, that resonate far beyond the official abolition of the slave trade and slavery, sometimes even to the present day. Why is it that these non-Atlantic slavery histories have received relatively little attention?

This applies not only to the formerly colonized countries in South-East and South Asia but also to European countries that acted as colonizers. In European societies, questions of historical responsibility for colonialism and slavery overseas are gaining prominence in social debates about racism, culture and inequality, while, at the same time, understanding and processing colonial histories of slavery and violence in the former VOC area is still conspicuously wrestled with. For example, an envisaged Amsterdam museum, and now national museum on slavery is still, remarkably, solely focused on the Atlantic past.

Yet change seems possible. For example, in its temporary exhibition on slavery in 2021, the Rijksmuseum does build a bridge between the Dutch history of slavery in the Atlantic and Asian colonial empires. 2021 is also the year in which, after four hundred years, the genocide on the Banda Islands (1621) is commemorated, which created the conditions for the first plantation system in the territory of the Dutch Republic to be based on the work of enslaved people. The controversy surrounding ‘empire builder’ Jan Pieterszoon Coen, which re-intensified in 2020, shows how this past still resonates in the present. Coen, one of the most famous but also most notorious VOC officials, who rose to the rank of governor general, founded Batavia after his troops had burnt down the city of Jacatra. On the Moluccan Banda islands, he massacred a large proportion of the indigenous population, then brought enslaved people to Banda and set up nutmeg plantations, usually referred to in euphemistic terms as ‘perken’, the plantation owners and slave owners as ‘perkeniers’.

The same applies to the discussion regarding the so called Gouden Koets [Golden Coach], which will be temporarily exhibited in the Amsterdam Museum in 2021, with special attention to one of the side panels, ‘Hulde der Koloniën’ [Homage to the Colonies]. The Golden Coach was a gift from the people of Amsterdam to Queen Wilhelmina in 1898. Until recently, the coach was used once a year by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima to travel from their palace to the Council Chamber in The Hague, where, each September, the King traditionally opens the political year with a solemn speech.

Silence and distortion

So, the history of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and Indian Ocean is painfully visible, and invisible at the same time. How should we understand this? One explanation for this apparent contradiction lies in the insight that silences about such visible histories are created by active concealment and silence, but also by casual reference to this past. Because these painful histories take on a milder appearance through this casualness, and thus a more marginal place, further exploration or processing of this past seems unnecessary. From this, silences arise, because images are created that slowly push the painfully visible histories into the margins of dominant national or soothing narratives.

The traditional image of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and Indian Ocean has been shaped and dominated by words such as ‘mild’ and ‘domestic’. This traditional conceptualization of a mild and urban Asian slavery, of a slavery consisting mainly of domestic servants took shape not only in words but was also powerfully presented and reinforced in images. This had already happened early on. For example, Pieter Cnoll and Cornelis van Nijenrode had themselves portrayed by Jacob Coeman in 1655. The domestic scene is painted in soft colors. On the left are their daughters. All around are symbols of prosperity and excess. Flowers, fans, dogs. On the right, an enslaved woman with a fruit basket. An enslaved servant is taking a piece of fruit. The painting conjures up an image of the superiority and wealth of a European merchant and a Eurasian woman, but also of good-natured domestic slavery with enslaved people as confidants and house servants.

But this painting also has another dimension. One of Cnoll’s enslaved men was Untung Surapati (Surapati). It is quite possible that it is he who is depicted here. It is this Surapati who, as the story goes, was mistreated by a later owner and ran away. He subsequently managed to work his way up from runaway to army leader. He turned against the voc and revolted from East Java, where he managed to gain a powerful independent position in the late seventeenth century. During the so-called First Javanese War of Succession (1703–1708), the VOC undertook large-scale military expeditions to deal with Surapati and his military power. After his death, the VOC is said to have tracked down Surapati’s body, burned it and scattered it at sea. It shows that their fear was great: in doing this, the Company sought to avoid the creation of a place of pilgrimage for future resistance. In the Netherlands, Surapati is no longer as well known, but is mainly referred to as a rebel, a runaway or a slave, as in the painting by Pieter Cnoll. In Indonesia, however, Surapati is widely known as a resistance fighter, and has even been proclaimed a national hero.
So, these contrasting images exist side by side. Yet it was not the images of the harshness of slavery, the violence, and the resistance that survived, but rather the images of domestic and mild ‘Asian’ slavery which were later reinforced and expanded upon. In nineteenth-century prints, serving and bathing female Asiatic slaves became a recurring theme. Painted in soft colors, these visual representations created an image of geniality, docility and even a (colonial) suggestion of sensuality – as Caroline Drieënhuizen makes clear in her chapter dissecting these images.

Slavery and representation

Where does the dominant image of ‘mild’ ‘Asian’ slavery in the Netherlands and internationally come from? Two main sources can be identified. First, we see, certainly in the case of the Southeast Asian and Dutch colonial contexts, that the image of slavery was strongly influenced by the deep transformations colonial slavery underwent in the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slavery had an important economic function in the VOC empire and beyond: from the production of global trade goods such as spices and sugar, to labor in the silver and gold mines, the maintenance of infrastructure and the provision of transport.

Unfree labor and slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean

In this region, there existed a diverse and complex body of forms of slavery and forced labor: unfree people were forced to obey claims to the use and possession of their labor or their bodies.

The main forms were:

- Market slavery: an owner has the right of ownership and use in relation to the enslaved person.
- Debt bondage and pawn slavery: a (temporary) obligation to repay a debt to a master or creditor, often by means of forced labor, or by putting oneself, one’s wife or child at the service of the creditor. Temporary unfreedom could lead to permanent unfreedom or unequal relations, through sale or inheritance or as a result of a (collective) debt of honor.
- Caste slavery: forms of unfreedom, inequality and forced labor based on social differentiations around caste. In such cases, landlords and slave owners often had control over unfree persons belonging to low-ranking slave castes, including a right to (a portion of) their labor, but usually no official right to sell.
- ‘Herendiensten’ [vassal services] or ‘corvee’ systems: labor or the supply of products by local or colonial authorities was enforced on the claim that locals, as ‘subjects’, owed this forced effort to the ‘sovereign’. This was not slavery, because one did not have a formal right to sell one’s subjects. However, a ruler could demand (part of) the labor of local populations, force them to work, relocate and control them, and use violence.

These forms of slavery and forced labor already existed before the arrival of Europeans, but with European colonial expansion, market slavery (or chattel slavery) and the large-scale slave trade exploded. There were several points of departure and arrival in the Indian Ocean. The legislation shaping this market or chattel slavery was imposed and enforced around the globe by the European colonial empires.

During the course of the eighteenth century, the importance of production by means of forced labor for the VOC greatly increased – these ‘herendiensten’ [vassal labor] were the forerunners of the nineteenth century Cultuurstelsel [cultivation system]. This shift did not completely replace slavery but did make it less important economically. After the British-led abolition of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century, the colonial government organized the mobilization of labor almost entirely through other coercive systems, mainly through the enforced cultivation system, but later also increasingly through convict and contract labor. With this, the nature of slavery in the Dutch colonial context also changed.
Although colonial slavery in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago had been very similar to that of the Atlantic world until the end of the eighteenth century, in the nineteenth century it was increasingly confined to domestic settings. However, the images coming from these nineteenth-century colonial households have been wrongly projected onto the ‘Asian’ slavery past in a broader sense and onto the earlier period. This has placed a veil of domesticity – in itself a false image – over much more complex and harsher slavery histories. But at least as important is the fact that slavery had not disappeared in the nineteenth century and after.

A second cause of the misperception arose precisely in reaction to the continuation of slavery practices after the abolition of the slave trade, and subsequently, on 1 January 1860, of slavery. In response to the criminalization, slavery was continued informally in many places. Colonial, local, and later post-colonial authorities increasingly dismissed these slavery practices as ‘traditional’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘benign’. They had little control over, and often did little to address, the continued informal forms of slavery in Asian and African societies under colonial rule. But these stereotypes allowed colonial authorities – without having to exert too much effort – to resist the growing international and moral pressure to combat slavery. Thus, colonial representations of ‘Asian slavery’ emerged, which not only survive in academic discourse to this day, but also continue to play an important role in public dealings with the history of slavery in, for example, Thailand, India and Indonesia. Can we rid ourselves of this colonial distortion of the past?

Body of sources

In this publication, we do not use an unambiguously defined body of sources. The visual sources come from different streams of lore, and we have tried to include as many as possible. Nevertheless, the majority of visual sources produced are of European origin. These are paintings commissioned by a more affluent voc elite or by the voc itself. We also include drawings and sketches made by voc employees, or pictures from printed publications – in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mainly travel and country descriptions, but in the nineteenth century also a growing number of descriptions of peoples and typologies. Only part of the visual source material is non-European: this usually concerns images or parts of writings commissioned by Asian rulers. Several Dutch and international museums and heritage institutions house rich collections of paintings, engravings and prints related to this history, and offer snapshots of its variety of stories.

The inventory and the contributions to this book clearly take as their starting point the areas and contexts that are connected by the Dutch colonial presence in voc territory. This has of course guided the various reflections in this book, but also poses interesting questions about how different societies with a shared past deal with these painful histories of slavery. The visual sources hold up a mirror to us: what does a sketch or a watercolor say about the perceptions of slavery? This visualization does not stem only from the physical context and is not only imposed by the makers themselves. It is interwoven with dominant ideas surrounding the subject, on the part of both the maker and the beholder. Contemporary media and early modern sources are permeated with views on slaves, and on slavery and the Dutch share in it. By researching (iconic) images, these representations, both historical and contemporary, can be exposed and dissected.

Visual representations in three layers

The visual sources on the history of slavery fall broadly into three categories.

First, we find enslaved people depicted in (family) portraits or similar intimate situations. They often appear as servants in a domestic scene, or as status symbols in an individual or family portrait. These portraits are admittedly highly contrived and offer a limited view. But, at the same time, they provide a good basis for the discussion about who a ‘slave’ actually was. Sometimes we even see enslaved people who can be traced back to historically identifiable individuals, such as Philander or Roose or Surapati. Can we use these depictions to learn more about their lives? About what the enslaved looked like, what the expectations around them looked like, and why? What patterns do we recognize, and what do they tell us? And what are the difficulties in interpreting them?

In a second category, we find enslaved people in more general, almost everyday situations: as part of a cityscape, depictions of landscapes, streets or events. We rarely see them in the foreground; usually they are literally in the margins, as part of a backdrop. They work in the streets, wander around markets, run errands, bathe, lug barrels, or carry a parasol for a master. The limitation here is that enslaved people have become anonymous characters. At the same time, these images show a ‘normalized’ presence of enslaved people, almost everyday street scenes, often in grey tones, which break with the image of ‘mild’ Asian ‘domestic slavery’.

In a third category, the existence of enslaved people is strikingly absent. These are visual representations of which we know from written sources that the presence (and intensive deployment) of enslaved people should be evident all around. For example, landscapes in which enslaved people – or any people – are absent, but which are nevertheless significant for Asia’s history of slavery. Think of drawings of the mines of Silida (Sumbatra), which contain clues to the work and lives of the many enslaved individuals who worked there. Or the landscapes and maps of the Ommelanden [surroundings] of Batavia, where sugar distilleries, and also, explicitly, ‘plantations’, are frequently mentioned. We know from court cases and ego documents that enslaved people worked there as well, but here the plantations and fields are often concealingly referred to as ‘gardens’. While interacting with other sources these ‘empty’ visual representations can thus be revived. And they in turn help to critique the euphemisms and dogmas that can emerge from written sources.

Reflections in three parts

The layout of the book broadly follows the above tripartite division. The first part shines a light on visual silences: what do or don’t images show – and what
are we overlooking ourselves? In her contribution, Nancy Jouwe describes the connection that historical visual sources have with the ‘cultural archive’. Remco Raben writes about the marginalization of the enslaved and the silencing of slavery’s violence in images. Slavery in Dutch Asia was physically exhausting, and the slave trade was large-scale, but visual representations of this slavery past seem to argue the opposite. In his contribution, Matthias van Rossum discusses this and elaborates on a newly discovered painting that possibly depicts a slave market in Batavia’s Ommelanden.

In the second part, the focus is on portraiture, stereotyping and typologies. On the basis of a special photograph, Lygia Giay writes about the long history of the stereotyping of Papuans. Girija Joshi in her contribution problematizes an overly narrow understanding of (slave) labor and reflects on the relationship between labor, exploitation, and social status in the Indian subcontinent by means of a nineteenth-century ethnographic work. Caroline Drieënhuizen zooms in on the depiction of enslaved women as a colonial ‘type’, while Eveline Sint-Nicolaas describes the journey of a painting showing a merchant with enslaved people as a telling example of the depiction of slavery in Asia. Carine Zaayman discusses her exhibition Under Cover of Darkness about enslaved women in the early Cape Colony, which was on display at the Slave Lodge in Cape Town from 2018.

The third and final part covers landscapes, cities and local memories of slavery. Bondan Kanumoyoso shares the story of Depok, now a city to the south of Jakarta, which was built, worked on, and inhabited by a community of enslaved people and their descendants. Alícia Schrikker’s contribution highlights the memory of slavery in Sri Lanka, which seems to be linked to the complex relationship between slavery and serfdom. Maria Holtrop turns our gaze to slavery in the Dutch Republic, with a painting from Dokkum as a starting point, and reveals the life course of three enslaved people portrayed in it. Wim Manuhutu’s contribution breathes life into (colonial) maps and plans that conceal painful stories behind indirect references to slavery. Sri Margana’s contribution deals with slavery in eighteenth-century Java, with special reference to illustrations showing enslaved people in a Javanese manuscript. Merve Tosun in her piece focuses on the colonial world view that emerges in Johannes Rach’s ‘everyday’ cityscapes.

In the current Dutch discourse on race, visual sources are important, but due to their obscurity, often invisible as a source related to slavery and consequently to race. The longer lines between the current social debate and the colonial sources are being drawn ever more clearly by activists, scientists, artists, writers and curators. The visual sources we address in this book contribute to a greater visibility of the afterlife of slavery.
PART 1

Visualizing silences: presence and absences of slavery
This 2003 quote by British researcher, curator, and artist Lubaina Himid identifies a widespread need felt by various contemporary artists in Europe. They want to bring out the colonial history that is hardly known or seen, in order to acknowledge the existence of certain stories and histories and to ensure they are represented. In the Netherlands also, it has become a mission for a growing group of artists, especially artists of color (e.g. Felix de Rooy, Iris Kensmil, Patricia Kaersenhout, Brian Elstak, Charl Landvreugd, Remy Jungerman, Quinsy Gario, Raquel van Haver, Stacii Samidin). With their work, they literally present these untold histories to the public.

The dynamics mentioned above can be seen as the counterpart of the corresponding growth of interesting visual sources of the Dutch history of slavery and colonialism among researchers, curators as well as an expanding audience. I see both groups, contemporary visual artists who want to depict the unseen, and on the other hand researchers who search for existing but sometimes unknown historical visual sources, as being two sides of the same coin: the desire to expose, visualize and materialize (make physical) colonial traces.

In this article I will discuss one side of that coin: the growing importance of visual historical sources in research into slavery and colonialism. These sources are connected to our cultural archive: the stories, myths and fairy tales that we as a nation tell ourselves with reference to our colonial history and the role of race within them. Some visual sources actually do show certain aspects of that colonial history. Yet these visual references seem to be mentioned only casually, go unnoticed or are even actively ignored. This article attempts to sketch out these issues.

The role of visual sources in historical research

In his oration held in Groningen in 1905, Johan Huizinga indicated that the task of the historian was to conjure up an image of the past. He considered the visual to be important and produced historical images himself. In the twentieth century, however, according to Beunders and Kleppe, attention to the visual has lagged behind in the Netherlands. This is symptomatic of the strange relationship between the visual source and historical research. For a long time, (Dutch) historians did not consider this combination to be self-
The written material was the dominant source, visual material was mainly additional and was primarily used to support the work described. The study of visual sources lay mainly with art history. In the Netherlands this is now shifting; as of this millennium, the visual source has gained more respect from historians and more attention is now being paid to it in education and in historical research.

The broader and interdisciplinary research field of visual culture, in which disciplines such as cultural studies, gender studies, anthropology, art history and cultural history come together, is also experiencing significant growth. An important Dutch voice in this is, of course, Mieke Bal, and, more broadly, Gender Studies in the Netherlands focuses on it, but in fact it has found only a sparse following here relatively recently, certainly in comparison with various neighboring countries (Germany, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom). Moreover, in the Netherlands it seems to be associated primarily with photography.

Which visual sources
The photograph or film as a source can be found in the work of Dutch researchers such as René Kok, Erik Somers, Marga Altena, Gerda Jansen Hendriks and Louis Zweers. Their work often deals with (post)colonial relations, conflicts, clashes and connections. Here the visual material functions as a representation of social relationships and constructions, for example through the effects of propaganda by the Dutch government in the Dutch East Indies, or (disproving) stereotypical representations of women.

In a museum context, there are several recent examples. In fact, the exhibition Dossier Indië, which was on display in the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam in 2020, continues this trend. Dutch East Indies photography in this exhibition from the archive of the National Museum of World Cultures presents a visual narrative that does not want to repeat images of the idyll and nostalgia, but wants to show abuse of power, violence, submission, and resistance. A number of critics, however, feel that guest curator Tom Hoffman is not necessarily succeeding.

In the exhibition Asia>Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum, 2015-2016) the stakes were different: here, the luxury, aesthetics and taste of the ‘Golden Age’ were the focus of attention, through paintings, maps and other material objects. Over a year later, the Rijksmuseum presented Goede Hoop. Zuid-Afrika en Nederland vanaf 1600 [Good Hope. South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600 onwards]. This exhibition attempted a more self-critical look at Dutch colonial role in South Africa. Again, critics pointed to the failed attempt of their mission.

In 2013, with the exhibition Suspended Histories, private museum Van Loo[m had invited various artists to depict the close ties that existed between the Van Loom family, the VOC and Asia. In the Autumn of 2017, Indonesian visual artist Iswanto Hartono (associated with the Ruangrupa art collective) held an exhibition in the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam in which he depicted the colonial relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia. In Hoorn (Westfries Museum, 2019) the exhibition Depok, de droom van Cornelis Chastelein [Depok, Cornelis Chastelein’s dream] was on display, about slave owner and VOC official Cornelis Chastelein, who left his estate Depok to the enslaved people living there. Like Good Hope, this exhibition alternated historical pieces with contemporary portraits of, in this case, people from Depok in Indonesia and the Netherlands.

Returning to the work of researchers, Paul Bijl’s thesis from 2011 is important to mention. He gave an analysis of photographs from 1904 that showed atrocities committed by the Dutch against Indonesians during the Aceh War. He analyzed reactions to the photographs throughout the twentieth century and found that the reality of the photographs clashed with the Dutch self-
image. Here there was an unresolved past, resulting in a twilight zone ‘between remembering and forgetting’; the photos had ‘paradoxically always been visible, yet were regularly experienced as absent’, according to Bijl. Like Bijl, I am interested in that paradox. In our publication we will mostly look at paintings, drawings and sketches from the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and only to a limited extent at photography.

**Images of slavery**

Images of enslaved people, and even more generally the visibility of black presence (images of black people) in the Dutch colonies seems sparse – until we look more closely. The most iconic images we associate with Dutch slavery come from the Scottish-Dutch John Gabriel Stedman (1744-1797) who, in 1796, published his classic *Narrative, of a five-years’ expedition against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam*. The work has been described by the famous couple Richard and Sally Price as ‘one of the richest and most evocative accounts ever written of a flourishing slave society’. In fact, it was not the text of this publication that was of ultimate and decisive importance, but the illustrations. The book contains eighty engravings by famous engraver William Blake, based on drawings by Stedman himself. The woman who has received a whipping, the man hanging from a hook hooked into his rib; these are now iconic images that are known and used everywhere. The book, which was translated into Dutch in 1799, had a huge impact in Europe.

So, is there any Asian counterpart? Not as far as visible violence is concerned. But the work of the minister and draughtsman Jan Brandes is particularly important in this context. He stayed in colonial Indonesia, Sri Lanka and South Africa at the end of the eighteenth century. He drew various enslaved people from his household and included their names. In contrast to Stedman, he drew harmonious and pleasant domestic scenes. Yet we know that Brandes treated his enslaved servants badly, to the point that several ran away from his household and one tried to poison Brandes. These historical facts contrast sharply with the sweet drawings.

In this publication we search for images, visual sources of slavery in the VOC area – meaning the former Dutch East Indies including New Guinea, South Asia and the Cape Colony – which refer to the presence of slavery. A few things stand out in this context. Firstly, there is what Remco Raben refers to as a visual silence. This silence exists first of all because the bodies of enslaved people are actually missing, precisely in places where we know slaves were present or even formed the majority, such as on a plantation. The harmonious images of tranquil plantations create an image of order, peace, beauty and rulership. That this order had to be brought about daily with sweat and violence is deliberately left out of the visual representations. But even if there are enslaved people present, they often go unnoticed. This is a second layer of sighted blindness, where the presence of enslaved people is seen as of lesser importance or is even ignored. This sighted blindness, whereby the black and colored presence is dismissed as futile and ignored, is an expression of the hegemony of the white (colonial) gaze.

A third layer can be seen in portraits from the early modern period in the Netherlands, where the depicted black people and people of color in fact function as props and/or as types, as I have argued elsewhere and as Carolien Drieënhuizen also shows in her contribution. The colored presence perpetuates the important position of the white people in the painting while they themselves do not actually matter as persons. These representations of insignificance (being a prop) and actual dehumanization produce a norm. They cause the majority of viewers (certainly the dominant group but not exclusively so) to experience this as something normal. It makes these black and colored bodies (almost) invisible, even if they are literally at the center of a painting. This is where stereotyping occurs. These three forms of dehumanization of people of color in visual representations – visual silence, sighted blindness and stereotyping – are informed by the cultural archive.

**The cultural archive**

The term ‘cultural archive’ was coined by Edward Said (1983) and refers to the ways in which narratives, stories and fairy tales, within the context of the colonial past, create a basis for knowledge. These narratives unconsciously link to feelings and thus perpetuate a colonial and radicalized way of thinking, feeling and acting that is taken for granted. Gloria Wekker has further analyzed the functioning of this process in the Dutch context. Wekker draws...
a connection between the cultural archive and white innocence, referring to a dominant Dutch self-image that consists of a (mostly) tacit but complacent notion of whiteness. This position of whiteness, termed white innocence, is the neutral position against which the rest is measured.

A second aspect of this white innocence is that race does not matter because we in the Netherlands ‘do not do race’, as Wekker argues. At least, that is the dominant image that has been created. This image is reinforced by the tendency to emphasize the ‘positive’ aspects of imperialism while concealing the violence, the racism and thus the injustice of the colonial past instead of addressing it and (hopefully) coming to terms with it. In short, the Dutch cultural archive expresses itself in white innocence, in which race has no place and does not need one. In recent years, however, a change seems to be occurring in the Netherlands.13

What does this mean for the visual image of colonialism and in particular slavery in the VOC area/Indian Ocean? Whereas Stedman’s publication became an important anti-slavery instrument due to its gruesome and iconic images (something abolitionists frequently used), the images of Jan Brandes can in fact be read as expressions of white innocence, in which domesticity and harmony predominate in the VOC-dominated areas. Besides the previously mentioned forms of dehumanization of people of color in visual representations – visual silence, sighted blindness and stereotyping – white innocence as a visual representation is in fact a composite of all three. The effect of these images by Brandes is that we do not see the violence of slavery and therefore cannot understand it as such, unless we try very hard and are informed by other sources. Together with the absence of a comprehensive visual canon of slavery in VOC territory, it could mean that we have never learned to see slavery in the Indian Ocean and around the Pacific as part of Dutch history, let alone to weigh it and link it to violent forms of domination. It is an issue that deserves more in-depth research; for that, hopefully this publication will provide an impetus.

Let’s start with the bare facts: in the eighteenth century, the largest population group in the settlements of the VOC consisted of enslaved people. In most inner cities they were indeed in the majority. Nothing, absolutely nothing, could be done without the efforts of the enslaved. Most of these settlements were slave societies. This meant not only that enslaved people made up a very large part of the population, but slavery also determined most facets of urban life. The scale of the slave trade to the VOC’s settlements was therefore immense.14

The omnipresence of slavery makes us expect many paintings, drawings and prints from the VOC sites showing the enslaved. Such images do indeed exist. If we really look for them, there appear to be quite a few images depicting enslaved people. All the same, there is a visual silence surrounding slavery which has certainly contributed to the fact that this history has received relatively little attention. This silence is not so much about the absence of the enslaved, but about the fact that slavery is merely presented in the framework of a narrative that is invariably centered around the Europeans in the colonies. Nor were these images ever created by the enslaved themselves, and therefore they always reflect the perceptions of the slaveholding class. In these images we encounter the enslaved only in very specific roles, and even in specific places.

The drawings, prints and paintings leave essential experiences of slave life out of view. The hierarchy of representation and the marginalization of those enslaved create shadows and silences. One of the consequences is the emergence of a discourse of exceptionalism. This claims that slavery in VOC settlements was mild in nature, especially in comparison with the plantation slavery in the Atlantic and Caribbean region. Even W.R. baron Van Hoëvell, the liberal former Batavian minister who advocated the abolition of slavery in the Dutch East Indies in 1848, argued that slaves in the East Indies were better off than ‘free’ servants.15 The image of ‘mild slavery’ indeed dominates the historiography of colonial societies. Nobody ever wondered why so many enslaved people tried to escape.

Silences

Most paintings, drawings and prints depicting enslaved people are actually about something else. Often you have to look in the margins and shadows to see the omnipresence of slavery. Take the etchings that Joan Nieuhof made in 1682 for his book Gedenkwachtige zee en Ianttreize. In the pictures of Batavia, if we look close enough we can see countless enslaved. Usually, we encounter
them as the retinue of Europeans, in street scenes that are almost idyllic. Virtually invisible is the fact that it is not only the men and women as the retinue of the European lords and ladies, but also most of the workers in the cities were enslaved. This is hard to tell from the people in the pictures, but for the stroller in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the distinction was clear, through clothing, posture and someone’s positioning in the street. Present-day viewers do not have that essential knowledge. The description of Nieuhof’s print in the *Atlas of Mutual Heritage* reads: ‘Laundry is being washed in front of the quay’.\(^1\) That the laundresses were probably enslaved is not mentioned.

There are also the ink drawings of Johannes Rach (1720–1783) from a hundred years later, of which the Rijksmuseum owns a small collection.\(^2\) The seemingly rather innocent drawings of buildings and locations in and around Batavia and, to a lesser extent, other places on Java, on closer inspection turn out to be full of traces of slavery. However, the enslaved people depicted here are presented to us in very specific, public roles. In nearly every one of Rach’s drawings we see a group of enslaved people and their masters. Almost without exception the enslaved carry a *payung* (parasol) to protect their owners from the sun. Rach’s drawings are topographical images, but they also serve to confirm the social status of the European elite. Slave entourages played a crucial role in this. The drawings confirm the position of Europeans and the mild nature of slavery in the East-Indies.

Nonetheless, in a few drawings by Johannes Rach there are instances wherein enslaved people are put in less innocent situations, like in the drawing of the Watergate of the VOC castle in Batavia. Here we see, aside of the obligatory carrier of a *payung*, enslaved people who carry goods into the castle. About these Company slaves very little is known, but it is clear that they provided the brunt of the hard labor.

However we handle this, enslaved people are gazed upon, they never look themselves. It means that their portrayal is always determined by the preferences of painters and draughtsmen, themselves slave-owners, who

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\(^1\) *Gedenkwaerdige zee en lantreize van en om Batavia, 1682*. (Atlas van Stolk)

\(^2\) *Het Gezigt van het Castell te Batavia te Zijn Van de Water-Port tot aan de Punt de Sepuh*, 1777 (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)
depicted them in certain roles and situations. We will always look through the lens of the enslaver. Almost always we see the enslaved in their role of personal servant of the European. Aside from a few exceptions, the enslaved are marginalized extras in the cityscape, which is dominated by the Europeans. It remains completely out of the picture that nothing in the city was built, cleaned or traded without slave labor.

Although the pictorial silence on the subject of slavery is not as bad, depictions by Nieuhof and Rach, and by the many other European artists offer precisely an opportunity to downplay, marginalize and disguise slavery in VOC establishments. The ‘myth’ they propagate - the term used by the French literary scholar Roland Barthes – is that of a European elite that was served by the depiction of a benevolent type of trade in and treatment of enslaved people.18

**In- and outside the margins**

If we take a step closer to the enslaved people, we again encounter processes of marginalization and silencing. One of the clearest examples of - literal - marginalization is a very early depiction of an enslaved person in a VOC environment: the pen drawing that Esaias Boursse (1631–1672) made in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) around the year 1660. The drawing, which focuses on an European ensemble, contains two enslaved people. A man is posted on the right side of the scene, a woman against the back wall. Incidentally, in the description of the drawing in the Rijksmuseum, only a passing reference is made to these two, and they are described as servants.19

![Esaias Boursse, Enslaved person with a European party, probably Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 1664](image1)

The positioning of the enslaved man is striking: all the way in the foreground. He is the only person with slightly distinctive facial features. It is clear that Boursse, who was already a professional painter in Holland and had recently arrived in Asia, used the enslaved man to give depth to his drawing and portrayed him in the shadows.20 It is clear that the drawing is not about the enslaved man. The eye is drawn automatically to the European company. The mechanism of centering does its job of organizing the scene. He is as much a spectator of history as the person looking at the drawing.

Enslaved people are not always marginal. There are several images where they are the central subject. This is the case with perhaps the most intimate portrait of an enslaved woman, by the eighteenth-century Lutheran minister Jan Brandes. It is a red pencil drawing of a woman. It has no caption. Research in Jan Brandes’s personal papers may have revealed a trace of her identity. Brandes called her Roosje. Her name was Basie when he bought her, and who knows what name she was given at birth. One suspects that the woman was her master’s concubine. This can be deduced from the jealousy that struck Brandes when he heard a gossip about Roosje’s relationship with an enslaved male in the household. What followed was standard practice but is not visually recorded anywhere. Fearing the wrath of her owner, Roosje ran away, only
to return on her own account a few days later; if caught, runaway enslaved people could be severely punished by the court. Still, Brandes whipped her and chained her up, probably in the slave pen that could be found in all large households. Shortly afterwards she was sold to a new owner. 21

The portrait, so intimately and lovingly executed, and so seemingly close, is silent about the life of the woman who was temporarily called Roosje. Her origins, youth, abduction and sale, her life in the households of successive owners, her feelings towards her masters and her daily work, her humiliations and beatings: none of this is visible. The portrait conceals more than it tells us. We know from Brandes’s notes and diaries that he lived more or less in daily fear of his enslaved servants, that he beat them regularly and that most of them made one or more attempts to run away. Roosje, too, had been beaten until bloody before; her fear and flight were based on painful experience. In the meantime, Brandes, in his letters to the Netherlands and in his drawings, avoided depicting that hard-edged side of slavery.22 The myth of peaceful slavery was knowingly perpetuated.

So, we are once again looking at silence.23 This silence comes to us in many forms. It is only with difficulty that we can try to see what cannot be seen in the images – provided that we look in a different way. Our looking is not about registering what we see, but about making visible what can only be revealed through suggestion and tenacious historical research. Only then will enslaved people be freed from the concealing idiom of the slave owners, and our perception itself will become an object of contemplation.

Seeing the invisible?

Slave trade, urban slave markets and the interpretation of a ‘new’ painting

At least around a million people must have been enslaved in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and transported to areas under the authority of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). This continuous stream of forced human transit created profound connections between societies from all corners of the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago. The seven-year-old girl Callij, for example, was bought by a Dutch captain in Cochin in southwest India in 1781. He named her Uliliana, or ‘modesty’, and transported her to Batavia. There he sold her to the free woman Kaatje, who then called the Indian girl Roosje.24 This contribution examines the visual traces of this ‘invisible’ history.

Maelstroms of forced displacement

The history of the VOC, the colonial empire it governed, and the surrounding non-European societies, is full of such human movements across seas, rivers, and mountains, often cutting across the boundaries of communities, cultures, religions and languages in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago. The currents of forced displacement went crisscross. From written sources we know for example that in 1700 the enslaved person named ‘Titijs’, originating from the Indian Coromandel Coast, was sold by the free woman Pieternella of Makassar to the local VOC schoolmaster Anthonij Bijlevelt in Batavia (present day Jakarta, Indonesia). Conversely, in 1758, a slave named ‘Domingo’, originating from Mozambique, was sold in Bengal (India). In that same year, ‘Francis’ of the Indian Malabar Coast, slave of Cornelis Chasteleijn, was sent from Batavia to the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa). As capital of the VOC’s colonial empire, the colonial metropolis of Batavia in particular was one of the destinations where enslaved individuals from the entire Indonesian Archipelago and the Indian Ocean region ended up. For example, in 1700 the Balinese slave Mandalalal was sold to the Malay Datoe Bongsoe by the Batavian free citizen Oemar. In 1751, the Papuan man Wandamie was sold by the Javanese Jamalan to the Moor Abdul Japar.

In this maelstrom of human mobility, set in motion by the slave trade, enslaved people were repeatedly removed from familiar environments, planted in new environments, bought and sold, subjected to the authority of ever new masters and mistresses, and put to work again and again. Slavery and forced labor existed in the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian Archipelago in many forms, from debt slavery and caste inequalities, to subservience and lordship, but with the early phase of European colonial world capitalism it was especially this harsher form of chattel slavery – which was based on the legalized marketability or ‘commodification’ of people - that exploded. It was...
in this form of chattel slavery that slaves were not only forced into labor and subservience but were also constantly alienated from their environments and from themselves. Girls like Callij became a Roosie of Malabar, thousands of miles away.

Twisted past
This ‘forgotten’ history of the slave trade in the world of the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago has long stayed out of focus – far too long, not only in the Netherlands, but also in the countries where this colonial slavery took place, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Even in countries that give more attention to the slavery past, such as India and South Africa, this difficult history has not always reached a general social consciousness and research is effectively still in its infancy. This has a lot to do with ‘blind sightedness’, as Nancy Jouwe describes it in her chapter, but also with the distortion of this past, caused by myths that have been reproduced around notions of local, indigenous and mild slavery. These myths became widespread in the nineteenth century under the influence of colonial governments, sometimes in interaction with local rulers – who used constructions of ‘benign’ Asian slavery to whitewash the fact that they themselves did not abide by their own bans on the trading of slaves and slavery.

However, if about a million people were moved to Dutch territories under VOC rule in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago alone, and the total scale of slavery and slave trade in other European colonial and non-European societies was surely more extensive still, then where are the traces of these mass mobilizations caused by this widespread slave trade? And are these traces only textual, or is there imagery of this slave trade, visual sources, that have also survived?

Visual traces
For a long time, one of the most well-known visual traces were the prints published in Wouter Schouten’s itinerary. These illustrations showed the large-scale slave trade by ‘Arakanse Roovers’ (robbers from Arakan), who enslaved people in the Bay of Bengal and sold them to the Portuguese, the Dutch, and others. As early as the mid-1620s, the VOC came to an agreement with King Mrauk U on the purchase of two to three thousand slaves per year. Until well into the seventeenth century, the VOC transported enslaved people from South Asia, particularly Arakan, Coromandel and Malabar on a large-scale, to the conquered areas of the Indonesian archipelago, particularly Batavia and the Banda Islands. In the prints accompanying the work of Wouter Schouten, who visited this region himself in the early 1660s, we see this slave trade depicted: the large-scale export of enslaved people.

At the same time, we know that cities like Batavia were marked not only by the large-scale import of enslaved people, but also a constant buying and reselling of enslaved individuals in the environments to which they had been brought. Why is it then that we have, for such a long time, only seen these slavery-based urban environments through the domestic scenes and soft colors of the paintings of Jan Brandes? Why did we see the harsher sides of the Dutch-Asian history of slavery reflected at most in the black-and-white street scenes by Johannes Rach, in which, as Merve Tosun explains in her chapter, enslaved people became the backdrop of a colonial world order and hierarchy? Or, in other words, why is the widespread urban slave trade nowhere to be seen in visual sources, when it drips off the pages of the notary and company archives? In short, how do we see the invisible? And how invisible is this supposed invisible really?

A ‘new’ painting
Perhaps it’s more visible than we thought. A year ago, a painting surfaced that had probably been painted in Batavia at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was probably also made by the same maker as the painting of the ‘Dutch merchant with slaves’ in possession of the Rijksmuseum, on which Eveline Sint Nicolaas writes in her chapter. In both paintings, it seems evident that the commissioner is depicted in the lower left-hand corner. A VOC merchant with his (Eur)Asian wife are depicted. Possibly it’s even the same couple in both paintings.
But what do we actually see here? This was not an easy question asked by the Rijksmuseum. The first thoughts in the discussions about this painting centered on a depiction. Then what kind of a depiction would that be? It wasn’t the popular wajang, for example. And despite the fact that the canopied stage corresponds with a drawing by Brandes of a Chinese theatre piece, it is also unlikely that it is a similar kind of performance to that of a Chinese theatre, due to the absence of costumes and musical instruments.

Might it have been the narration of a folk tale? This seemed more likely at the time than the possibility that this was an auction of slaves – since the appearance of such an unique depiction of a slave market seemed too good to be true. On the stage we see a man, most likely, standing in a white robe with colorful patterns, a striking headdress, perhaps a crown? The man opposite him stands stooped, almost submissive, yet pointing at or piercing his chest at the same time. In the background on the left is a crier or narrator. The motley collection of attendees watches, doing their own thing to some degree. Was this a narration of a local, Javanese, or Malay folk tale, about a king or the coronation of a hero, for instance?

So, the possibility of a slave market had been suggested, but then receded into the background again during conversations. It was not just the striking clothing causing doubt, but also the man bending forward. The question arose: how could we know for sure? What was the basis for a solid argument that what we see here is either the performance of a folk tale, or the sale of a man enslaved? It may have been a case of blind sightedness, of not daring to see the visible. A blind sightedness, moreover, which could even befall, with remarkable ease, a person like me, who is occupied on an almost daily basis with the written traces of the history of slavery.

The equation - a slave market?

Only a few weeks ago it dawned on me that material for comparison was in fact available. A mid-nineteenth-century depiction of a ‘slave-vendutie’ in a book by Van Hoevell, depicting the sale of a man, woman and child in Batavia. Of course that was more than a century and a half later, and it is possible that the way in which a slave sale is depicted in this book may have been influenced by the efforts to abolish slavery in the Dutch East Indies colonies. But it is simply the only thing we have – or at least I know of no other depictions of urban slave sales in Batavia or Dutch Asia. Perhaps even more importantly: the clues it provides are too important to ignore. A man in a top hat has taken on the role of auctioneer and seems to be pointing to bidders in the audience. We see a man and a woman on stage, with what looks like a child. Strikingly, here too we see the enslaved man on the left in a neat long white robe and wearing a hat or cap.

This would explain a lot: it is not unlikely that enslaved people who were about to be sold were dressed up nicely to speed up the sale and increase the price. It would give new meaning to many aspects of the painting from the eighteenth century. The crier advertises the slave with an uplifted hand. The piercing gesture of the stooping man on the stage would then no longer be a sign of
subservience, but rather the inspection of a body made saleable. Is this a buyer closely inspecting the enslaved man on stage? Or is it actually the vendor who theatrically shows the slave's body to the gathered crowd?

The shift in perspective leads to new questions that deserve an answer. On the right, we see someone pointing at the audience with a rattan stick. Is he tracking the bids? It is quite possible that here we see the calling auctioneer’s assistant. In the nineteenth-century depiction by Van Hoewell we see the same process, but here it is not an assistant, but the auctioneer himself who points and keeps track of the bids from his large chair. Let us explore the painting further. Who, for instance, are those other enigmatic figures on the edge of the stage? And why aren’t they dressed as colorfully?28 Sitting or hanging from a pole, defeated, these persons also find a more logical place within the interpretation of a slave market: these are enslaved people either waiting to be sold, or sold already. We then see these slave men and women in their daily attire. It is not improbable that the enslaved were only dressed in these colorful and eye-catching clothes temporarily, only for the moment when they were actually offered for sale on stage.

Urban slave sales

The painting portrays the image of enslaved people sold one by one. This is not the place where large groups of people are sold and their sales executed simultaneously, as in the picture of Arakanese slave traders in Wouter Schouten’s book. This image does not show the large-scale overseas shipping of hundreds of slaves. No, this is rather the depiction of the result of these mass displacements: a slave society in which the enslaved are already present, such as Batavia, the Ommelanden and other parts of the VOC empire. This is a slave sale in one of those urban and agricultural environments in which slaves are constantly being bought and resold.

So, we are not looking at a large permanent slave market. The stage has almost a temporary character – light poles on the side hold up a tent-like roof. So, was this slave market some kind of exception? Rather the opposite: The transience of the stage marks the regularity with which public slave sales took place. It is a stage that can easily be dismantled and rebuilt day after day, like a market stall. Here too, the comparison with the depiction of a ‘slaven-vendutie’ (slave vending) from the nineteenth century proves helpful. The word ‘vendutie’ underlines that it was a public auction. Slave sales had to be upheld at a notary’s office, but that does not mean that all sales were completed indoors or at notaries’ offices. Slaves were sold everywhere: on the street, at the market, in public environments. We know from the so-called vendutieverkopen (vendor sales), the auction of estates of deceased or bankrupt persons, that in the eighteenth century these usually took place in front of the former owner’s house. In the same way, slaves were also sold in different places in the city and its outskirts. On March 12, 1753, for example, the venduitemeester (auction master) sold his six slaves ‘in front of the death house of the citizen Jan Martin’: the woman Meij of Boegis, the men Raba of Makassar, Soekoor of Boegis, the carpenter October of Sumbaawa, a carpenter called Fortuijn of Mandhaar, and a bricklayer who was also called Fortuijn of Mandhaar. Sometimes the public auctions of slaves took place in front of a ‘ledig huys’ (an empty house) or in front of the auction master’s own house. And so the stages on which slaves were sold moved through the neighborhoods and streets of the city of Batavia and its outskirts.

A view of the Ommelanden

This interpretation of this depiction – as an image of a slave sale – is reinforced by the background and the style of the painting. These lead to the idea that not only the painter, but also the commissioning parties of this painting and the ‘Dutch merchant with slaves’ may have been the same person. The ‘Dutch merchant’ seems to represent the tasks or function of the commissioning VOC officer. If the painting does indeed depict (captured) slaves being transported, this may have been the landdrost (local administrator, bailiff) of the Ommelanden, whose task it was to ensure that runaway slaves were rounded up and returned. With its many houses, walls and trees, the ‘new’ painting of the slave sale seems to be situated, even more distinctly than the earlier painting, in these Ommelanden with their districts and intensive slave-based agricultural production. In between the houses are coconut trees, behind them are sugar plantations and rice fields. This environment can also explain why, in addition to the voc officer and his wife, two other couples are prominently facing the viewer. Perhaps these are the heads of local communities, like the lieutenant or captain of the Chinese, Javanese, Balinese or others, who for the governing of the Ommelanden must have been in close contact with the landdrost and other voc officers.

Around the stage we see then the lively and diverse world of the Batavian Ommelanden. People in diverse, colorful attire and from different backgrounds are walking and standing together. In this crowd we also see enslaved people, barefoot; as servants with umbrellas for their masters and mistresses or walking with tools on their backs. In this way the invisible becomes visible, or better: the visible becomes recognizable. In the depiction of the daily habitat of a voc officer who was responsible for the colonial order and law enforcement in the Ommelanden, we suddenly find a unique image of an urban slave sale. Thus, all of a sudden, a few members of the large masses of invisible enslaved individuals, the innumerable ones who were sold, become visible again.
Portraits, typologies and stereotypes
In this article, I would like to reflect on the photo taken by C. Dietrich, ‘savages around Sirotta islands’ and use it as a starting point to broadly address the long history of New Guinea’s entanglement with slavery and the impact on (its/her) inhabitants: the Papuans. The photo drew my attention for two reasons; first, the name Sirotta is unfamiliar and second, the picture is another one documenting a mass of undifferentiated Papuans. The latter is the focus of this piece, but I will begin by addressing the first point above to contextualize my exasperation.

Papuan raiders as a type
In Dutch sources, Papuans rarely, if ever, appear as individuals. Being stereotyped did not set them apart from other colonial subjects, but Papuans were for a long time only understood through these stereotypes. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the Dutch mostly left Papuans in New Guinea and Raja Ampat alone to their own devices. Any semblance of colonial rule was indirect, mediated by the sultan of Tidore. Even at the height of VOC activity in the entire Moluccas, Papuans were not under their direct purview. Papuans had limited presence in History when it arrived in the region. Their presence in archives were limited to pejorative references to their activities and (psychological and physical) character. This stems from the seventeenth century, when the raiding activities of some groups became cause for the ‘Papoesche zeerovers’ label. The raiders were not discriminative in their actions, and also raided Papuans living along the coast of New Guinea. This opened another avenue for Papuan participation in History; as enslaved individuals, far from home but finally visible in the eyes of Europeans. Enslaved Papuans became another source through which Papuans could be seen and understood. In the nineteenth century, the process was most visible when John Crawfurd used an enslaved Papuan in Java as an archetype for all Papuans. His work and the advent of racial science lent legitimacy to the practice of typifying Papuans, turning their bodies into text through which everything about them was revealed.

Slavery in the region
Smack in the middle of the progression of ideas of Papuans as a type of people was the region’s long entanglement with slavery. It is unclear when this began, but the enslavement of Papuans was already a regular occurrence in 1670 when the Dutch explored opportunities to obtain manpower from New Guinea. This history did not end until the Dutch heavily interfered with and re-ordered Papuan lives around the turn of the twentieth century. The long, consistent
An understanding of the history of Papuans in the Sirotta islands cannot be separated from the long history of enslavement. We should begin by stating that the name Sirotta cannot be found in maps today; it appears that it reached the height of its use in the nineteenth century when Dietrich took this photo. However, we can get an approximation of its location because of the report of the New Guinea Committee. The colonial government entrusted the Committee with the task of professionally and scientifically investigating the north-west part of New Guinea to find the most fitting place for a settlement. To that end the Committee went on a voyage on the ZM Stoomschip Ems in 1858. The leader of the Committee, a man by the name of van der Goes, published an account of their voyage in which he mentioned the Sirotta islands. His report provides us with information on its geographic features and location; the island consisted of three sandstone rocks in the Arguni Bay. It lies at the south-west of New Guinea and this allows us to infer the role of the inhabitants in the history above.

It is significant that Sirotta lies in Arguni Bay because historically, communities in this region were directly involved in the enslavement of Papuans. The region was historically known as Onin Kowiai, and it was a slave market from 1623. 44 The success in tapping into this market was sporadic at best, because the communities here had arrangements with communities in the northern part of the Moluccas, and to the south-west on Kisar island.45 The trade continued in their absence, where traders would visit the region annually, and obtain Papuans in exchange for luxury goods. The constant access to luxury goods elevated communities along the Bay and gave them power over the neighboring Papuans who lived in the hinterland.

Slaving communities in New Guinea

In spite of their longstanding participation in slavery, Onin Kowiai communities did not enjoy as much notoriety in Dutch records as the activities of Papuan raiders from Raja Ampat. Raiders from Raja Ampat were infamous communities of raiders whose activities brought horror to coastal communities in the entire region in the seventeenth century, ranging from communities in the northern part of the Moluccas, and to the south-west on Kisar island.46 It bears recognizing that historically, the dichotomy of Onin Kowiai communities as mere slave traders and Raja Ampat as mere raiders did not always hold. After all, this was a region where the distinction between the two was not always clear.

Perhaps then, an explanation for the more benign reputation of the rajas in Onin Kowiai in Dutch records can only be found in understanding the origin of the people they sold. Unlike the raiders from Raja Ampat, their main source of manpower was situated in the hinterland. Hence, even if the Onin Kowiai were directly involved in the collection of Papuans to be enslaved, we have yet to find contemporary documentation of their raiding activities there. However, based on records from the late nineteenth century, there is evidence to suggest that they had power, and not just a blatantly militaristic one. 47 They wielded tremendous power over the diverse communities inland because of their access to foreign goods, one of the most important among these being the kain timur.48 These highly desired foreign items motivated the sending of Papuans from the hinterland to the Onin Kowiai, where they would be sold into slavery beyond New Guinea. It is likely that they were sent to the coast because of conflicts inland or debts. However, because the Dutch did not see nor record activities in the hinterland until they occupied the region, the reputation of the rajas remained relatively pristine.

Communities who participated in enslavement did not just affect the lives of their own members; they also affected the lives of communities around them. The impact they had was not always easily identifiable, as the type of power they exercised over them was not always overt. One thing in particular was true: for a community to live along the coast in the region was dangerous. No weak community could stay there, and the ones who chose this path devised different ways to live with the looming danger of slave raids.49

It is tempting to ask why some communities still chose to stay along the coast. For the moment, it bears remembering that communities were not permanent, they split and moved. Hence, the question remained important. It might be related to their attachment to ancestral lands as a reason for not wanting to move. Another possible and rather simple reason is that a community of fishers would not move inland, because it would deprive them of their regular sea-sourced rich-protein diet. Unfortunately, we have yet to find documents recording their reasoning; most visitors to Arguni Bay were not interested in asking. Records hint at a more complicated answer to understanding why, after generations of slaving activities in the region, there were still communities living along the coast. The answer they provided was defiant yet rewarding in its own right.

A troublesome route to ‘civilization’

The last point is connected to what I mentioned above: the obsession with foreign things. The coastal area was dangerous because it was a contact zone, and it made the communities easy to reach by outsiders. It was a contact zone, which allowed encounters with foreigners. Historically, these encounters, either through regular trade or one-time exchanges with passing foreigners, allowed the community access to foreign items that were markers of ‘civilization’: cloth/textile, knives, nails, and other iron goods. These foreign items were more than mere objects because of what they symbolized, and they elevated the communities who owned them. 50 Foreign things were and remain material evidence of connections with a world beyond New Guinea. It is however clear that being closer to these things elevated Papuan communities above the others. Anthropologist Jelle Miedema wrote how ownership of and proximity with
Kain timur was connected with notions of primitivism and affected patterns in inter-tribal marriages among communities living in the Bird’s Head Region. Speaking of the communities living inland relative to the communities in Onin Kowai, in 1914 Augusta de Wit wrote that they went to the coast ‘to fetch civilization’. People who were sold into slavery here lost their freedom for the elevation of others. As such, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to say that the people of Sirotta chose civilization in exchange for complete safety.

This is the troublesome and even painful sentiment one has when one contemplates the lives that the people of Sirotta led. Just living there, precariously, always toeing the thin line between freedom and enslavement, knowing its danger and defiantly remaining in place. All that, only to be referred to as savages in the documentation and recollection of a passing photographer. To have elevated themselves among their fellow Papuans, only to be labeled as savages, an undifferentiated mass of people with no names, to the world beyond. They were better than Papuans in the hinterland, but never good enough to stop foreign visitors like Dietrich from considering them ‘savages’. The photo presents an example in understanding the complexities of being a Papuan at that moment.

Opportunities for a regular Papuan to be recognized as an individual in the records emerged in the turn of the twentieth century. In line with what people in Sirotta had tried, setting oneself apart meant elevating oneself above other Papuans. The intensification of Dutch colonial and mission activities in the region provided a venue for this. Strongly tinged with a civilizing mission, their projects were efforts to rapidly modernize New Guinea and its inhabitants. Part of this project intended to bring all Papuans under the purview, if not protection, of Dutch authority, and an end to slavery and bondage was an important part of this. Until then, the Dutch declaring the end of slavery had no impact in New Guinea.

Petrus Kafiar: a great Papuan

The life of Petrus Kafiar illustrates the close connection between the ending of slavery and the civilizing mission. Born into a community involved in slave raiding in Supiori, sometime around the 1880s, he himself was kidnapped by a neighboring community and enslaved as a child. Later, a worker for the Protestant mission in Mansinam bought his freedom. Kafiar was not alone: the mission in Mansinam occasionally bought enslaved Papuans and made them ‘foster children’. Freeing children from enslavement was an important part in the creation of the mission’s self-image because it showed that their work was heroic. Nonetheless, the freedom that Kafiar and his cohorts enjoyed was mostly rhetorical, as they were dependent on the mission. Kafiar was educated and eventually sent to the seminary in Depok. After his return from Depok, he became a teacher evangelizing in the heart of his community.

The tonal difference in two books narrating his life showed the limited path Papuans had when trying to gain the distinction of being an individual. The first one is the book F. J. S. Rumainum wrote and the second is a book written by J.L.D. van der Roest and published by the mission. While both books spoke of his trials and tribulations, the tones they assumed were different. Rumainum wrote about how amazing Kafiar was; the first Papuan to follow a formal education all the way to Depok to become a teacher. Van der Roest, however, was not as generous in his account of Kafiar. When describing how he fared in his education in Depok, he wrote that Kafiar was not one of the smartest students. This made sense, according to him, because ‘the group to whom he belonged [Papuans, LG] was among the most stupid.’ He consolled the readers by assuring us that Kafiar was good-natured and that the teachers were going to make the best of him, as far as they could. The difference of tone in those two books indicates the radically different ways Kafiar’s engagement with modernity were seen, based on who was writing.

Even after he finished his education and became “the best Papuan” (for being the first to ever follow a formal education), his work was still subject to the review of white missionary workers. He needed permission from the Dutch missionary worker before he could evangelize to and work among his own people. For all the claims the mission made of their work in civilizing Papuans, the colonial context of the mission also prescribed its limits. The mission in New Guinea was closely connected with the colonial government and was happy to see the active role they began taking in colonizing Papua. Assuming the voice of Kafiar, the author of his biography lauded the work of the colonial government which punished the raiders and introduced peace to New Guinea. Still, there is no doubt that at that moment, he was one of the best Papuans. A great example of what Papuans could achieve. This remains true today and there is no denying his importance in Papuan history.

It is hardly surprising that some have accurately used his life as an example of Homi Bhabha’s idea of colonial mimicry. Papuans who were colonized were expected to mimic their colonizer as a sign of progress and civilization. However, following Bhabha’s line of thinking, the colonized could never be similar enough to be equal to their colonizer; colonialism was still a system predicated on difference between the two of them. After being freed from slavery and becoming educated, Kafiar became an individual Papuan. A Papuan unlike the mass of ‘savages’ whose names did not matter to Dietrich. Even as his achievements were lauded by other Papuans, the colonizers did not see Kafiar beyond his usefulness: a great Papuan was still just a Papuan. This was the path from slavery to freedom that the Dutch colonial government envisioned.
Between love and constraint

Labor, patronage and status through the eye of the Tashrih al-aqvam

Work and the shop floor reconsidered

Within the history of industrial relations, the issue of exploitation in the workplace is not a marginal theme. But what does exploitation look like? And what do we understand by ‘shop floor’? The answers to these questions seem self-evident when we talk about a sugar plantation worked by enslaved people. However, plantations and factories are by no means the only places where work is done. Historically, the ‘private sphere’ of the household has been an equally important site of work. By this I do not mean the manufacture of merchandise, such as grains or textiles, by the family as a unit of labor. Rather, I refer to the household as a locus of care, nurture/nutrition, and the resulting kinship. These care tasks require effort and energy, just like other physical and intellectual labor. Nevertheless, they do not fit within our narrow understanding of ‘work’, perhaps because we consider care to be an expression of love. Where there’s love, surely there can be no question of work, nor of compulsion. As a result, we overlook the work of carers – often women, children, subordinate family members and close servants – as historian Indrani Chatterjee has noticed.64

Within the context of South Asia, images offer us a way to bridge the gap between the history of care and that of labor. This short essay makes a modest attempt in this direction, by looking at a nineteenth-century ethnographic work by James Skinner, the Tashrih al-aqvam (‘Description of the peoples’). Using this source, I will reflect on the connection between labor, exploitation, and social status in the subcontinent.

James Skinner as an ethnographer

The Tashrih al-aqvam was written in the 1920s by James Skinner, a Scottish Indian mercenary who led the armies of the Marathas, Mughals and eventually the English East India Company.65 The Tashrih offers a detailed view of the ethnographic composition of northern India, particularly of modern-day Haryana and northern Rajasthan. It is part of a pair, of which the second work – the Tazkirat al-umara (‘Biography of the Princes’) – is a political history of the region. Skinner had three richly decorated copies of each work made by his own book printer in Hansi. The manuscript pairs were each donated to British officers with whom Skinner was close friends. The copy that I will discuss here was destined for a ‘Captain Watkins’, of whom little is known. It can now be found at the Library of Congress in Washington.66
The Tashrīh is divided into two sections (fasl), based on religion (Hinduism and Islam). Each section is further divided into two chapters (bab), one focused on ‘secular’ professions (duniyadaran), the other on ascetics (fakir). Each chapter is accompanied by a number of short, descriptive essays on different population groups (qaum, farq, zat). Altogether, 121 different groups are described. Each description is accompanied by a portrait. These images are based, Skinner claims, on real individuals. In addition to a focus on traditional costume, the ‘characteristic’ – i.e., professional – environment of the group in question is also depicted. Although the artist’s name is not mentioned anywhere, the images are probably the work of the family studio of Ghulam Ali Khan, one of the painters of the so-called ‘Company style’ working in and around Delhi during the colonial transition.

Freedom and status in the Tashrīh al-aqvam

Despite much critical research showing the pitfalls of the concept of ‘caste’, this concept is still one of the first things people think of when it comes to South Asia, and certainly to labor and status in the subcontinent. In this respect, the Tashrīh al-aqvam is particularly interesting. In contrast to the rigid conventional image of ‘caste’, this work paints a complex picture of the relationship between work and social status. Despite Skinner’s use of profession as a basis for ethnographic classification, the population groups he treats cannot easily be called ‘caste’, at least not in the classical sense of the term. Occasionally, however, the author does use the word ‘barna’, derived from the Sanskrit ‘varna’, which indicates the hierarchical division of trade groups according to the supposed purity of their work. At the same time, however, the purity principle seems to be only one of the factors that determine the social status of a group. Just as important as the nature of the work is the identity of the employer. The higher the rank of the patron, the higher the rank of her or his clients.

This is evident in the lower orders of Brahmins, or Hindu priests, such as ganaks (astrologers) and bazigars (wizards). Skinner labels these two groups as baransankara, or ‘mixed varnas’, whose descent he traces back to a relationship between a Brahmin and a lower-class widow. Apart from their birth and their profession – which Skinner dismisses as deceit compared to the learning of the real Brahmin – the patrons of both categories also originate from the lower ranks. Ganaks thus serve as priests to Chamars, a collective name for sweepers, shoemakers and leatherworkers. Bazigars, whose customs Skinner describes as ‘equal to the ways of the lowest Shudras [servants]’, receive the favor of ‘Sardars’, a vague word for ‘great men’, whether of noble birth or not.

What is striking about the Tashrīh is that being free or unfree seems to have relatively little influence on one’s social status. Local populations such as Jats, Ahirs and Gujars (all shepherds and farmers), who were often autonomous, did not necessarily possess a higher social rank than groups explicitly named as clients and servants, such as mirasi (a general term for all kinds of artists), doms (musicians), biswas (courtesans), and kalwants and bhats (poets). Indeed, precisely because these artists often performed in the courts of princes (rajgan) and aristocrats (umra), they acquired a certain amount of prestige through their association with noble patrons.

Work, coercion and vulnerability in the private sphere: the prostitute and the servant in the Tashrīh

The tension between an ‘impure’ profession and a high status is evident in the two images of the courtesan, or biswa, found in the Tashrīh. Despite their ‘indecency’, low birth and dependent position, they could be prosperous and influential because of their popularity among the elites. In the first image of the biswa the emphasis is on her immorality. We see a relaxed, beautifully dressed woman, sitting on her sidewalk in the bazaar, smoking a bong. A fashionable man with a hat and a cane approaches her and seems to be flirting with her. She returns his look, confident and unashamed, almost indifferent. In the second image, however, we see prostitutes performing at the court of some young prince. The emphasis here is on their art and their charm - they dance and sing while a group of male musicians play instruments. The audience – in this case the young prince and a single servant - look enchanted. The atmosphere is intimate.
By comparing these two images, we arrive at a much more complicated picture of the social position of the prostitute. People look down on her because she deviates from the norm of a moral woman. At the same time, her art gives her and her audience prestige. This prestige is reinforced by the status of her admirers, while their admiration also makes them vulnerable to her. What is missing in the Tashrīh, however, is the vulnerability of the prostitute, as carer, client, and employee who depends on the favor of her patron. When he falls in love with someone else, she not only loses prestige, but possibly also the influence and protection that his patronage afforded her.

An equally good example of the complex relationship between work, patronage, care and status can be found in Skinner’s treatment of the gholam. Although this is a general term for ‘slave’, in the Tashrīh the scope of the term is limited to the personal servants of elites. As for other ‘low’ social groups, Skinner traces the gholam’s descent back to an extramarital relationship, this time between a potter’s widow (kumhar) and a panegyrist. Despite their low birth, gholams are also craftsmen who specialize in massaging and caring for the human body. Not only are they capable of curing all kinds of muscle aches and pains, they also have knowledge of medical herbs, which they use effectively to keep their patron in a state of health and mental well-being. This influence on the physical constitution of the patron lends power and prestige to the gholam. At the same time, the patron is to some extent dependent on the gholam, whose loyalty must be nurtured by giving them all kinds of gifts and privileges. Thus, the favorite gholams not only receive monetary gifts, they are even granted the right to refuse the commands of others. In other words, their influence, built up within the household, extended to the outside world of power and politics.

The examples of the courtesan and the servant show that proximity to a powerful person of high rank could increase one’s own status, and thus soften the effect of birth and profession. But that does not mean that the subordinate position of servants was, as a rule, easy, pleasant or advantageous. Although the relationship between a master and his servant could be loving, it was precisely because of the unequal balance of power that there was plenty of room for abuse and even exploitation. At the same time, the intimate nature of the relationship between master and servant made the former vulnerable to the betrayal of the latter. In Skinner’s worldview this is expressed by his thesis that the most remarkable characteristic of the gholam was the tendency to cheat (bewafayi). The mutual vulnerability is reflected in the image of the gholam in the Tashrīh. A man, wearing a simple loincloth and bonnet, massages the outstretched arm of his master with love and attention. The master is also dressed in no more than a loincloth, and looks at his servant with kindness and innocence.

The foregoing leads to two conclusions. The first is that in order to be able to visualize the work done by carers, we need to grasp a broader understanding of both ‘work’ and ‘the shop floor’. The second is that love and kinship within the private sphere and household did not exclude exploitation and mutual vulnerability. Caregivers and relatives of a powerful patron could become influential themselves, not only within the private sphere, but also outside it. At the same time, they were dependent on their patron’s favor for keeping their prestige and power, and therefore had to maintain a careful balance between self-interest and their master’s wishes. These labor relations were therefore characterized by both coercion and freedom, love and exploitation. This is no different here than it is in other world regions such as Africa and Central and West Asia. It is therefore time to separate the historiography of labor in South Asia from the rigid, Orientalist prism of ‘caste’. 
The young slave woman’, and ‘little creatures’

The enslaved as a type

Many of the images of enslaved people in colonial Indonesia that we know of from the mid-nineteenth century are images of women, often so-called ‘types’: generalized depictions of groups of people, reduced to their essence. We find ‘the slave woman’ as a type in individual prints and drawings, but especially in the then popular albums of social types that appeared everywhere in Europe, including the Netherlands.

The nineteenth century was the century in which the Kingdom of the Netherlands was forged into a modern nation. This nationalistic aspiration went hand in hand with the construction and strengthening of a national attachment to a distinct identity that became anchored, above all, in history and tradition. This notion of nationality was depicted in cultural expressions that were local or regional in origin and that were threatened by the influence of modernity. These depictions were typical of a region or place.

The numerous beautifully illustrated albums of social ‘types’, accompanied by pieces of text, should be understood in the same context: as representatives of a country’s singular identity.

As several historians have pointed out, the imagery of the Dutch colony played an important role in Dutch nationalism. In a game of sometimes binary, sometimes interlocking mirror images of ‘Us’ and the ‘Other’, a dominant European ‘Us’ constructed knowledge of ‘the East’ in the Netherlands.

The Dutch albums filled with images of types from the Dutch East Indies colony’s population were one such mirror dance: they were Dutch representations that primarily provided insight into how the Netherlands identified people and societies. The fact that one of the recurring types in various albums and also in other Dutch publications on colonial society was the ‘slave woman’ raises questions about the meaning of the colonial practice of slavery and the construction of an European colonial reality around 1850.

The ‘social type’, as I will argue here, is never just an innocent representation from history, but contributed to the shaping of a perceived colonial ‘reality’.

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A. van Pers, A pseudo slave woman and a pseudo sinjo, 1853
The ‘slave woman’ type

One of the first colonial type collections (a term coined by Dutch language and culture specialist René Wezel) appeared in 1853 and served to acquaint the Dutch readership with the national colony’s society. *Nederlandsch Oost-Indische Typen* [Dutch East Indies Types] is an extremely lush work, in large folio format, which offers a short text with each type depicted. Alongside the Chinese in a sedan chair, the hadji, and the enchained, we find images of a ‘pseudo slave and a pseudo sinjo’ and ‘the slave woman’. All women are depicted barefoot, wearing white kebayas and dark brown sarongs.

The ‘pseudo slave girl’, however, wears a wide blouse that is not slanted as usual. There are six pins in her hair. The ‘sinjo’, a white boy, walking ahead of her with a hoop, is dressed as a European adult. The accompanying text explains that the boy’s parents have only just arrived in the Indies and do not yet fully understand the local mores: the child is wearing the wrong clothes, not suitable for the tropics, and shouldn’t be playing with hoops but with marbles or a spinning top. His attendant is probably not an enslaved person but has been dressed up by her employer in such a way that she resembles one. Here, again, according to the accompanying text, the parents are way off the mark: her blouse and sarong do not correspond to those of the enslaved and the pens in her hair are far too exuberant.80 This shows that, around 1850, a European family that boasted a status symbol such as the possession of slaves was an engaging and recognizable image from colonial society.

The caption ‘the slave woman’ in the album is accompanied by a print of two enslaved females on a porch with a small cockatoo and a monkey on a chain. In their hands are trays of food and a cloth and the woman who looks straight at the viewer, offers a serene smile. The text defends the possession of such women and emphasizes the good position in which they find themselves, through the protection of the law and the care of their owner. It asks for understanding: ‘Do not blame the Java residents, reader, that they still have Slaves’. Moreover, according to the text, of many of these women ‘one cannot deny the beauty of their form’, which is ‘a source of suffering for these little creatures’ if ‘the lady of the house is jealous of this’.81

The focalization expressed in the text is clearly male-European: the writer even addresses a Dutch audience and asks for their empathy with the phenomenon. The women discussed are reduced to a childlike, homogeneous essence (‘slave women’, who are ‘little creatures’), stripped of all individual agency, and their appearance is claimed to be typical of colonial society. They are only a component, one could almost say the decoration, of the colonial space. In addition, the writer’s masculine gaze labels them as sexually attractive beings, who are a threat to the European lady of the house, and are protected by their Western owners on the one hand, and by colonial law on the other.

The image becomes anchored

The description in this publication did not stand alone. Two years later, in 1855, *Java’s bewoners in hun eigenaardig karakter en kleederdracht* [Java’s residents in their peculiar character and attire] appeared.82 In this work, which saw numerous reprints over the next twenty years, we find the type of the ‘bathing slave woman’. The image, in which the woman, sensually wringing her hair while her wet sarong clings to her body after a bath in the river, is accompanied by a story about a beautiful, enslaved woman who brings the mistress of the house’s wrath upon herself and is then saved, as a result of western intervention in the form of the mistress’s husband. Again, the dangers for the husband were prioritized over the women themselves, who moreover had been degenerated into an almost objectified essence, namely ‘the slave woman’.

A. van Pers, *Slave women*, 1853
Even when the ‘slave woman’ appeared outside publications of type collections, such as in 1849 in Wornasarie, the ‘Indies’ year booklet’, in an image which is so individual that it cannot be a type, the description given by the author, S. van Deventer, seems to be a first move towards the later generalizing descriptions in the type collections.

‘No matter how simple her dress may be, [the slave girl] folds and arranges it, not without coquetry, always in a way that enhances her shapeliness. (...) The young slave girl is cheerful by nature, one might say, frisky. (...) And this friskiness is not of the present or of yesterday, it characterized her already in previous centuries. (...) Her heart opens easily to love.’

Even colonial reformer Wolter Robert van Heëvell (1812–1879), who around 1860 wrote very critically about the trade in enslaved people, described the appearance of the two young girls who were sold in similar sensual terms:

‘the regular facial features, the only slightly cultured, almost white hue of the soft, fine skin, the bright white teeth, which shone like little pearls every time the facial features folded into a friendly smile, the round shapes of the well-shaped form, the rich jet-black head, the dark, fiery eyes, full of good and life.’

With him as well, the women were ‘cheerful and frisky’ and, when it came to their body and ‘soul’, ‘pure’, ‘unspoiled’ and ‘innocent’. In his story help once again came (although not enough to save the women from being sold to an ‘old Chinese’ with ‘hideous facial traits’ and an ‘animal lust’) from a European, Mr. Van Spruit, who was concerned about the women’s fate.

Moralizing function

In type collections, the type was given a moralizing and educational function with regard to the colonial society. Wazel already observed that the emphasis of most national type collections on the colonies was on knowledge transfer. But within the diversity of colonial types, a certain colonial hierarchy could also be distinguished.

The same image of the ‘pseudo-slave with the pseudo-sinjo’ from Nederlandsch Oost-Indische Typen was published again a few years later in the Prentenboek voor de Nederlandsch-Indische jeugd [Picture Book for Dutch East Indies Youth] (1859). The ‘pseudo-slave’ had been transformed into ‘The Slave Woman and the Sinjo’ and now served as a means to an end: to compel East-Indian children to obey. Obedience, according to the text, was not only for the children’s ‘own safety’, but also to spare the enslaved ‘grief and sometimes punishment’. The colonial child was given a central place. The enslaved woman and her emotions served in the text only as a means to enforce that obedience on the child. Both ‘the sinjo’ and ‘the slave woman’ are types, but the story reveals a clear hierarchy: it all revolves around the child, not the woman. Again, these women served more as stage props of the colonial world than as acting beings therein.

Intermediate long-term effect

This intermediality of texts and images, the way in which texts and images relate to each other and derive their meaning from these relationships, and the continuation of the representation of ‘the slave woman’ in images and texts in various Dutch publications on colonial society, allowed this social type, with specific, long-standing characteristics (sensual, passive and thus sentenced to Western, male, protection) to become deeply anchored in the popular imagination of the motherland.
It shows, entirely in the style of Edward Said’s thesis, how the West’s way of gathering knowledge on colonial Indonesia took place: in a discourse of mainly binary opposites in which the decent West, dominated by self-control, was set off against the East of feminine, passive, defenseless sensuality, sexual willingness and therefore threat. In this male-dominated discourse, women, and certainly ‘Oriental’ women, were not seen as fully fledged adults, but as immature beings who needed protection and whose appearance and deliberate coquetry could lead nowhere but to the seduction of European men. In this way, European, male, colonial practices such as the possession of slaves, their handling (punishment and sexual intercourse) and domination were legitimized.89

This makes types like ‘the slave woman’ more than representations. Texts, together with images, as part of the tradition of social types did not only reflect the colonial social situation and hierarchy, but also shaped and maintained them. The types even normalized them, by representing that situation as justified and inherent to that society (‘the slave woman’ was, after all, a ‘typical’ phenomenon, threatened by criticism from ignorant people).

Conclusion

Summarizing, one could say that the phenomenon of slavery in colonial Indonesia in Dutch representations of colonial society had been reduced to a character sketch, to the type of ‘the slave woman’, with its associated unchangeable, generalized characteristics. Appearing in so-called type collections, she reflected society in a very generalized way, as is so often the case in publications on national types. This was done from a Eurocentric, predominantly male, perspective. The appearance and use of ‘types’ is, however, something more than just an innocent representation. With the recurrence, over the years, of the type, the colonial practice of owning and enslaving was legitimized and normalized.

In short, the images and texts, often closely interwoven, of and about enslaved women only give insight into the functioning of colonial ideas, the hierarchy of those ideas (as a type, the ‘slave woman’ was at the bottom of the ladder of colonial types) and in how they influenced the formation of a European colonial ‘reality’. They tell little or nothing about society in all its complexity or about the enslaved themselves. It is time for the latter to be freed from this sexualized, gendered discourse, and for them to regain their agency, their individuality and historical specificity.

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In 2005, a remarkable painting came on the market. It was an unusual depiction of a non-European landscape in which two shackled men are escorted away under the supervision of three guards, a man, and a woman. The auction catalogue described the painting as: ‘Dutch merchant with slaves in West Indian hilly landscape, Dutch school, 18th century’. There was little time for in-depth research, but the intriguing depiction and the lack of paintings and
objects that could help address the theme of slavery in the Rijksmuseum made the history department decide to bid on the painting nonetheless. Due to the rather poor condition of the painting and the fact that the museum was being renovated, the acquisition was placed in the depot pending further investigation. Meanwhile, its description in the collection database was based on the description in the auction catalogue.

In 2015, Matthias van Rossum’s book Kleurrijke tragiek: De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de VOC [Colorful tragedies. The history of slavery in Asia under the VOC] appeared, with the (not yet restored) painting of the merchant with slaves featured prominently on its cover. In subsequent years, Van Rossum frequently argued that the scene should actually be placed in Asia, and the Rijksmuseum adapted its description in the collection database. In 2015, with the support of the Zuidroute/Rijksmuseum Fund, it was possible to restore the painting for the exhibition Goede Hoop [Good Hope], about the shared history of the Netherlands and South Africa. In the exhibition, the painting was presented in the context of the exiles that the VOC sent to the Cape from Indonesia, thus moving it away slightly from the subject of slavery. In the accompanying text, the question of whether the two captivated men were criminals, enslaved people, or political exiles, was left unanswered.

The restoration work in 2015 was an opportunity to take another very detailed look at the piece. What do we actually see in the painting? If we look at the couple, the merchant and his wife (detail)

The couple, the merchant and his wife (detail)
It is difficult to link a name to this painting. The artist Cornelis de Bruijn travelled around Indonesia for several months in 1706-1707. The woman with the cloth shows clear similarities to a drawing by De Bruijn but is stylistically too different for the painting to be attributed to De Bruijn. Nor did his travel account of this period provide any concrete clues. From the portraits of the governors-general that hung in the Castle and that were made by local painters we know that there were painters working in Batavia. A letter from March 1680 provides further interesting information in this context. In this letter, VOC merchant Cornelis Wemans writes to his childhood friend Cornelis Tromp about his plan to send a portrait of himself to Tromp, as a token of gratitude for the portrait he had received from him. However, the painting would be finished too late for the next return fleet, so he had chosen an alternative gift. We don’t know why it would have taken so long for Wemans’ portrait to be finished. What does become clear, however, is that painters were active in Batavia at the end of the 17th century, and also that VOC merchants were their clients.

It is not very likely that the painting hung in the Castle of Batavia or a VOC office elsewhere in Asia or the Netherlands. The depiction is too specific and therefore too different from other paintings we know in this colonial context. It seems more likely that this was a private commission or that the artist made the painting for himself. The painting, however, is not easily typified as a means of underlining one’s own status by being portrayed with an enslaved male servant, or as a representation of enslaved people at work, two types of depictions that we see often.

While writing this article, a similar painting turned up at a French auction house and history seemed to repeat itself. This too is an intriguing depiction that was clearly made by the same artist, but which does not lend itself easily to interpretation. It is striking that a similar couple is depicted in this painting. They are part of a scene in the open air, attended by a large group of spectators who seem to represent the diverse society of, among others, Chinese, Balinese, Javanese and Mardijkers. If the merchant and his wife are the key figures in both works, is this the portrayal of a man who held a function that linked Batavia with the Ommelanden? A man who played a role in the slave trade in the VOC area? And could this mean that the scratches on the faces of the two main characters were made as a response to their role in the slave trade?

In recent years, the story of the title and description of the painting depicting the merchant and his captives became symbolic of the disregard for the significance of slavery in Asia in historical studies and presentations. The auction house had simply assumed that, as this was a depiction of slavery, it had to be in ‘the West’, and in the Rijksmuseum this description had not led to any critical reflection. Perhaps this misinterpretation would not have received much further attention had this work not been a unique painted depiction of enslaved people, not as servants but as captives. Thus, the painting soon became symbolic of the increased awareness of slavery in the area around the Indian Ocean. Now that the second work by the same painter that surfaced recently may be connected with the slave trade, it becomes clear once again how important visual sources are in the study of the history of slavery in Asia. The limited number of representations available may, through further study and comparison, bring us closer to the history of slavery in Asia, and hopefully some questions regarding this remarkable painting will be answered in the future.
Turning Invisible Labor Visible

Under Cover of Darkness and Women in Servitude in the early Cape Colony

The Slave Lodge is the second oldest surviving building from the period of the early Cape Colony. It was purposely built to house people enslaved by the Dutch East India Company, a function it fulfilled between 1679-1811. In the subsequent years, the building underwent a number of transformations, from being used as government offices, a Supreme Court and finally in 1966, a cultural history museum. In 1998, the museum was renamed The Slave Lodge, in order to signal a turn by the museum to focus on the history of slavery at the Cape. The museum stands in the center of Cape Town, at one end of the Company’s Gardens, as Capetonians call it even to this day. “The Company”, a name we form in our mouths almost unthinkingly, refers of course to the VOC. Dotted throughout the cityscape are reminders of the Company’s occupation of the region. Some are self-consciously erected markers, such as statues and...
street names commemorating the period, while others are lodged in the very materiality of its infrastructure, such as cobblestone streets, buildings like the Slave Lodge, and – not least of all – the spatial design of the city itself. Cape Town carries its past on its sleeve, but on one issue it is silent: Whose labor built and sustains this city? The history of slavery in the city receives comparatively little attention and is often relegated to the deep past. What is more, the extent to which slavery set in motion the extractive labor conditions, arranged along lines of both race and gender, which still characterizes the city, is largely downplayed in the manner that Cape Town publicly rehearses its history. Race, patriarchy and labor continue to constitute the most challenging issues faced in contemporary South Africa, but rarely is it acknowledged that the patterns of their organization were established in the early Cape Colony. Under Cover of Darkness was born from a desire to upend the naturalized, unconscious assignation of slavery as belonging to the deep past, and the undervaluing of women’s labor in particular. We wanted to turn the rooms accommodating the exhibition into spaces where the unseen is transformed into the seen. Predictably, our ambition was simpler to conceive than achieve: since the naturalization of slave ownership and extractive labor practices does not cease at the door of the museum. Iziko’s very collection has been shaped by the interests of those who considered enslaved people their property, rather than of the people whose labor was alienated through enslavement. Consequently, the vast majority of the objects in the museum’s collection are associated with the period belonged to Europeans. We nevertheless tasked ourselves with finding means whereby these objects could be mobilized to give shape to the stories of enslaved women and women in servitude, as well to make the legacy of slavery at the Cape apparent in the present.

Two stories in particular animated our process from the beginning, when Josephine Grindrod invited me to work with her as curator on a project that had been years in germination. She had become captivated by Susanna van Bengal, an enslaved woman convicted and executed for murdering her six-month-old daughter in 1669. Though Susanna’s desperate fate is not unknown to those interested in Cape Town’s history, hers is not a life that has been prominently commemorated. This story was one that needed to be made more visible and to be brought into the present. At the time, my own research was focused on Krotoa, a Goringhaicona woman who lived and worked in the household of the VOC governor, Jan van Riebeeck, from the age of ten. She later became an indispensable interpreter and negotiator between the Dutch and various Khoekhoe groups at the Cape. Krotoa’s labor defined her life, and the colonial administration controlled her labor. (Though often treated as distinct, the history of slavery in Cape Town is intimately intertwined with the lives of first nations peoples.) Krotoa might today be a much more famous figure from the history of Cape Town than Susanna, but up until the 1990s her story was similarly under-represented. Moreover, anyone who has searched for Krotoa in the archives will know that information on her is extremely sparse. It became clear to Josephine and me that both Krotoa’s and Susanna’s lives are significant in understanding contemporary Cape Town, but that stories such as theirs were, for the most part, hidden. The relative invisibility of Krotoa and Susanna led us to wonder which other stories remain to be uncovered. So we returned to the archives, where Susie Joubert unearthed material on more women. From this material, we chose to tell twelve stories: Anna and Marij van Madagaskar (two women brought to the Cape from Madagascar); Ansela who became Engela (enslaved in Bengal and brought to the Cape where she eventually became a free burgher); Armosyn Claasz (born into slavery at the Slave Lodge where she later became the matron); China, renamed Rosa (sold into slavery as a child in India); Dina van Rio de la Goa (enslaved in Mozambique, escaped, and eventually lived as a free man in the colony); Krotoa (a Khoekhoe woman who served in the Van Riebeeck household as a girl and later became a translator); Magdalena van Batavia (enslaved in Batavia and bought the freedom of her daughters at the Cape); Marij van Macasser (who only appears as an item of “household goods” in an auction record); Rosa van Bengal (sold as an enslaved person in the Cape on to a ship destined for South America); Susanna van Bengal (enslaved in Batavia, but arrived at the Cape as a convict) and Zara van de Caab (a Khoekhoe woman tried and dishonored after her suicide). The twelve stories told in Under Cover of Darkness convey the breadth and diversity of women’s experiences, and remind us that they were individuals, not to be diminished by reductive generalizations. At the same time, these stories signal that there are many others that will never be told. Most women’s lives did not make it into record. Women in servitude were written about only when their lives intersected with the colonial administration, most commonly when bought or sold as “property”, when acting in contravention of colonial laws, or in the rare instances when a woman obtained freedom. Most women living under these conditions never owned anything.

Example of archival document consulted in the production of the exhibition, a page from Armosyn’s will (photo: Susie Joubert)
If *Under Cover of Darkness* was to memorialize that which is absent, unvoiced and unmourned, then the stories of these twelve women needed to be materially instantiated in the exhibition. Objects from the collection alone could not accomplish this, and in fact, their centrality as source-material for historical narration needed to be deliberately displaced. Consequently, I adopted a curatorial strategy for the exhibition in which the objects were put in conversation with other forms of representation, other means to narrate this history. The dominant methodology by which I intended to dislodge the privileging of museum objects was to narrate the stories of the twelve women in Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English (the three primary languages of the Western Cape) on pillars arranged throughout the exhibition space. As they were positioned, the pillars impede an easy passage through the rooms so that one cannot view the objects unless one negotiates a way around the pillars and is confronted by some of the narratives.

Furthermore, the museum objects themselves were organized to speak to the stories of the twelve women. For instance, an exquisitely delicate baby bonnet made by an enslaved woman called Melati evokes different associations when juxtaposed with the story of Susanna van Bengal than when viewed it on its own. Seen together, Susanna’s story and the bonnet are able to evoke complex reflections on what is most often considered to be the primary labor performed by women, namely childrearing. A note attached to the bonnet reads “Knitted by a slave of my grandmother’s and worn by me in 1838.” That Melati made the bonnet not for her own child but for a European woman’s child, evidences an uncomfortable intersection between the acts of care and coercion, craft and servitude. Whereas one can easily be touched when imagining Melati’s beautiful, fastidious handiwork cradling the soft head of an infant, one should all the while remember that Susanna was so abused by the VOC that she was left incapable of extending such care to her own child.

The bonnet, alongside two pieces of lace also made by Melati, are some of the very few objects in the collection of the museum that are known to have been created by an enslaved woman. Another such object is a dress from the textiles collection, but in this case no definitive information, nor the name of the maker survives. In the exhibition, the dress is displayed opposite Untitled (30 May 2018), an artwork by South African artist Azazole Ndamase. The work consists of a blue worker’s overall jacket, ubiquitous in South Africa, embellished with artificial hairpieces and extensions. Ndamase’s work is itself a potent meditation on labor, gender and agency, especially fraught issues in
contemporary South Africa. In the exhibition, it was placed to face the dress made by an unknown enslaved woman to remind us of the deep roots of these polemics.

Apart from pointed juxtapositions, other forms of conversation, or call-and-response, were utilized so as to trouble the didactic conventions of museum display as well as invite sensorial and empathetic responses to the twelve stories. As a visitor makes their way from the entrance deeper into the exhibition, they will gradually become aware of a far-off, sonorous note penetrating the air. The single, repeated note sung by a succession of female voices sounds clearer and louder the further one progresses into the exhibition until, stepping into the darkened space of the final room, one is met by video documentation of Elegy: Louisa van de Caab (2018). South African artist Gabrielle Goliath staged this version (produced especially for Under Cover of Darkness) of her on-going performance piece Elegy (2015), on the opening night. The video presents an embodied, voiced, collective act of mourning by a group of opera singers for Louisa van de Caab, who died at the Cape in 1786. An elegiac text honoring Louisa written by Saarah Jappie accompanies the performance and video. Opposite the video, the slave bell from the Oranjezicht farm squats on plastic pallets, encaged in a perspex box. Once used to control the movements of enslaved people through sound, it is silent now, immobile. In another room, similarly encased in a perspex box, is a section of a slave tree that used to stand in Church Square. Under its branches, people were bought and sold. Next to this box is a heap of ash, which I collected by burning wood throughout the period in which we were planning and producing the exhibition, as my own form of meditation on the unmaking of substance and dissolution of memory.

I aimed, via these curatorial strategies, to make visible – to the limited degree that it is possible – what is invisible in the museum’s collection: the intimate labor performed by women in servitude. These strategies were conceived as an intervention into the conventional reliance museums have had on narrating the histories of slavery by drawing on colonial objects or textual narration. Instead, I wanted to instantiate these histories as presences, to be sensed and engaged bodily.

In order to arrive at the Slave Lodge one inevitably has to negotiate a path through an improbably varied melange of people and buildings: street performers entertaining red-faced tourists in floppy hats and sandals, informal traders selling souvenirs and fruit next to St George’s Cathedral, barristers and politicians in sombre suits hurrying onto their next important meeting. The city around the Slave Lodge frames every visit to the site, and as such should move us to pause for thought. Right next to the museum is the South African Parliament, the site where apartheid laws were enacted. The proximity of these buildings reminds us of how the very structures of colonialism and apartheid continue to structure life and labor in South Africa. With Under Cover of Darkness, we sought to make the largely unacknowledged role of slavery in the persisting legacy of inequality apparent, especially as it concerns the invisible labor performed by women in the city today. Throughout the exhibition, we
endeavored to dislodge the dominance of colonial objects as a means to narrate the history of slavery in Cape Town, by placing them in conversation with the stories that are absent from the collection, but urgently need to be told. These histories are not distant to us but constitute the very foundation of our lives.”
Introduction

Batavia in the 17th and 18th centuries was a city governed directly by the VOC. As the headquarters of the Dutch maritime trading networks in Asia, the administration of Batavia was mixed with the administration of the VOC. The mixed administration was one of the main reasons why the upswing and decline of the VOC were closely linked to the progress and setbacks of Batavia. Such circumstances were not ideal conditions. Cornelis Chastelein, a member of Raad van Indië, had spotted the problem. He proposed to develop Batavia and other Dutch colonies in Asia by not involving the VOC too much in the colony’s internal affairs. His proposal did not receive a serious response from the VOC’s High Government. Chastelein’s disappointment at his proposal being ignored became one of the reasons that made him come to a decision to retire from his position as a member of Raad van Indië. After his retirement, Chastelein devoted his life to developing Depok.

The case of the community of Depok, located in the present-day city of Depok in Indonesia, stands out as a remarkable example of mass manumission of enslaved laborers by a high-ranking VOC official. To this day the myth of Cornelis Chastelein speaks to the imagination, whereas the stories of the formerly enslaved have only been told piecemeal. This contribution aims to give a brief overview of the history of the ‘Depokkers’, as members of the community were known in colonial times.

Cornelis Chastelein bought Depok estate from Lucas van de Meur, resident of Cirebon, on May the 18th 1696, at a price of 300 rijksdaalders.97 As a high-ranking official of the VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) and member of the Raad van Indië, he was part of Batavia’s wealthy citizenry, having a large, steady income that enabled him to buy Depok estate. The location of this private estate was in the surrounding area of Batavia called the Ommelanden, on the southern side of the city, between the Ciliwung and Pesanggrahan river. When Chastelein bought Depok, a large part of the land consisted of forests. It required a large number of human resources to work the land to make Depok suitable for settlements. This explains why he bought a substantial number of enslaved when he began working on Depok.

In addition to building his own private estate, Chastelein’s initial goal was to develop pepper plantations and to build Depok into a productive agricultural and plantation area. Besides pepper, the Depok estate was also planted with indigo, cocoa, and fruits.
Chastelein and his enslaved started to cultivate Depok land in 1705. When he began working in Depok, Chastelein moved from Batavia to Srengseng, an area located on the Ommelanden and close to Depok, on the north of the private estate. There were 200 enslaved brought by Chastelein to Depok. These enslaved came from various regions in the Indonesian archipelago, such as Bali, Makassar, Bugis and Timor. In 17th and 18th century Batavia, the possession of large numbers of enslaved among Europeans was a symbol of high social status. The more slaves a person had, the higher his or her social status in society, especially among Europeans. Although VOC officials and wealthy Europeans in Batavia owned large numbers of enslaved people, the percentage of Europeans in the 17th and 18th centuries never exceeded 3% of the total population in Batavia and its surrounding area. The majority of slave owners were in fact Indonesians who, although only able to possess one or two enslaved, in population terms constituted a majority.

Chastelein seems to have established a good working relationship with his enslaved. He did not treat them as Europeans in Batavia treated their slaves. Chastelein viewed his slaves as people that he, being a good Christian, had to guide to become able to live independently. As a devout Calvinist, he expected his enslaved to convert to his religion and to obey religious teachings.

The Testament
Chastelein’s ideas for his slaves and their future were conveyed in a testament that was legalized by a notary on March 13, 1714. In this testament he granted his enslaved freedom. As a provision of life for the enslaved, Chastelein provided them with Depok estate. But in order to possess the private land, he also required them to convert to Calvinism. Chastelein’s testament was kept by his notary and the copy of the testament was handed over to his trusted enslaved, Jarong van Bali. Chastelein appointed Jarong as the leader of the enslaved in Depok. When Chastelein died on June 28, 1714, they were immediately manumitted and became free people, based on his testament. However, not all of the 200 slaves in Depok were willing to convert to Calvinism. 120 were willing to receive the Calvinist sacrament, while 80 refused to do so.

Referring to Chastelein’s testament, the enslaved who refused the sacrament were not allowed to live in Depok. Although they still got the status of free persons, they were not permitted to work on Depok estate anymore. These 80 people then joined the population of indigenous villagers who lived in the various kampung around Depok. The presence of those who later became the kampung’s inhabitants explained why Depok estate and its inhabitants who were former enslaved could live in peace with the surrounding indigenous population. Even now, the Depok residents who are descendants of former enslaved of Chastelein live in peace and mutual respect with the Indonesian population who live as their neighbors. This close relationship is seen in every Christian and Islamic feast day, where the Depok Calvinist residents and Muslim people who live in the kampung visit each other.

However, not all of the 120 people who were freed from slavery and received the sacrament were allowed to live in Depok. In Chastelein’s testament it is mentioned that there were some people who were prohibited from living in Depok because according to him they often created trouble. Specifically, Lendert, his wife Elizabeth from Bali and her son Catje, and Otto from Makassar were named. The reason Chastelein forbade these people from living in Depok as he was worried was that they would cause big problems. Therefore, Chastelein mentioned their names as rioters and after he died, they were not permitted to visit Depok.

The Land
In addition to the statement of the enslaved ‘manumission, Chastelein also submitted a request to the Batavian government that Depok estate could be possessed by the emancipated enslaved. Unfortunately, his request was rejected. Until the beginning of the 18th century, the transfer of private ownership of land in Batavia and the Ommelanden usually happened through the process of buying and selling, or inheritance from one person to another individual. Based on research in the available sources, there is no information about private land that was given by the owner to a group of people who were his former slaves. This might the explanation behind the Batavian government’s decision to reject Chastelein’s request. The official reason given by the government in its formal decision letter was that Chastelein’s request
was not in accordance with the resolution about inheritance issued on May 29, 1705.

However, the Batavian government did not completely reject Chastelein’s wishes. A compromise was reached. Depok estate was not given to Chastelein’s former enslaved, but to his son, Anthony Chastelein. The government’s decision on the matter was issued on July 24, 1714. Under Anthony’s ownership, the emancipated slaves could continue working Depok’s land. However, Anthony did not live long, dying in February 1715. The ownership of Depok then passed to his widow Anna Chastelein de Haan.

Two years later, Anna married a lawyer who was a member of the Raad van Justitie, Johan Francois de Witte van Schoten. Based on the marriage, Anna’s husband submitted an application to the College van Schepenen to transfer the Depok estate to him. His application was approved, so that until the 19th century Depok estate was officially considered the possession of Johan Francois de Witte van Schoten. For the reasons behind the application for possession of Depok, it has been suggested that with the name Johan Francois de Witte van Schoten as the owner, Depok’s status as a private estate would be more assured. Hence, the former slaves and their descendants could remain to work on Depok land. Furthermore, they could continue to live there by following all the rules set out by Chastelein in his testament.

From the outset, Chastelein never intended to build Depok as a city. Chastelein wanted to build Depok as a community that lived in the ways he imagined. Since the early 18th century Depok began to form as a settlement with the characteristics of a sub-urban society. In contrast to other communities in Indonesia, the community that formed in Depok was part of the reality of colonial society in the early 18th century which consisted mainly of former slaves. Chastelein’s main goal in establishing Depok was to create a model for the VOC government in building their colonies in Asia.

Conclusion

By establishing Depok, Chastelein wanted to show the VOC a way to managing the colony so that the community in the colony could develop on their own initiative. Depok’s establishment was a form of Chastelein’s criticism of life in the city of Batavia and the way Batavia’s Government administered it. Although in the early eighteenth century Batavia reached its zenith, being referred to by Francois Valentijn as “the Queen City of the East”, according to Chastelein the potential of Batavian society could not fully develop since the freedom of the population was restricted by the VOC. Chastelein wanted the VOC to understand that the colony would develop better if the population had more freedom in carrying out their initiatives.

In Depok Chastelein brought his ideas about how colonies should be developed into practice. This explains why in his testament he gave freedom to his slaves and granted them lands and properties so they could fulfill their own daily needs and become independent. He was also set many rules that guaranteed the freedom of the community living in Depok, mainly consisting of enslaved people. Chastelein wanted to show that a colony that was built by giving many opportunities and initiatives to its inhabitants was a colony that could develop and persist for a long time. Although Chastelein’s ideas were never implemented on a larger scope, it was proven that the community that lived in Depok could survive for longer than two and half centuries. The community established by Chastelein survived until the Dutch colonial government ended in 1942 and remained into the early 1950s.
Between bonded labor and slavery in Ceylon (Sri Lanka)

Unfree labor as a business case

Unfree labor was an essential part of the VOC’s revenue model in Asia. This could be slave labor, but also bonded labor linked to groups of people in society with a specific social status. As elsewhere in South Asia, labor in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) was organized via the caste system and linked to land ownership. Consequently, the type and amount of labor a person performed for a ruler depended on descent. For example, cinnamon, the specific product for which the VOC came to Ceylon, was gathered from the forests by people from the Salagama caste. They peeled the bark from the tree and were therefore also called the cinnamon peelers. It was cheap, almost free labor for the VOC.105

In addition to the trade in cinnamon, which mainly focused on European outlets, the VOC derived profits from regional South Asian trade, such as the trade in elephants or in ‘sowing roots’ (chaya or sāyavēr); these were roots used to make a red dye. The roots had to be dug up. This was strenuous work which was done by the sāyavēr kuttiyar, a specific caste in Jaffna. People often tried to escape this labor by posing as members of a different caste, or by temporarily leaving their village when the digging season began.106

All villages had to supply workers to the annual elephant hunt in the southwest of the island. These ‘cooie services’, as the VOC called them, were linked to caste status and land ownership. The elephant hunt required intensive organization, as we can observe in the watercolors of Jan Brandes, who attended a hunt in 1785. From the watercolors it instantly becomes clear how labor-intensive the hunt was. All this was part of the bondage system that the VOC cleverly appropriated and co-developed. The villagers found this compulsory service extremely unpleasant, not only because it was demanding work, but also because they could not work their own fields at the same time.107

In order to maintain control over all these forms of labor and land ownership, the VOC employed village registers in the eighteenth century, known as thombos. This way it was possible to keep track of who had to pay tax over which types of fields, or who had to carry out labor. This administration is still partly intact and is kept in the National Archives of Sri Lanka. Paradoxically, this administration is now a unique source, because for historians it reveals more than just the registration of unfree labor. The records make it possible to reconstruct family histories of people who were forced to work for the company, for instance.108
A fine line between bondage and slavery

The dividing line between bondage and slavery was sometimes very thin. This was especially true for people from the Nalavar, Palavar and Covia castes in the north of the island. Within the caste hierarchy of the region these were the lowest castes. Members of these castes had to be constantly available to work the land for people from higher castes. Moreover, the voc also appropriated a proportion of these people. The voc called them ‘slave caste’, but their social status was less straightforward than the voc made appear. People of Nalavar and Palavar descent, for example, could not readily be sold or bought. Yet, there are known cases where this did actually happen, a reminder that in practice it was more disorderly than rules might suggest.

In the thombos we also encounter people from the Nalavar and Palavar castes: in such cases, a formal owner was usually also recorded. Mostly this was someone from a higher caste in the village, but it could also be the church, for example. In some cases however a thombo registered persons as members of the slave caste but does not give the name of any owner. The person in charge of the registration apparently did not consider whether it was possible to be a slave with no owner. It demonstrates primarily that the voc had a limited understanding of the caste system and the associated degrees of unfreedom, and that the Dutch-language term ‘slave caste’ was not exactly accurate.¹⁰⁹

In Brandes’ drawing we also see other men at work, the white voc merchants watching the elephant hunt. They are flanked by bare-footed men dressed in loincloths, some wearing cloaks, and all wearing a headband. These people also performed this work as an obligatory service, and in this case protect their masters from the sun by holding up a fan-shaped parasol, made from the leaves of the local talipat palm, with which they could also keep themselves cool. As a colonial power on the island, the voc’s servants in the countryside had access to labor at all times, which they withdrew from the local community. Here in the countryside, bonded people were carrying out the work which in the city was done by slaves.

Slaves of the Company

Inside the forts and in the cities, work in the offices and houses of the voc was carried out by people who had been bought as slaves and who often originated from outside the island. Throughout the eighteenth century, the voc permanently kept around eight hundred people as slaves, most of whom were stationed across the larger offices in Jaffna, Galle and Colombo. The high-ranking administrators always had a number of these slaves at their disposal. In addition, in and around the offices all kinds of slaves were working, fetching water, cleaning, and preparing food. All institutions of the voc, including the church and the orphanage, had a number of enslaved people at their disposal for this type of work. In 1777, for example, one of the deacons of Galle’s orphanage asked the governor for two new slaves who could cook, because the old slaves had become too sick and the children still had to be fed. There were also porters and builders, who worked on the maintenance of the forts and roads.¹¹⁰

We sometimes find these people in reports and they sometimes appear in images. In the watercolor by Steiger, a view of Jaffna, we see a slave boy carrying a fan made out of talipat palm for his master, just as the villagers did in the watercolor by Brandes. In the engraving by Heyd, a view inside the fort of Galle, we see a voc official accompanied by a boy with a parasol.¹¹¹ The enslaved are mentioned more structurally in the annual summaries of the materials house. In the lists, amongst the items written off, such as tools to be replaced, we also find people living as slaves who needed to be replaced because they were ‘broken’: too old to work, injured, or fallen ill. In the images, the enslaved look human and healthy, in the lists of the materials house we see the voc’s dehumanization of them.

The people who were kept by the voc as slaves came from various corners of the Indian Ocean. In the seventeenth century they came mainly from Bengal and Arakan, in the eighteenth century increasingly from the Indonesian archipelago. South Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara and Maluku in particular were regions that many people came from. There too, under the influence of the
Johan Wolfgang Heydt, View of the courtyard of the
castle Punta Gale, 1737 (Koninklijke Bibliotheek)

So, the VOC was a slave-owning organization and its trade in Ceylon was only possible through forms of bondage that did not exist in the Republic itself and were abhorred there. In the cargo lists of the VOC ships arriving in Ceylon, we sometimes see the slaves arrive ‘to order’. For example, on 26 November 1737, the ship Anna Catharina from Malabar brought 50 ‘pieces’ of slaves to Colombo, worth a total of 2273 guilders. On the cargo list these people were described as merchandise, together with the wheat and the 16,000 cow skins that were also in the hold.112

What did these people do? Many of them did domestic work: they cooked, did the laundry, did chores in and around the house and took care of their owner’s children. The slave orchestras were probably somewhat more exclusive. We know that such orchestras were popular with the highest VOC officials, but we don’t know much more about them. In the course of the eighteenth century there were also more and more VOC officials who privately owned larger areas of land, some of which were also worked by slaves. In addition, slaves could be leased to the VOC if there was extra need for labor, for example in the harbor. In this way, VOC officials and Dutch families were able to make good money through the VOC, while this form of slavery did not directly burden the budget of the materials house. As a result, these people are not immediately visible in the VOC’s administration.

Slave Island

Sri Lanka’s history of slavery is now largely forgotten. In Colombo there is only one place that still reminds us of it, the slave island, now called Slave Island or Kompunnadiya.

P. Foenander, Map of the fort and old city Colombo
(detail), 1785 (Nationaal Archief)
Many stories are told about this place. The VOC is said to have released crocodiles into the surrounding lake to prevent enslaved people from fleeing. There is also the story that VOC slaves were sent to live on Slave Island after a major uprising of African slaves. Recent research shows that these stories can be traced back to the dramatic murder of a slave owner, in 1723, by enslaved people in his household who were fed up with his abuse. The twelve enslaved persons in this household were originally from Southeast Asia, not from Africa. Six of them were eventually sentenced to death, a public display that must have made a deep impression on the people of Colombo. The distorted memory is indicative of the obscurity of the local history of slavery among a wider audience in Colombo.113

What we do know is that Slave Island was also home to a group of people called ‘Christian slaves’, who clearly formed their own community. Their living quarters and their school are visible on the map of 1785. While it may be that these people could not be traded, they were still forced to work for the VOC. On the other side of the island, in Batticaloa, there existed a similar community of people who were called ‘craft slaves’ by the Dutch, who were also Christians and called themselves mechanics. Could it be that a process of caste formation took place there on a small scale and that these people, descendants of slaves, were held in an extreme form of bondage by the Company in ways similar to the Coviyar and Nalavar in Jaffna? That would underline once again the interconnectedness of bondage and slavery, but would also explain why this history slowly slipped into oblivion. New research is needed to shed more light on this.114

In the town hall of Dokkum, there is a painting from 1697 depicting a rich household. The painter Gerard Wigmana portrayed mayor Julius Schelto van Aitzema and his wife Sara van den Broecke in their house in Dokkum, with an unknown, important guest. In the back, on the left, people are crowding in front of a window to look inside. Several servants flock around the group at the table. A child of about ten years old features prominently in the foreground. He is holding a silver tray with great concentration. He wears a grey livery, trimmed with red ribbon, and his shiny black leather shoes are decorated with a shiny silver buckle. The child looks identical to two other servants standing to his right. There is an important difference, however: he was born in the Indonesian archipelago, just like the young woman in the foreground on the left and the woman in the rear right-hand corner.
Miraculously, the names of these servants from the Indonesian archipelago have been handed down to us. The painting was sold at an auction in England in the nineteenth century. A London newspaper interviewed the municipal secretary of Dokkum about the people portrayed and revealed the name of the child and the young woman on the left. He said that he knew the painting well: ‘(...) they are served by a servant called Philander de Baron (...), originally from East India (whose daughter, known by the name of black Rosette, I used to know!), (...) and another one called Martha, also of East Indian origin’. After extensive research the name of the woman in the rear right corner also surfaced. Her name was Rosette van Sambauwa and she was the mother of Philander de Baron.

Rosette van Sambauwa was brought to the Netherlands by Sara van den Broecke – the woman at the table. Van den Broecke travelled to the Republic with her first husband, Gualther Zeeman, in 1689 (about eight years before this painting was made) after a life in Batavia. In the Cape, the last stop of the return fleet destined for the Netherlands, Zeeman and a few others submitted a request to take a number of enslaved people ‘on behalf of and serving their wives and suckling children’. This request was granted. Thus, Rosette van Sambauwa, Baron van Bengalen, Grietje van Tominij, Michel Cochin, Matij van Punto de Gale, Martha van Makassar, Calamatacke, and an unnamed enslaved woman from the ‘slavenlogie’ [Slave Lodge] of Cape Town travelled to the Netherlands. For each of them, 68 rijksdaalders were paid to the Company’s treasury. Philander de Baron is not mentioned in this document. He was the son of Baron van Bengalen and Rosette van Sambauwa and could not have been more than two years old at the time of the crossing.

The VOC did not officially allow their crossing. Many placards were issued banning the transportation of enslaved people to the Netherlands. The penalty was 50 selen. A placard of 1646 gives an indication of the reason for the ban. Many of the people who were brought over, returned to Batavia, which appears to have cost the VOC a lot of money. In addition, the crossing over of the enslaved was considered harmful to the Republic with regard to de voorttelinge [reproduction]. No further details are given as to why this reproduction would be harmful. For an infant it was allowed to take a ‘minnemoer’ [wet nurse], if she was paid for. This woman would then have to ‘bring a receipt of that money to the Netherlands, in which case she would be granted passage to Batavia and otherwise not’.

Filander, Rosette and Martha were not the only servants brought over from Asia. VOC officials took hundreds, perhaps even thousands of enslaved people from various regions of Asia, Madagascar and South Africa with them to the Republic. The listed Asian toponyms in the baptismal, marriage and burial records betray their presence. They are much less well known than the African servants in the Netherlands, who have been researched in recent years and are sometimes depicted in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century portraits.

In comparison, a much smaller number of enslaved Asians have been immortalized in paintings. For example, the unknown man carrying the pajong [parasol] of a VOC chief merchant, painted by Aelbert Cuyp. Cuyp only ever worked in the Netherlands, from which we can conclude that the man carrying the pajong is also portrayed from life. Could the man have been brought over just like Filander, Rosette and Martha? Another example is the man in the red cape depicted in the portrait of the governor of Ceylon, Rijcklof van Goens, and his family. This painting was made by Bartholomeus van der Helst during their short stay in the Netherlands. We do not know the name of this man either. He is strongly reminiscent of the African child Van der Helst portrayed twelve years earlier in the painting Schutters van wijk VIII in Amsterdam onder leiding van Kapitein Roelof Bicker [Militia company of district VIII under the command of Captain Roelof Bicker]. He also wears a striking red cape and his name too remains unknown.

Not much is known about how enslaved Asians fared after arriving in the Netherlands nor how many of them returned soon thereafter. Officially they were free in the Netherlands, because there was no slavery in the Republic. What this meant in actual practice and whether they knew this themselves is unclear. The laws on this subject were vague and changed often and drastically. Even though under the letter of the law they may have been free, the Asian servants were still subject to a fairly coercive domestic authority. They generally needed permission to go outside, because ‘running away’ was a punishable offence.

Did this also apply to the servants who were taken away by Sara van den Broecke? Only about Rosette van Sambauwa and Baron van Bengalen can more information be found in the archives. They had their daughter Magdhalena baptized in the town of Alkmaar on 3 January 1690, almost exactly nine months after they left Cape Town. It was mentioned that ‘both are Indians, the Father a Christian’. Gualther Zeeman and Sara van den Broecke settled in Alkmaar until Zeeman’s death in 1692. The following year Sara van den Broecke married Julius Schelto van Aitzema – the man on the right at the table in the painting – and moved to Dokkum, where Van Aitzema was mayor. As the
The painting shows, Rosette and Philander went with her. What happened to Baron van Bengalen is unfortunately unknown. It is possible he died in Alkmaar, but there is no evidence for that in the cemetery records. It is suggested that the woman on the left, ‘Martha, also of East Indian origin’, is the Martha van Makassar from the Cape document. Philander de Baron did not remain a servant of the family for the rest of his life. After the death of Van Aitzema in 1714, he became chief of police in 1715. He married a Frisian woman and had five children. One of his children he named Rosette after his mother. He may have named his eldest son after one of the other mayors, Adolf Reilingh, who helped him get his job with the police. Like himself, the children were all given the surname De Baron, named after their grandfather Baron, who came from Bengal. None of the five children seem to have had children of their own. Philander’s sister Magdalena appears in the sources one more time, in the census of 1744. At that time, she was living in Dokkum and received poor relief. She does not seem to have had any offspring either.

This story shows both similarities and differences with other stories of enslaved servants who were brought to the Netherlands. Both Africans and Asians sometimes ended up in a (family) portrait, as happened to Philander, Rosette and Martha. Their masters flaunted their presence and through them were able to present themselves as well-travelled individuals. Yet there are also differences in the manner in which the servants from Asia and Africa were depicted. Many African servants had the role of status symbol. They were not portrayed as flesh-and-blood human beings, but as generic black people. The men in the paintings of Cuyp and Van der Helst, however, appear to have been painted after life. The Dutch people who had brought them had actually been to Asia, while this was sometimes not the case with the owners of African servants. The Asian servants made visible the link that existed between the portrayed Dutch people and Asia.

The painting from Dokkum is more than a family portrait with an Asian servant. It depicts a domestic scene, where we see people in action. Philander does not stand, as is the case with the other paintings, in the shadow of the main characters, but manifestly in the center. That may well tell us something about the relationship his masters had with him. Philander was able to secure a good position because of the connections he had with the mayors of Dokkum and was accepted into the community. He married a Frisian woman and had children with her. The baptismal and wedding archives show that this was not unusual for Asian servants. Nowhere in the Republic was there a community of Asians, however, such as existed for Africans in Amsterdam in the middle of the 17th century. The fate of Philander’s children shows that his level of inclusion in the community was extraordinary. None of them married or had offspring. Apparently they seemed to have had a far more limited network available to them.

This unique painting offers us a glimpse of the lives that enslaved Asians may have led in the Netherlands. It shows how slavery in the VOC areas, similar to transatlantic slavery, not only affected the countries around the Indian Ocean, but also left its traces in the motherland itself. How deep these traces were, will have to be revealed in future research.
Visitors to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam who visit the room named ‘Nederland Oversea’ [Holland Overseas], will encounter the history of Banda in two places. Of course, there is the portrait of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, who visited Banda twice. First as a young merchant, in 1609, and again in 1621, as Governor General and commander of a military force that forcibly put an end to the resistance of the Bandanese people against the efforts of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to enforce a monopoly on the trade in nutmeg.129

Then, in the same room, there is a painting attributed to the famous Amsterdam artist Johannes Vingboons who, based upon information and images supplied by VOC captains and officials, in around 1662/1663 painted a view of the island of Bandaneira, including the forts Nassau and Belgica. The painting bears the name of Neyra, as Bandaneira was also called at the time.130

In neither of these pictures is there any direct reference to the violence and the fundamental changes that were brought about in Banda in 1621, of which slavery constituted one of the major building blocks. This contribution will look at how visual sources can help us understand the history of slavery in the Banda Islands. Silences and indirect references are just as important as what can be seen in pictures and maps.

Banda before 1621
As a producer of nutmeg – a highly sought-after spice – the Banda Islands played an important role in long-distance trade networks for hundreds of years before the arrival of Europeans. Because of the emphasis on nutmeg cultivation the Bandanese population was dependent on supplies of food from elsewhere, such as sago from Seram and rice from Java. Other products were brought in from the region.131 The population of the Banda Islands was organized into village communities led by orangkaya (literally: wealthy people) and united into two separate federations, the Ulilima (union of five) and the Ulisiwa (union of nine), which were in regular conflict with each other.132 A portion of the population had converted to Islam, partly as a result of contacts with traders from elsewhere; a smaller proportion still adhered to local religions. Traders from various areas such as Java, Makassar, China, the Asian subcontinent, and the Middle East had also settled in the Banda Islands.
This was the situation encountered by the Portuguese when, in 1512, they were the first Europeans to visit the Banda Islands to trade. In the decades that followed, they were unable to build and maintain a permanent position on the islands and had to settle for a position as one of the many parties the Bandanese traded with.

This image of a dynamic society also emerges from the images made to illustrate the travel account of the second Dutch expedition to the Indonesian archipelago, led by Jacob van Neck and Wijbrant van Warwijk, which made contact with the Bandanese in 1599. Besides images of the nutmeg there are also depictions of the inhabitants of the Banda islands, including merchants referred to as ‘Turkish’, with their servants. There are also scenes of Bandanese warriors and Bandanese people playing a ball game. A map of the Banda islands shows the various villages.

Like the Portuguese, the Dutch – under the flag of the VOC from 1602 onwards – tried to persuade the Bandanese to agree to a monopoly on the purchase of nutmeg. Both Asian and European competitors would have to clear the field. Of those European competitors, the English were considered the most dangerous, despite the fact that there existed a formal – uncomfortable – form of cooperation against Spain and Portugal.133 As in other places in the archipelago, the VOC tried to get its way through a combination of treaties and (the threat of) military force. Although the Bandanese population consisted of various parties with different views, none of them intended to hand themselves over to a monopolist. In their resistance to the VOC, aid was sought from other players, such as the English and the Makassarese.

Eventually, by the end of 1620, the conflicts prompted Coen to decide to put an end to the Bandanese resistance once and for all. Plans in this direction had already been proposed to the VOC leadership years before. Therefore, Coen certainly did not act outside his mandate as Governor General, although as a result of the long lines of communication he did have much room to maneuver. In a military campaign that began at the end of February 1621 and lasted until the summer of that year, most of
the Banda Islands were subjected by force. Hundreds of Bandanese managed to escape the violence and settled, among other places, on Eastern Seram and the Kei Islands. Hundreds of others – men, women and children – were captured, taken to Batavia – the capital founded by Coen – and put to work there. Several hundred women would return to Banda a year later because their nutmeg picking skills could not be missed. Thousands – estimates vary widely – perished from military violence, famine and disease. As a result, the islands were largely depopulated. This was especially true for the island of Groot-Banda, also called Lonthor.

For the production of nutmeg, after the conquest of Banda a system of plantations (perken) was set up: plantations with a European supervisor – called a ‘perkenier’ – who was responsible for ensuring that the VOC was supplied with sufficient nutmeg. The work in the gardens was done by enslaved laborers who were brought in from the region – other islands in the Moluccas and Papua – as well as from further afield – Bali, Makassar, Java and South Asia. As indicated by Matthias van Rossum, this involved thousands of people, a number that only rose further in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This made Banda the first plantation society in the Dutch-controlled empire of the seventeenth century in which slavery played a central role.

The (in)visibility of slavery in Banda
There is little evidence of the violent subjugation of the Banda Islands and large-scale slavery in the nutmeg plantations in visual sources from the past. For that, we need to look with new eyes at maps of Banda, which show that, after 1621, the islands were largely divided into neat plots of nutmeg plantations. After all, the claims of the native population no longer needed to be taken into account. By building a large number of forts and fortifications, the VOC sought to ensure that its newly acquired position on the Banda Islands could be maintained in the long run.

On a map of part of the island of Groot-Banda we see, for example, the fort Hollandia surrounded by nutmeg plantations that are all arranged according to the same pattern. Even though the map has no legend, each plantation, with the perkenier’s accommodation, the smokehouse in which the nutmeg was dried, and the quarters of the enslaved, has the same standard layout.

An identical pattern can be seen on the map of the island of Ay with the fort Revenge. A map of the island of Run, dating from around 1635, which is part of the collection of the governor of Ambon, Aert Gijssels, not only shows clearly how that island was divided into beds, but also mentions the number of souls (individuals) who worked on each plantation. Knowing that these were mostly enslaved people, this map is a clear visual reference to slavery on the Banda Islands. On maps from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,
the islands appear to be the same as on the maps from before 1621, except that
the villages have disappeared and have been replaced by nutmeg plantations
with names such as Groot Walang, Klein Walang, Spaantjebij and Welvaren.

Enslaved people in the picture

We have to move forward to the nineteenth century in order to get a clearer
picture of the people who worked on the nutmeg beds. In 1817, naval officer
Maurits Verhuel was part of the Dutch squadron that sailed to the Moluccas
after the second English interim reign of the Indonesian archipelago following
the Napoleonic Wars, in order to re-establish Dutch rule there. In April,
Verhuel visited the Banda Islands. He kept a diary in which he also sketched.
After his return to the Netherlands, he made watercolors based on these
sketches, some of which are now in the Scheepvaart Museum Rotterdam
and the Museum Arnhem. Among the watercolors that are set in Banda, in
addition to landscapes, there are also a few nutmeg plantations and the
nutmeg harvest. What is special about VerHuell’s work is that, in addition
to landscapes, people are also depicted, including enslaved people. In his
writings there are no critical reflections on slavery, but there are plenty of
characterizations of people that can be described as orientalistic. VerHuell’s
interest in young women is evident from, among other things, a watercolor
registered as an image of a young ‘perkslavin’ [nutmeg female enslaved] from
the Bi Jauw nutmeg bed, which Verhuell mentions separately in his memoirs.

Conclusion

Banda was the first plantation society where slavery played a central role in the
Dutch-controlled empire of the seventeenth century. The visual sources related
to slavery in the Banda Islands are largely implicit when it comes to their
references. The depopulation of the islands can be observed in the appearance
of the nutmeg plantations with their uniform layout after the conquest of 1621.
In contrast to the battles for Ambon, Ternate and Tidore, there are, surprisingly,
no contemporary images of the military expedition of 1621. Whether this had
to do with the fact that the subjugation of Banda was experienced even by
contemporaries as brutal is perhaps speculation.

Sometimes the cartographic material shows the extent of slavery by means
of figures, as in the case of the map of Run, dating from 1635. In addition,
the absence of violence in the visual representation of the Banda Islands is
particularly striking. The enslaved remain largely out of the picture. There is
certainly no individual representation whatsoever. The enslaved girl depicted
by Maurits Verhuel in 1817 is truly the exception to the rule. After the abolition
of slavery in 1860, and with the rise of photography, more images of life on the
nutmeg plantations became available.
Introduction

The practice of slavery in Java was an old phenomenon predating the arrival of Europeans. The existence of slavery in Java was rooted in the Hindu religious value which constructed the society into a caste system. The system was practiced rigidly and closed any possibility for social mobility. This system had slowly changed when Islam was introduced in Java and quickly became the major religion.

The establishment of the Dutch VOC in Batavia in the beginning of the seventeenth century brought another dimension of slavery. However, in the area of the Javanese principalities, the so-called Vorstenlanden, especially Yogyakarta and Surakarta, the practice of slavery to an extent produced a unique characteristic in which the role and the function of the enslaved were dualistic. Ordinarily enslaved were servants but at certain moments they could also function as colleagues or even advisers. The unique practice of this type of slavery in the principality’s areas reverberated widely in Javanese literary traditions. This article describes the life of enslaved in Java in the eighteenth century with special reference to a Javanese manuscript written in the late eighteenth century.

Images of Batur in Javanese manuscripts

Illustrations depicting the lives of enslaved or batur selected for this contribution are from a digitized Javanese manuscript, the Serat Damarwulan (MSS in the British Library collection in London). The first scholar to take note of this manuscript was L.M. Cooster-Wijzen, who made a complete list of illustrations in this manuscript in 1953.

The figure of the batur can be identified easily. The male batur are mostly illustrated barefoot, with their upper body half-naked and a simple cloth to cover their genitals. They mostly appear outside residences. Meanwhile, the female batur wear kain jarik (ragged clothing) and kemben (breast cloth) and are also barefoot. Most of the time they appear inside residences, sitting politely on the floor. The elite figures of the Roman are depicted with faces reminiscent of Javanese wayang (shadow puppet theater) figures. Slaves and other ordinary figures are realistically depicted in decorative styles.
The Origin

The term slave (in modern Javanese budhak) as a category of social class is not popular in Javanese society. In the ancient Javanese language, the word budhak meant youth. It did not refer to social status but to age. During the Hindu period, enslaved as a category of social class were called sudra (in Javanese weng sudra). They were people who did not have personal resources, and their lives were very dependent on other people. With the Islamization of Java, the term sudra slowly disappeared. Only in Bali did it remain until the nineteenth century.

It is likely that the term ‘slave’ in the Western sense was only popularized in Java in the 17th century, by Company employees. When the VOC began to build a castle in Batavia, the demand for enslaved people was high. The VOC purchased them from various regions in the archipelago, including Java. From then on, enslaved became a commodity and an exchange gift that could be bought, sold, or presented in diplomatic situations between the kings of Java and the Company. Apart from being manual laborers, enslaved were also needed during the war. In every military expedition, the VOC needed many enslaved as bearers of ammunition and supplies. In VOC sources they are known as batoor (in Javanese batur) or servant, whose main job was “picolanzer” (Javanese pikuhan) or bearer.141

In Java, a person could become enslaved for several reasons. The first was a lack of resources, especially land which was the main source of living in an agrarian society. Secondly, people might be enslaved as severe punishment for misdemeanors or crimes. Thirdly, people who lost in battle might be captured and enslaved. Fourth, failure to pay off debt could result in enslavement. Fifth, people were forcibly kidnapped from their settlement and then enslaved. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, most of the enslaved in Java belonged to the first three categories.

War was endemic in Java during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In this period Mataram, established in the late sixteenth century, began its military expeditions to expand territorial occupation. During the reign of Sultan Agung most regions in Java were under his sway. From the eastern part of Java, especially Blambangan, the conqueror transported thousands of men and women to be enslaved in the capital city.142

By the late seventeenth century Mataram was in decline because of internal conflict. The VOC was dragged into that conflict. Rebellions and wars of succession forced the ruler of Mataram to relocate its capital city to three different places. With the continuous interference of the VOC, the conflicts finally ended with the division of the kingdom into three parts in 1755 and 1757.144 The wars and conflicts had damaged the economy. After this turbulent period, more and more people were enslaved or forced to become enslaved by themselves.

Enslaved and servants in Javanese culture

In Java, the practice of slavery was an ancient phenomenon. During the Hindu period many people were enslaved to build buildings and infrastructure, such as temples, roads, and royal residences. In the eighteenth century the practice of slavery was increasingly prevalent in kings’ palaces or in the royal residences. This was due to the number of members of the aristocratic family increasing drastically as a result of the practice of polygamy, as well as the increasingly rampant royal parties and rituals.145 The enslaved employed in the aristocratic houses and palaces were called “batur” or abdi, meaning servant. Uniquely, they bore multiple roles and functions, not merely as enslaved who could be ordered to do whatever their master wanted, but sometimes as interlocutors about various matters. The word “batur” is actually an abbreviation of “embat tutur” which means a friend to talk to.

These specific values and functions are reflections of Javanese classical literature, especially wayang (shadow puppetry) stories. In Javanese wayang, there are two groups of batur, called panakawan. The first group, panakawan, who serve the protagonist figures, consist of four people, namely Semar and his three sons Gareng, Petruk and Bagong. Secondly, there is the panakawan group who served the antagonists, namely Togog and Bilung. The two groups of batur are referred to as panakawan, which means companions, or a group of travelers. Therefore, in Javanese shadow puppet stories, they always follow or accompany their masters wherever they go. Panakawan played dual functions, as servants as well as friends. They voluntarily gave or were requested to give advice on problems faced by their master.

The concept of the enslaved or batur as a panakawan was widely adopted in Javanese tales and history in the Javanese literary tradition. Many Javanese manuscripts from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries...
depicted the figure of an enslaved who acted as a panakawan. Among the famous examples are the Panji story, set in the kingdom of Kediri (11th-12th century), and Damarwulan whose action takes place in the Majapahit kingdom in the 14th-15th century. The panakawan from the Panji story were Bancak and Doyok, while in the Damarwulan they were Sabdopalon and Nayagenggong. The description of enslaved in Javanese political and cultural practice in this article will be based upon these popular Javanese manuscripts.

**Surapati**

During the eighteenth century, slaves became the subject of political and social mobility. One of the most popular examples is the case of Surapati, an enslaved man from Bali who managed to carve out a career and achieved a high rank in the VOC military. Later he was promoted as bugati (regional ruler) in Pasuruan, East Java by the king of Mataram. The reputation of Surapati, now a national hero of Indonesia, has been the subject of study for two senior historians: H.J. de Graaf and Ann Kumar. De Graff’s main sources were official VOC reports. Conversely, Ann Kumar preferred to use Javanese chronicles originating from West Java, Yogyakarta and East Java.

Surapati was an enslaved man from Bali. In the eighteenth century, Bali was the region that supplied the most enslaved to the market, and many of the Balinese enslaved ended up in Batavia, working for the VOC. However, Surapati had a different trajectory. His original name remains unclear, but when he was bought by a Dutch trader who felt that his business was continuously growing thanks to his purchase of the Balinese, he was named “Untung”, which means profit. He got special treatment from his master and was even given the opportunity to pursue his own career in the VOC military. He showed talent in his new profession and performed outstandingly in several VOC military expeditions. He reached quite a high rank in Dutch military structures, even higher than some Dutch military men.

Untung became involved in a conflict with a Dutch officer, William Kufeller, and caused one company soldier’s death. Untung was blamed for this incident and deserted. Thereafter, he became an enemy of the Company. He showed talent in his new profession and performed outstandingly in several VOC military expeditions. He reached quite a high rank in Dutch military structures, even higher than some Dutch military men.

From Cirebon, Surapati entered Mataram territory and served the king as a royal guard. At that time Mataram was under the reign of Susuhunan Amangkurat II who reigned in Kartasura and who came to power with the help of the VOC. During the reign of his father, Amangkurat I (1636-1678), Mataram fell to a rebel from Madura named Trunajaya. As the crown prince he felt obliged to reclaim the throne from the rebels. For that purpose, he asked the VOC for help. His request was approved by the VOC with a very stern agreement including demands to fulfill. The rebellion could be ended, and the throne was able to be reclaimed. Since the capital city of Plered was damaged during the war, Amangkurat II built a new capital in Kartasura.

A few years after the war, the VOC began to collect debts Amangkurat II owed the Company for its assistance. At the same time, the VOC also learned that Surapati, the VOC’s most wanted person, was at the court of Kartasura. Therefore, the VOC sent Captain Francois Tack to Mataram, accompanied by a substantial armed force, to negotiate with the king and arrest Surapati. The VOC dual mission was countered by Amangkurat II in conspiracy with Surapati. The main goal was to thwart the Dutch mission. If Surapati could intercept and destroy Captain Tack’s force, the king would elevate him to Regent in Pasuruan. Surapati accepted the king’s offer and confronted the Company envoy outside the palace. Captain Tack and his soldiers were massacred, including those who were at the VOC fort at Kartasura.

Amangkurat II kept his promise. Surapati headed for Pasuruan and crowned himself the ruler there. The conspiracy between Mataram and Surapati never became apparent to the VOC, who considered Surapati to be the main perpetrator. Thus, the VOC military effort to capture Surapati continued. After some fierce fighting, Surapati was finally killed in 1706.
Gender, work division and hierarchy
Enslaved people or *baturs* in eighteenth century Java had very clear distinctions along gender lines in their work. Outside the capital city, males were mostly tasked with physical labor, as *picoelansers*, or bearers of both goods and humans. They were generally needed during long-distance military expeditions in places that were difficult to reach or traversed only by wagons and carts. Apart from ammunition, supplies and food, they also had to carry the wounded soldiers. Sometimes the number of *picoelansers* exceeded the number of troops employed in an expedition. For example, the VOC military expedition to Eastern Java required no less than 500 *baturs*. They were purchased from various regions in Java and Madura. It was not easy to collect these *baturs*. Besides requiring a strong physique, courage was much needed. A number of VOC defeat in the war in Blambangan in 1768-1771 were said to be due to the fact that many of the *baturs* fled the battlefield looking for safety.148

The most common labor carried out by the enslaved in the capital city outside the royal residences was feeding and taking care of animals, especially horses, cows, and elephants. These animals were needed for transportation and in rituals. Male *baturs* were also needed in the capital as stretcher bearers, who were used by male or female aristocrats who could not ride horses, or who were passing through places where animals such as horses were not allowed. These *baturs* as *picoelansers* were also needed in palace rituals and ceremonies, such as the *Royal Grebeg*, which was held at least twice a year. Male *baturs* were also required in the royal house for maintaining gardens and caring for pets. Apart from that, *baturs* were deployed in the construction of houses, walls, bridges, and roads.

Female *baturs* were generally required inside the palaces and royal residences of both male and female aristocrats. Their main jobs were cleaning the house, cooking, carrying royal regalia, holding a bowl for spitting, holding a parasol, and looking after their masters’ bodies. Male and female *baturs* were rigidly separated in space, division of work, and gender, but there was not a rigid social hierarchy among themselves. They were separated mostly based on seniority. They wore similar clothes and hairstyles.

Beyond Geography
Revisiting Johannes Rach’s Cityscapes

Introduction
Looking at early modern colonial imagery often means seeing a world as interpreted or envisioned by European men, from travelers and clerics to cartographers and draftsmen. These images, often commissioned by colonial authorities or administrators, were to exude and confirm colonial power, grandeur and superiority. This has been argued for European imperial involvement in the Americas: maps, landscapes, drawings and watercolors made by agents of an imperial power had a function of declaring imperial ‘ownership’ over territories, asserting hegemony of that imperial power, and celebrating empire.149 And while iconic colonial imagery of slavery and anti-slavery both have been problematized around themes such as racial stereotyping, degradation and voyeurism, images presenting the day-to-day existence of enslaved people have been characterized as ‘not immediately polemical’ in their narrative approach.150 That statement stuck with me, because it is true that the ‘mundane’ often escapes our attention. Such images of the day-to-day do exist in the Asian context, in relatively large quantities relating to Batavia (Jakarta), so what if we scrutinize precisely this type of image more closely?

One of Batavia’s most notable draftsmen, Johannes Rach, has left behind a large collection of cityscapes depicting grand villas and civic buildings behind sometimes crowded and other times quiet streets busied by a variety of people. Born in Copenhagen in 1720, he worked as an artist before joining the VOC as a gunner and departing for the Indies in 1762. Over 20 years he made hundreds of topographical drawings that were so in demand that Rach employed assistants and copyists to fulfill orders. His clients included the Heren xvii in the Republic, the government in Batavia, and local residents - he has been named one of Batavia’s great illustrators for a reason.151 But what kind of world does he present to us? What are the implications of his artistic or ‘narrative’ approach if we look at his Batavian oeuvre more systematically?

The Protagonist
One thing that we cannot ignore when looking at Rach’s cityscapes is the fact that the city itself - its buildings, pavements and canals - is the protagonist in his drawings, rather than the people roaming its streets. Most of his drawings of Batavia and its environs feature large European-style buildings towering over the people on the streets, pavements or gardens. His rather detailed presentations of large villas often stand in stark contrast with the roughly sketched figures passing by. The focus is on the villa or fort, masterfully placed...
at the center of our field of vision, as he also makes clear in the descriptive banners at the top of his drawings: ‘View of Jacob Riemersma’s Villa’, ‘View of the Amsterdam Gate form the North’, ‘View of the City Council of Batavia and the Grote Kerk’, and so on.152

It is important to see this work within the colonial context it was produced in, keeping in mind not only that his clientele existed from within the colonial administration, but that Rach himself was also an agent of that administration - making a career within the Dutch East India Company first as a smith’s assistant, then ensign, then artillery captain and finally as artillery major. It is thus no coincidence that his presentation of colonial settlements ‘enriched’ with large European-style buildings function to establish a certain richness and grandeur. In line with other colonial geographical artworks, his drawings push the idea of European hegemony over the different settlements. Indeed, it was a very intentional project to shed the city of its Asian features and implant a European (or pseudo-European) design.153 Rach documented the ‘achievements’ and reach of the colonial government (forts, ports, churches and castles), while simultaneously recording the individual affluence of certain administrators (their estates and villas).

Stratified Society
Still, Rach offers a view of some of the people that would be roaming the streets of Batavia – even if they often seem to appear as extras. He portrays a society where the streets are crowded by a diversity of people – from Chinese merchants to Mardijkers (freed people), and from the European elite to enslaved people. It can be an interesting exercise to look at the frequency and ratio of the appearance of different groups in Rach’s drawings, so I inventoried almost a hundred of Rach’s Batavian sceneries to localize the people roaming his streets. Distinctions between social groups are relatively easily made, as clothing and outer appearance were important markers of ethnicity and socio-economic status. The results are compelling: enslaved people appear in at least 70% of his drawings, while Europeans and Chinese each appear in around 40% of his drawings. Considering the fact that in 1779, 61% of the total population of the inner city and 21% of the surrounding areas were enslaved people, while Europeans made up about 8% of the total population of the inner city of Batavia and only 0.2% of the surrounding areas, this seems like a serious distortion even if we take into account the fact that some of his drawings are of European-owned estates.154

It almost goes without saying that his drawings project a racial hierarchy in line with colonial attitudes. European men and women move by foot or horse carriage, in most cases accompanied by enslaved people who were not allowed to ride horses or walk on pavements themselves.155 It is almost exclusively Asians who we can see performing physical labor: Chinese merchants, local shopkeepers, water carriers, enslaved men and women. Besides this contrast between European leisure and Asian labor, Rach also exposes us – rather voyeuristically – to public behavior that would be labeled as transgressive in an early modern (European) context: female nudity, public defecation/urination, and violence. His ‘View of the Vijfhoek’ (ill. 1), shows local women bathing in the canal and a man defecating in that same canal, while a European man passes by with (probably) his wife and an enslaved girl and points at the scene in a seemingly amused manner.156 In another drawing (ill. 2), we see a very physical fight taking place between Chinese men in the middle of the street, blocking the way of a European woman and her enslaved companion on one side of the street and a European man and his enslaved companion on the other. On the right, a horse carriage transporting a European man and two enslaved men passes them by.157 The position of the European elite gets even more fortified by Rach’s depiction of Europeans of lower socio-economic classes. Perhaps as a sort of parallel to the ‘View of fort Vijfhoek’, one of Rach’s drawings shows a local couple strolling past an observatory, while a European man seems to urinate against a tree.
group of clearly affluent Europeans on the left pointing at the patients. The patients, most of whom are Europeans by the looks of their attire, are rather strictly rounded up with the assistance of sticks. Interestingly, the Europeans on the left are drawn to be much taller than the Europeans on the right even though they stand on the same horizontal line. Still, his view of Batavia’s shipyard and artillery battery remains one of the very few instances where Rach actually visualizes Europeans performing physical labor in Batavia.

Luxury Entourage
A dominant trope in colonial imagery of slavery is that of enslaved people featuring in the ‘luxury entourage’ of influential, or at least affluent, European people. Johannes Rach’s drawings are saturated with this trope, where enslaved men stand with pajongs behind men and women in European attire: at least 60% of all of the enslaved men portrayed in Rach’s drawings of Batavia are portrayed performing this type of labor. Not only were enslaved men overwhelmingly portrayed as part of this entourage, enslaved women have an even larger part in that trope: at least 64% of all enslaved women were portrayed as part of such an entourage, sometimes visibly carrying boxes of sirih (betel). Having people carry parasols was considered an expression of wealth and status in pre-colonial Java and was an adopted practice by the

Dutch colonial elite. Similarly, the sirih-box carried by enslaved women was intended to show a certain socio-economic status. Of course, there are drawings that are exceptions to this. In one of his drawings, enslaved men (by the looks of their attire) are pushing and tugging a cart under the supervision of an overseer holding a stick in front of the castle of Batavia and in another drawing enslaved men are portrayed trimming the hedge in the garden of colonial administrator Reiner de Kerk’s house. In other instances, enslaved men can be seen washing horses and carrying (water) barrels. One impressive divergent case of an enslaved woman featuring in Rach’s drawings, is that of the woman carrying fish on a rope, leaving the bazaar of Batavia. She is alone, not directly supervised, and not part of an entourage – she has seemingly just bought fish from the bazaar and is probably returning home. These images correspond with recent studies revealing the economic importance of slave labor and the various workplaces that enslaved people were put to work in.

Conclusion
Like most colonial governments, the Dutch East India Company designed policies of classification that were linked to the spaces certain groups could
occupy and the different functions they would have within society. This is certainly reflected in Rach’s artwork, albeit in a distorted way. Europeans are grossly overrepresented in Rach’s streets, which are disrupted by the unruly behavior of Asians and lower-class Europeans exclusively. And while enslaved labor is presented as a luxury companionship, Asian labor appears as a given, and European physical labor as a rarity. What his drawings reveal is a certain worldview in which these hierarchies are justified and magnified. A view in which the European elite roam the streets of Batavia freely, ‘dignified’ and assisted by enslaved people and their seemingly straightforward labor as ‘luxury’ companions. Whether Rach consciously intended to or not, his imagery functions to maintain a racialized and socially stratified order – one which Europeans dominate and in which the European elite towers over lower-class European workers and local peoples in social status, privilege and morality. This was undoubtedly a perspective favored by his clientele, which partly consisted of the European elite of Batavia. So a close and systematic look at the colonial mundane of Rach’s cityscapes not only reveals the fact that his was a very biased view of Batavia, but also illustrates that even seemingly ordinary imagery is presented to us from a colonial lens that communicates specific colonial beliefs, interests, and aspirations.
Endnotes


2. For a Dutch translation of the concept of the cultural archive, coined by Edward Said, see: Gloria Wekker, Witte Onschuld (Amsterdam 2017).


7. See, for instance: http://www.richandsally.net/john_gabriel_stedman_s_narrative_of_a_five_years_expedition_against_the_revolted__8361.htm (accessed on 15 July, 2020).


10. We problematized this as the MOED team of curators during the exhibition ‘What is left Unseen’, June 2019, Centraal Museum.

11. Prompted in part by Gloria Wekker’s White Innocence, the work of art historians such as Elmer Kolfin and Esther Schreuder, projects like Mapping Slavery and The Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours, documentaries by such artists as Tessa Boerman and Ida Does, and the work of anti-Black Pete activists and artists.

15 W.B. haren van Hutten, De emancipatie der slaven in Neerlands-Indië (Groningen 1848) 7-3.
16 See http://www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl/nl/Gezicht-spinhuis-Batavia 6576.
17 The Rijksmuseum has 32. The largest collection of Rach’s drawings is in the Perpustakaan Nasional in Jakarta (202). Smaller collections can be found in Atlas van Stolk in Rotterdam (13), the Maritime Museum Prins Hendrik in Rotterdam (9), and the Scheepvaart Museum in Amsterdam (1). See Max de Brujin and Bas Kist, Johannes Rach 1720-1783. Artist in Indonesia and Asia (Jakarta and Amsterdam 2000), 3.
19 See Esaias Boursse, Scene with company in a tavern or living room, 1662, objectnr. RG-1996-6-146 (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam).
21 Max de Brujin and Remco Raben, The world of Jan Brandes, 1743-1810. Drawings of a Dutch traveler in Batavia, Ceylon and Southern Africa (Amsterdam 2004), 63-64.
23 In writing this, the parallel pops up with the cinematographic analysis of another director Joshua Oppenheimer about the recollection of the 1965-1966 mass murders in Indonesia. Here I am speaking of History as a narrative of the past that is traditionally very dependent on text, and therefore the arrival of Europeans who documented the lived experience.
27 See Jan Brandes, Kleurrijke tragiek. De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de voc (Amsterdam 1726) 10-13.
28 NA, Chennai, inv.no. 1678, 464.
30 ANRI, Vendutiekantoor, inv.no. 1, 12 March 1751.
33 With thanks to Judith Pollmann for this question.
34 With thanks to Maria Holtrop for her interesting questions and our excellent discussion about this in the Autumn of 2019.
35 Rijksmuseum, NG-1985-7-2-9.
36 ‘Eene slaven-vendutie’, (Groningen 1848) 185 (185) 184-191.
37 See Jacobs Bernhard van Haaften (1722), Godfried Bogaart (1722), Justus Vinck (1735), and Godlieb Johan Adolph van Trupe (1744). Naamboekje van de wel. ed. heren der Hooge Indische Repperringe, vols 4, 10 and 14 (Amsterdam 1727, 1739, and 1746). François Valentin, Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indië [part 4, Java] (Amsterdam 1768) 380.
38 With thanks to Judith Pollmann for this question.
40 J. P. B de Josselin de Jong, Biografieën van Nederlandsch-Indië, vols 4, 10 and 14 (Amsterdam 1727, 1739, and 1746); Francois Valentin, Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indië [part 4, Java] (Amsterdam 1768) 380.
42 Here I am speaking of History as a narrative of the past that is traditionally very dependent on text, and therefore the arrival of Europeans who documented the lived experience.
53 Kain Timur are ikat cloths from the Lesser Sunda Islands which were highly desired in New Guinea and center to a complex set of cultural practices. See Jap Timmer, ‘Cloths of Civilisation. Kain Timur in the Bird’s Head of West Papua’, The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology 12:4 (2011), 383-401.

54 Goodman, The Stolen.

55 Daniëls Rutherford, Raiding the Land of the Foreigners (New Jersey 2003) 33.


57 Augusta de Wit, Natuur en Menschien in Indië (1914) 472.

58 Rutherford, Raiding the land of the foreigners, 31-34. Wesseling and Dane showed that this is common in mission stories, where missionaries were depicted as child-savers, even when they participated in the continued displacement of a child. See Wesseling, Elisabeth and Jacques Dane, Are “the Natives” Educable? Dutch Schoolchildren Learn Ethnic Colonial Policy (1890–1910), Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society 10:1 (2018), 28-44, 35-38.

59 Rumainum was the first leader of the still highly influential GKI Church in Papua.

60 We see echoes of this in how Kafiar is remembered in Papua today. One should also note that being a teacher was a very prestigious profession.


62 Rutherford, Raiding the land of the foreigners, 33.

63 Van der Roest, Van Slaaf tot Evangelist: Petrus Kafiar, 34.

64 See the introduction to Chatterjee’s book, Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India (New Delhi 2002). This piece relies heavily on the insights of Chatterjee, who is one of the few historians of South Asia who focuses on labour and slavery within the household.


67 Interestingly, according to Skinner, in the case of the Bazajars the relationship is between a Brahmin priest and an African widow (bijveh-e-afriki), Skinner, Tashrih, f. 89. Of course this genealogy is mythical; however, the naming of an African woman is another reminder that we should be attentive to the presence of Africans in all kinds of positions in South Asia.

68 For the Company style, see Yuthika Sharma, ‘Art in between Empires: Visual Culture & Artistic Knowledge in Late Mughal Delhi 1748-1857’ (Dissertation, Columbia University, 2013). 3-4. Sharma argues that the concept of ‘Company style’ holds little meaning. It is still used here as a convenient and familiar category.

69 See for example the introduction to Nicholas B. Dirks, Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India (Princeton 2001). For another perspective, which also emphasizes the complexity of caste, see Susan Bayly, Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age (Cambridge 1999).


71 For an elaboration on this idea, see Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery, and Law, chapter 2.

72 Skinner, Tashrih, f. 366.


74 Skinner, Tashrih, f. 180.

75 Skinner, Tashrih, f. 366.

76 For an elaboration on this idea, see Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery, and Law, chapter 2.

77 Skinner, Tashrih, f. 368.


81 Ibidem.


85 Ibidem, 25, 28.

86 Ibidem, 26.

87 Wezel, ‘Indische typen’, 123.


89 With thanks to Jan de Hond, curator of History, Rijksmuseum.

90 Bhawna du Mortier, curator of costumes of the Rijksmuseum, helped me with the description of the clothes.

91 Friendly communication by Anna Krekeler, paintings conservator Rijksmuseum, 3 September 2019.


94 With thanks to Jan de Hond, curator of History, Rijksmuseum.

95 Gemeentearchief Delft, family archive Tromp 845-54 (letter by Cornelis Wemans to Cornelis Tromp 18 March 1680).
For an example of the villages that were founded by Bandanese on the Kei-islands, see T. Kaartinen, Songs of Travel. Stories of Place: A study of ‘Tradition, subjectivity and otherness in Banda Eli (East Indonesia) (Chicago 2001), 45-74.

For example. J. van Goor, in his biography based on reports by Coen and the VOC, arrives at an estimated 2,500 deaths on Groot Banda (Van Goor, 46f), while other authors use the much higher figure of 15,000 deaths. This can be explained in part by the differences in the estimated number of inhabitants of the islands prior to the war in 1621. What most authors do agree on is that the majority of the population of Groot-Banda, the island targeted by the military expedition, had been killed, had fled or had been deported.

M. Van Rossum. Kleurrijke Tragiek. De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de voc (Hilversum 2015), 23. In 1628, the number of enslaved people on Banda amounted to 2,200 individuals; by 1730, this was about 4,900 individuals.

Verhœuvel’s memoirs appeared as a publication of the Linschoten Vereniging: Chris F. van Fraassen en Pieter Jan Klappwijk, Herinnering aan een reis naar Oost-Indië: reisverslag en aquarellen van Maurits Ver Huell, 1815-1819 (Zutphen 2008).

The editors of Verhœuvel’s memoirs, Van Fraassen and Klappijk, suggest that the encounter between Verhœuvel and this enslaved girl called ‘Rosina’ was not as innocent as Verhœuvel pretended and that her child, born a few months later, may have been Verhœuvel’s. The evidence they provide, however, is no more than circumstantial.

I thank Dr. Annabel T. Gallop who provided me a complete digital copy of this manuscript in 2017. The Srat Damarawulan (ms Jav. 89), a romance set in the History of the Majapahit Kingdom (14th-15th Centuries) written in the late eighteenth century. According to Gallop, although the main story takes place in the period of Majapahit, the illustrations attached in the manuscript are of eighteenth-century daily life. In her blog Gallop writes: “The pictures are rich in humor and the artist had a marvelous eye for facial expression ad bodily postures. Everyday ‘things’ are depicted in fascinating detail, from bird cages to garden pots and textiles.”


163 Johannes Rach, Het Gezigt van de DiesPoort van Blyten af te Zien Langs de Rywegt, 1770-1774, National Library of Indonesia, objectnr. wvvi; Johannes Rach, D’Waterplaats, ca. 1775, National Library of Indonesia, objectnr. A15; See also the following image where two enslaved women are portrayed leaving the bazaar with fish: Johannes Rach, De Basar of de Markt, ca. 1775, National Library of Indonesia, objectnr. A06.


165 Matthias van Rossum, Kleurrijke tragiek: De geschiedenis van slaverij in Azië onder de VOC (Hilversum 2015).

166 Raben, Batavia and Colombo, 2-3.