

IO. Forced Relocation and Illegal Slave Trading After Abolition

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When the British government returned the Dutch colonial territories to the Netherlands in 1815, the Netherlands was obliged to prohibit and combat the slave trade in these colonies and their territorial waters.¹ This included the Dutch Antilles, Suriname, the Dutch settlement of Elmina (on the coast of present-day Ghana), and the Indonesian archipelago. The abolition process took many decades and in the Indonesian archipelago was only completed in the early twentieth century. Although the number of people abducted and traded after abolition was much higher in Asia than in the Atlantic, the situation in the Atlantic region was politically more sensitive due to the continuing illegal slave trade, particularly by French, Portuguese, and Spanish ships. The British frequently accused the Dutch of negligence and even complicity in maintaining slavery in the Atlantic region.

Indonesian Archipelago

In the early nineteenth century, Dutch authority in most parts of the Indonesian archipelago was still marginal. Only in Java and the Moluccas could the administration directly intervene in local affairs and effectively deal with the frequent kidnappings, particularly by pirate ships. Centuries of colonial slave trade and a rapidly growing Chinese and European demand for products like rattan and pearls had significantly fueled the probably ancient practices of abduction and slave trading. Thus, the rapid growth of global trade, with the deployment of ever larger ships and new communication methods, played a crucial role in the persistence, and in some cases expansion, of the slave trade and slavery in the Indonesian archipelago.

In the early nineteenth century, large pirate fleets plagued the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and present-day Malaysia. Most of these ships originated from the powerful independent Sultanate of Sulu, located north of Kalimantan (Borneo). The pirates hijacked all ships in their path, including those sailing under European flags, and raided entire villages. In their violent plunder, they killed 1,500 to 2,000 people and enslaved 3,000 to 4,000 people in the Indonesian archipelago annually.² They even carried out raids on the coast of Java, seat of the colonial administration and the best-defended island in the region. Combating piracy was therefore a high priority for the Dutch East Indies government.

Despite their political and economic rivalry, the British and Dutch increasingly cooperated to tackle maritime slave raids in Southeast Asian waters. Initially, they struggled against the fast pirate ships, but this changed when their colonial navies started using steamships. Nonetheless, piracy remained a serious threat to shipping and fishing until the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to actively combating piracy, the Dutch East Indies' colonial administration in 1820 started registering slaves to halt the supply of enslaved people to the colonial territories. Any unregistered enslaved person was legally free, and newly enslaved people could not be traded. In this way, slavery was expected to gradually decrease through manumission and mortality. The number of registered enslaved people declined from approximately 20,000 in 1820 to around 10,000 in 1841.

Most of the slaves that remained performed household work, but some toiled on the nutmeg plantations in the Banda Islands, which were owned by Dutch descendants. In the 1830s, the administration considered solving the labor shortage there by transferring 400 slaves from Bali. However, this idea was abandoned because it involved importing enslaved people from an area not directly controlled by the Dutch, but by local rulers. This would have contravened the spirit, if not the letter, of the British-Dutch treaty against the slave trade. So it was not Balinese, but a growing number of convicts and exiles from the Dutch colonies who were sent to Banda, although it cannot be ruled out that illegal slave transports took place, too.

More than 10 percent of the Indonesian population lived in slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were enslaved people living throughout the archipelago, except in Java, where slavery had been more or less eradicated. In absolute numbers—which remain rough estimates—anywhere from 567,000 to 806,000 people lived in slavery, approximately

a quarter of whom had ended up enslaved through kidnapping or the maritime slave trade.³ This number dwarfed the 10,000 to 20,000 enslaved people registered by the colonial authorities.

After the formal abolition of slavery in the Dutch East Indies in 1860, the colonial administration concluded treaties with the many independent principalities in the archipelago, obliging them to combat the slave trade and gradually eliminate slavery. Sometimes, this resulted in manumissions for which the former owners were compensated. However, enforcement of these treaties, let alone military intervention, was rare; the colonial administration simply lacked the manpower for this. Moreover, the colonial army was waging a bloody war against Aceh after 1873 and could not afford other military conflicts. For this reason, the registration and emancipation of a large enslaved population in Southwest Sulawesi, which had begun in 1863, was postponed in the 1870s.

It was not just pirates who continued the slave trade in the Indonesian archipelago. Europeans were guilty of the same. In the first half of the nineteenth century, French slave ships transported slaves likely numbering in the thousands from Bali to plantations in Mauritius and possibly Réunion. In the 1840s, ships flying the Dutch flag were caught by local authorities transporting enslaved people from Portuguese Timor. The slavers were heading for Makassar, a slave trading hub run by European descendants.⁴ In the 1830s, even Dutch administrative officials were involved in the export of enslaved people from the island of Nias, off the coast of Sumatra, to the Sumatran city of Padang. In their own defense, the officials claimed that this was not slave trading but the transport of *pandelingen*, or debt slaves, who were required to work to pay off money that they owed and would be freed once they had done so. Debt bondage was not yet illegal at the time. The matter was referred to King William I, resulting in a decree that made the trade in debt slaves punishable. However, the colonial administration often turned a blind eye to the import of slaves and debt slaves to mollify local economic elites. In the 1870s, Dutch colonial officials in Pontianak, for example, deliberately declined to take measures to stop traders of Arabian origin from openly dealing in enslaved people.

In the same period, practically nothing was done to obstruct the continuing export of enslaved people from Sulawesi, Bali, Timor, Nias, and Sumba. In 1877, as many as 500 people were sold and exported from Sumba. In Central Sulawesi, abduction and enslavement persisted until the end of the nineteenth century, driven by significant economic interests in the

production of products like pepper and rattan. Human trafficking also occurred during the large-scale Chinese labor migration to plantations and mines in Asia and the Americas, which began in the 1840s. In 1856, the *Bellona*, a vessel sailing under the Dutch flag bound for Cuba, arrived in the port of Batavia with over 300 kidnapped Chinese on board. The Dutch Ministry of Justice intervened but limited its response to warning Dutch shipowners to refrain from this trade.⁵ Eventually, in 1868, the Dutch East Indies government decreed that given the existing ban on slavery, shipowners had to show proof for every individual Chinese immigrant that they were in the archipelago of their own free will.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Dutch East Indies government came under increasing national and international pressure to combat slavery and the slave trade. Telegraph connections and the rapidly developing press made violations more quickly and more widely known. Meanwhile, the Dutch were making their power felt ever deeper in the archipelago. In the 1880s, for example, the colonial administration threatened to blockade the port of Lombok to stop the ongoing slave imports for the island's rice fields. Fear of reputational damage and foreign interference prompted the Dutch East Indies government to forcibly subdue independent principalities. The pretext of fighting slavery came in handy in this context. The first such operation was carried out in Lombok in 1894 and then in neighboring Bali in 1908, after which the authorities began implementing the abolition of slavery. In 1900, the colonial army was sent to Nias for the second time (after its first bloody expedition in 1863). It took another fourteen years to get the island fully under control and to effectively end slavery and the slave trade there.

But this does not mean that the gradual elimination of slavery and the slave trade had been completed by 1914. As for forced labor by prisoners, that practice was far from over. It is important to note the high number of forced laborers that the colonial authorities exploited in the nineteenth century. Each year, 0.5 percent of the Indonesian population—more than 2 percent of the adult male population—was sentenced to forced labor. The coal mines initially operated almost entirely based on convict labor.⁶

Elmina

The colonial administration in the Dutch East Indies faced a constant shortage of military capability, partly because European soldiers died in large numbers in the tropics. This explains why the government resorted to recruiting soldiers through its colony of Elmina on the West African coast (modern-day Ghana). Elmina had been the main Atlantic supply point for enslaved people for the Dutch since the West India Company captured it in 1637. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1814 was supposed to put a stop to this, but in practice, it continued. From 1832 to 1873, about 3,000 enslaved men were recruited as soldiers in the Dutch East Indies army, and fifty in the Surinamese army.⁷ These were often prisoners of war held by Ashanti chiefs, who were ransomed by the Dutch, after which the recruit had to repay the ransom amount from his salary. In theory, African soldiers in Dutch service were free, but in practice, they were subject to military discipline, and desertion was severely punished.



Two portraits by Isaac Israëls of former African soldiers of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). On the left is "Jan Kooi" and on the right is "Kees Pop." The soldiers' original African names were not documented.

Even after this form of recruitment was halted under British pressure, the Dutch continued it on the sly on a smaller scale. In a renewed protest in 1861, England emphasized that this recruitment encouraged slave hunting. Incidentally, the British had a double standard when it came to purchasing enslaved people for their own purposes. Planters in the British West Indies sometimes bought enslaved people on the Dutch Antilles, only to employ them as contract laborers on their plantations after granting them freedom. It was just as impossible for these laborers to quit their British employment as it was for the African soldiers to desert from the Dutch East Indies army.⁸

Nevertheless, the English protests against the recruitment in Elmina should be seen in the context of the large-scale illegal slave transports across the Atlantic Ocean, in which Spanish, Portuguese, American, and French ships played a leading role, frequently changing names and flags. The Netherlands was not blameless in this regard. In 1829, the commander of an English warship observed that the slave trade in Accra took place under the Dutch flag, in broad daylight, and only a few hundred meters from the English fort. Later, historian Joseph Dorsey suggested that there was a link between West Africa and Curaçao, enabling the smuggling of kidnapped Africans into the Caribbean, which also involved Dutch ships. It is certain that slave ships were regularly supplied with food and water in Elmina. British politicians repeatedly, and rightly, accused the Netherlands of negligence because providing rowers and canoes for the provisioning of slavers violated the British-Dutch slavery treaty. The Dutch excuse that they could not know in advance if a ship was a slaver must have been received with derision in London. The holds of slave ships were, after all, clearly designed for that purpose.⁹

Suriname

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Surinamese sugar cane plantations were in urgent need of labor, primarily because the extremely harsh working conditions led to high mortality rates and low birth rates. Planters therefore purchased enslaved people from the coffee plantations that were in decline. In addition, there were substantial slave imports, averaging around 100 people per year between 1816—when the British returned Suriname to Dutch control—and 1827. Around 1820, according to some observers, the number varied from 2,500 to 3,000 people, often brought over by slave traders from Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹⁰ These enslaved

people were often purported to come from the French Antilles, which was permitted under the Anglo-Dutch treaty. Up until the early 1820s, enslaved people would still be publicly auctioned without even the pretense of hiding their recent arrival from Africa.

We know a fair amount about this illegal slave trade, mostly thanks to two British judges who served in Suriname from 1822 to 1845. They, along with two Dutch judges, formed a court that had jurisdiction over the slave trade and could free its victims. Their correspondence reveals that hundreds of kidnapped Africans were still being imported into Suriname in the 1820s. For instance, in 1823, a French ship sailed right past Fort Amsterdam up the Suriname River with 350 enslaved people taken from Africa. The British judges concluded that the Dutch colonial administration in Suriname was in cahoots with the smugglers.¹¹

The British took a dim view of the lack of action by colonial officials in Suriname to combat the slave trade. They repeatedly pointed out the absence of a Dutch naval ship patrolling the coastal waters and urged the Netherlands to deploy an adequate number of warships there. Still, the Netherlands did take some measures. In 1824, penalties for the slave trade were increased to a fine of 10,000 guilders, 15 years of forced labor, and confiscation of the ship. Two years later, a slave registry was established for Suriname by Royal Decree, similar to the one in the Dutch East Indies, which was intended to prevent the illegal import of enslaved people. The appointment of Johannes van den Bosch as Commissioner-General for the Antilles and Suriname, and the fact that he was explicitly tasked with ending Atlantic slave imports into Suriname, reportedly had a positive effect. After 1827, the number of imported enslaved people appears to have declined.¹²

In any case, in 1833, the two British judges in Paramaribo reported to the British Foreign Secretary, Palmerston, that no enslaved people had been smuggled into Suriname for the preceding three years. Only imports from Curaçao had taken place, which was not in violation of the Anglo-Dutch treaty. However, it is doubtful that these enslaved people were truly from Curaçao, as other sources show that very few enslaved people—at most ten to twenty per year—were brought from this island to Suriname. Moreover, foreign slave traders continued trying to import kidnapped Africans into Suriname. After the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1834, the British judges in Suriname became increasingly assertive in their actions.

They accused the colonial administration of employing freed victims of the Atlantic slave trade on sugar cane plantations. They found it unlikely that this was voluntary, given the harsh labor conditions and high mortality on the plantations. The Dutch denied this, but the British remained skeptical, as the Foreign Secretary made clear to the Dutch government. Clearly, London's patience was wearing thin. The British now insisted that the treaty banning the slave trade be enforced to the letter. They were appalled by the continued existence of slavery in the Dutch kingdom. For their part, the Dutch authorities in Suriname, and the planters in particular, increasingly viewed the British judges as meddling busybodies. The planters did everything they could to make life difficult for these judges. Ultimately, the mixed court was abolished in 1845.¹³

Curaçao

From the seventeenth century until the British occupation of 1807–1816, Curaçao was a Caribbean slave trading hub. After the Dutch regained control of this island, where more enslaved people lived than in the rest of the Dutch Antilles combined, Curaçao remained a center of small-scale slave trade for decades. Between 1816 and 1847, over 4,000 enslaved people were exported. An 1834 overview shows that 87 percent of the 372 exported enslaved people went to Puerto Rico. Only seventeen made the crossing to Suriname, and another ten to the Danish colony of Saint Thomas.¹⁴

Before permission was granted for such exports, the enslaved individual had to declare before an official that he or she had no objection to being sold off the island. This supposed voluntariness seems dubious, but might not be entirely false. Unlike Suriname, with its extensive sugar production, the enslaved population in Curaçao grew without external input. The island also faced failed corn crops, the main source of food, which led to famines. Parents reportedly felt compelled to sell their children to save them from starvation—a topic deserving of further research. Plantation owners also felt compelled to sell their enslaved people and preferred doing business with planters in Puerto Rico, where the sugar cane plantations drove up the price of enslaved people. This explains why an 1831 measure to prevent the sale of enslaved people outside Dutch territory was soon repealed under pressure from the Curaçaoan elite. Still, the export of enslaved people decreased in the 1830s.¹⁵

In addition to these legalized transactions, illegal slave transports also took place from Curaçao, even though the introduction of a slave registry in 1839 was supposed to put a stop to this. Such a registry worked better against illegal imports than exports, and did nothing at all to prevent the outfitting and provisioning of slave ships. In 1839, one of the two British judges stationed in Suriname noted that a schooner had sailed from Curaçao to Puerto Rico. In 1840, the same ship returned to Curaçao, then sailed under a different name and flag to Saint Thomas, and finally docked in Curaçao under yet another flag. Curaçao's governor, Reinier Frederik Baron Raders, dismissed all suspicions, claiming that it was a ship carrying goods like salt, and was not a slaver.¹⁶ This explanation was hardly credible, especially to the British authorities, who saw it as part of a larger pattern of extensive illegal transatlantic slave transports to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil. Moreover, French and American slave ships had previously acquired Dutch shipping papers to avoid British checks under the Dutch flag.

The fact that Curaçao was a free port made it an especially attractive haven for slavers. In 1845, the Spanish ship *El Conde de Mirasol*—presumably just one of the names of this ship—was outfitted in Curaçao and then sailed to West Africa as a slaver. The intra-Caribbean slave trade remained a loophole, and this dovetailed nicely with Curaçao's role as an illegal transit port, the British authorities feared. They successfully pressed for a complete halt to permits for the export of enslaved people from Curaçao, which took force in 1847.

Conclusion

We can conclude that the slave trade continued for decades, even after the British required the Dutch to combat it after regaining control of their colonies in 1815. Illegal human trafficking reached its biggest proportions in the Indonesian archipelago; the Dutch colonial administration was partly to blame for this. The Dutch dragged their feet and often turned a blind eye, but even the British, who sharply criticized the Dutch, acted no differently in Asia and Africa. In the Atlantic region, the British did have a point. In Elmina, Suriname, and the Caribbean islands, the slave trade persisted under the watch of the Dutch authorities even after 1818.

Clearly, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge of slavery, the slave trade, and human trafficking in the Dutch colonies in the nineteenth century. It is especially notable how little attention historians have paid

to the massive scale of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago in the nineteenth century, and in Southeast Asia in general. Research into slavery and the slave trade in Dutch colonial areas and waters has become much more feasible now that the National Archives have made a large portion of the colonial archives digitally accessible. Compared to the rest of the world, there is a lot of catching up to do.

Notes

- 1 At the end of the Napoleonic era, practically all Dutch colonies were in British hands. The Dutch regained control of these colonies around 1815, partly as a result of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814.
- 2 Ulbe Bosma, *The Making of a Periphery: How Island Southeast Asia became a Mass Exporter of Labor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 54.
- 3 Bosma, *The Making of a Periphery*, 55–57.
- 4 NA, Archives of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies, 2.10.01, Inv. no. 43–56.
- 5 NA, Archives of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies, Inv. no. 575.
- 6 Matthias van Rossum, “The Carceral Colony: Colonial Exploitation, Coercion, and Control in the Dutch East Indies, 1810s–1940s,” *International Review of Social History* 63, no. S26 (2018): 75.
- 7 Ineke van Kessel, “West African Soldiers in the Dutch East Indies: From Donkos to Black Dutchmen,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* no. 9 (2005): 4160; NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 49, scan 370.
- 8 NA, Archives of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies, Inv. no. 31; Joseph Siwpersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij, 1833–1863* (Groningen: Boumas’s Boekhuis, 1979), 14.
- 9 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 42, scan 157; Joseph C. Dorsey, *Slave Traffic in the Age of Abolition, Puerto Rico, West Africa and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean, 1815–1859* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 200.
- 10 Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: Roofbouw en overleven in een Caribische plantagekolonie, 1750–1863* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993), 314; Joseph Siwpersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing*, 47.
- 11 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 41, scan 551.
- 12 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 41, scans 643, 649, 1132, 1285, 1565.
- 13 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 42, scan 1114; NA, Archives of Curaçao, Bonaire and Aruba, 1.05.12.02, Inv. no. 154; NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 42, scans 1116, 139; 50, 808.
- 14 NA, Archives of Curaçao, Bonaire and Aruba, Inv. no. 154; W.E. Renkema, *Het Curaçaose plantagebedrijf in de negentiende eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1981), 119.
- 15 Renkema, *Het Curaçaose plantagebedrijf, 180–81*.
- 16 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 48, scans 311, 49, 468, 1091.

Research Method: Digitizing Slave Registers

Thanks to hundreds of volunteers and donors, the Dutch–Surinamese–Antillean project *Historische Database Suriname en de Cariben* (Historical Database Suriname and the Caribbean, HDSC) recently succeeded in making Suriname and Curaçao’s slave registers available online, at ru.nl/hdsc. These registers make it possible to track enslaved people through time, from one owner to another and from one colony to another and thus to record a cross-section of the diverse lives of the enslaved.

Slave registers were created by colonial authorities to establish a comprehensive “bookkeeping” system of all people who lived in slavery in a particular area. The registers were introduced by the British after they had abolished the slave trade in 1808. Their purpose was to prevent illegal enslavement and trading of people. It was under British rule that the registers were introduced in the Dutch East Indies and Suriname.

After the Dutch reassumed control of the colonies, these registers developed into the Registers of Serfs in the Dutch East Indies from 1819, and into the slave register of Suriname in 1826 and registers in Curaçao and the other Antilles from the late 1830s. In the East Indies, a separate slave register was kept for each residency (administrative area), but only in the parts of the archipelago that were under direct Dutch rule. In the Antilles, every island had its own register. Suriname was the only territory under Dutch rule that had a central register for the entire colony. No slave registers were kept at the Dutch forts and outposts scattered along the West African coast.

The registers clearly show the dehumanization that is typical of chattel slavery. To begin with, people are described as the “property” of others. In general, every slave register contained the names of the enslaved and the owner, the enslaved’s date of birth and death, and where applicable, information about their sale, manumission, and escape. This information

was organized differently from place to place. Most registers also listed the enslaved's sex, their age or year of birth, and their mother's name. The East Indies registers and the British registers in South Africa also contain the enslaved's place of birth or country of origin. This information was not recorded in Suriname and the Antilles. The Surinamese registers do include the name of the plantation where each enslaved person lived because there was a strict legal distinction between "plantation slaves" and "house slaves." The British colonial slave registers in South Africa and Guyana also noted each person's occupation and skin color or ethnicity. This information is absent from the Dutch slave registers, probably because skin color formally played no role in the legal status of enslaved people.

All this information makes the slave registers a valuable source for sociohistorical, demographic, and genealogical research. The enslaved were not registered as members of a family, and fathers were never mentioned. Therefore, genealogical research is only possible through the female line, unless a cross-reference can be made with the same person in other archives, such as civil registries or baptism records. Because the slave registers were introduced several years after the transatlantic slave trade was abolished, it is virtually impossible to trace individuals to the specific slave ship that brought them over from Africa. Another constraint on research is that some registers are missing. Curaçao is the only colony whose registers have survived in their entirety. The registers from Suriname are mostly complete starting from 1851, but older series have gaps. The slave registers of the Dutch East Indies are largely lost; only fragments have survived.

Slave registers can provide context in relation to other sources, such as newspapers, wills, and testaments, and court reports that name an enslaved person and their owner. Since the slave registers were put online, tens of thousands of people all over the world have searched for their ancestors, and the registers have been used by researchers for television series, podcasts, books, plays, and educational materials aimed at making the history of slavery more visible. For scholars, the large body of information presents an opportunity to reconstruct individual people's lives, but also to discover patterns underlying the individual data, such as the notable difference in life expectancy for men and women in Suriname, and the better chances of survival for the enslaved in Curaçao.

The HDSC's ultimate goal is to reconstruct the entire population of Suriname and Curaçao from 1830 to 1950, to facilitate the research into the impact of slavery and colonialism on subsequent generations. For this reason, the civil registry of Suriname is now also being digitized and linked to the slave registers and to the registers of contract laborers who were brought to Suriname starting in 1853. The next step will be to expand the dataset with records from Aruba, Saint Eustatius, and other areas in the Caribbean. The importance of digitizing and interlinking these sources is best illustrated by the example of Saint Eustatius. In 1863, 1,201 people were emancipated there, but 826 of them are absent from the island's civil registry. This can only be understood if we see Saint Eustatius in a broader context, because many of these "missing" people later show up in the population registers of Curaçao or the Danish Virgin Islands, or even in the registers of contract laborers in Suriname. So clearly, knowledge about migration during and after slavery is essential to understanding the history of slavery in this region.

Abstract

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the Dutch financial system was closely connected to colonial expansion and slavery. The Dutch East India Company's innovative financial structure—permanent capital with transferable shares traded on a secondary market—was quickly adopted by the newly established West India Company as well. The Atlantic plantation sector that arose in the second half of the seventeenth century required vast amounts of capital, giving rise to a variety of new forms of investment that had a lasting impact on the structure of the Dutch financial and service sectors. This chapter outlines some of the ways in which Dutch financial firms and wealthy families continued to profit from slavery well into the nineteenth century.

Keywords: slavery; finance; capital; plantation