Chapter

22. Slavery in Colonial Indonesia

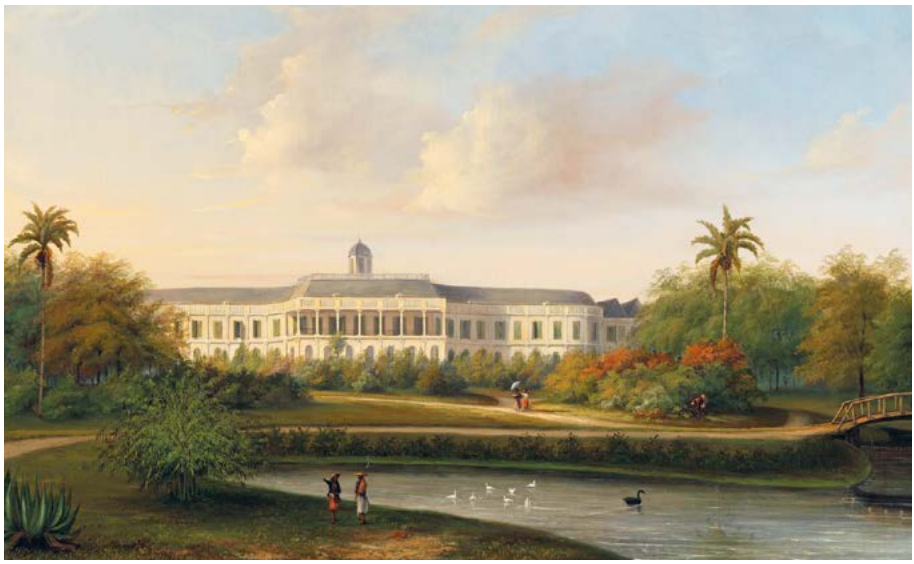
Alicia Schrikker

Azia van Batavia, Pasop van Timor, and Paloepose van Makassar are just a few of the names that appear in the archives of Huize Buitenzorg, now known as Istana Bogor, the administrative palace of the Dutch East Indies governor-general. Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose were enslaved people who were forced to work in the palace. They worked there from 1808 to 1811, as we know from the notarial deeds, which specified the sale history and legal ownership of these people. They were the property of Herman Willem Daendels, governor-general and field marshal of the Dutch East Indies. Daendels assumed ownership of Azia van Batavia immediately upon his arrival at Buitenzorg, on January 1, 1808, from his predecessor Albertus Henricus Wiese (1805–1808), who had kept Azia in slavery as a "tea maid." Later that year, Daendels acquired Pasop and Paloepose, along with some thirty others, at auctions in Batavia and put them to work in his palace.[1]

How people like Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose ended up in slavery is not always clear. The slave transports documented the moment that the enslaved arrived in the colony, but not how they had actually been enslaved. There were many avenues to slavery in the Indonesian archipelago.

This island group covers an enormous area of approximately 5,000 kilometers from Banda Aceh in the far west to Jayapura (Papua) in the east. It is also enormously diverse, both geographically and culturally. Aside from the five biggest islands of Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and the western part of Papua, there are another 6,000 or so smaller inhabited islands where over 150 languages are spoken. This variety existed in the past, too, so it should come as no surprise that the nature and practice of slavery

differed from region to region. Historians prefer to speak of a spectrum of unfreedom that ranges from people who were required to farm land for the elite (serfdom) to those who were truly handled as property and a commodity (chattel slavery).



Willem Troost's depiction of Buitenzorg Palace before the earthquake of October 10, 1834.

Colonial slavery fell into the latter category. In colonial society, enslaved people were used for hard physical labor for the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in and around the ports and forts, as well as on plantations and in private homes. To keep this system working, colonial society was dependent upon a continuous supply of new enslaved people. Studies into the regional slave trade identify several circumstances that led people to fall into the hands of human traffickers. One was economic hardship; people could be forced by starvation and poverty to sell themselves or their immediate family. This often happened as a result of natural disasters or war. Debts were another cause. Those who could not repay their debts could be forced into slavery in order to compensate their creditors. Slavery could also be a punishment for a criminal offense. In wartime, prisoners of war might also be enslaved. And finally, people were plainly kidnapped and forced into slavery.[2]

Although this categorization seems clear, it is not known which of these scenarios was the most common. We also do not know exactly what role the colonial authorities played in the process of enslavement. In this chapter, I focus on the diversity of slavery practices and the entanglement between the local and the colonial slave trade in the Indonesian archipelago. Because of the fragmentary state of current research—there is as yet no survey of the history of slavery in Indonesia—it is impossible to provide a complete picture. Instead, this chapter zooms in on the three areas that Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose's last names refer to: Batavia, Timor, and Makassar.

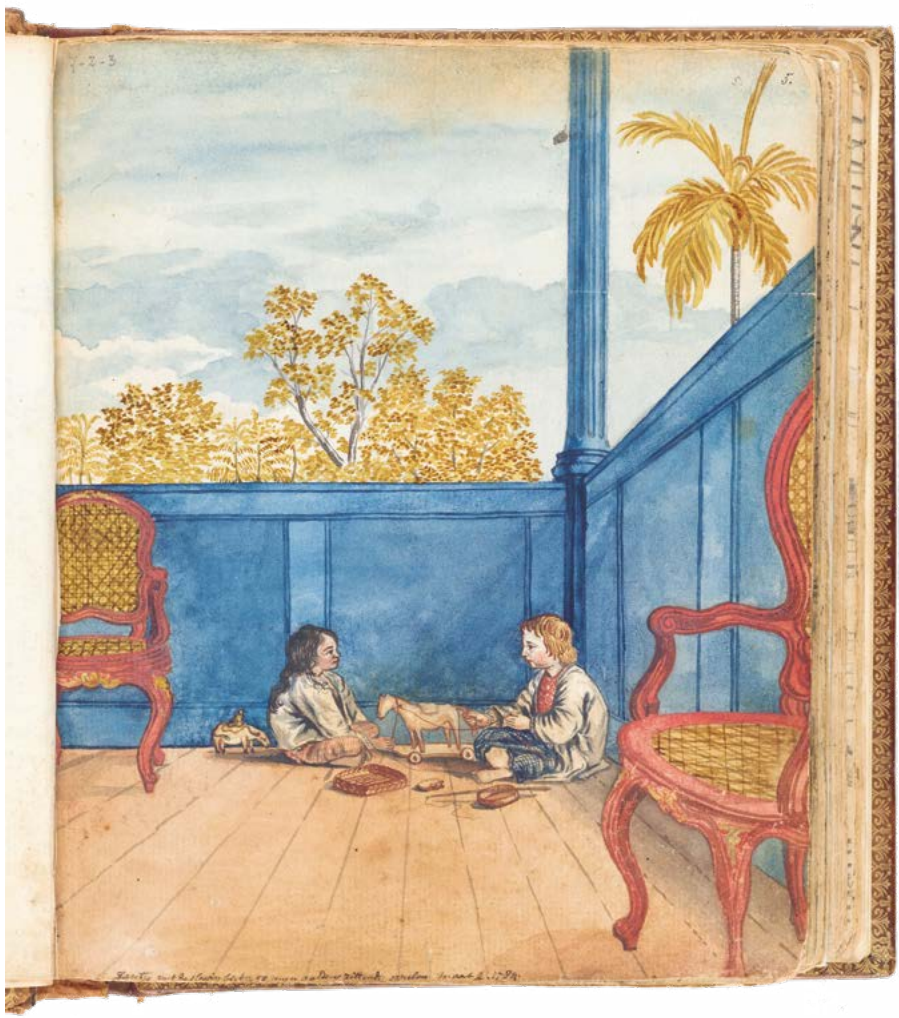
The VOC's Slave Societies

The seventeenth century saw the VOC expand from a business with trading posts in the Indonesian archipelago, into an administratively institutionalized colonial presence there. Commercial interests led the Company to seek control of the supply of crucial spices, which in turn led to territorial conquests, sometimes coupled with extreme violence, repression of local populations, and slavery. The relations between the Dutch and the locals outside the fortified port cities varied. In some places, the VOC claimed the right to impose direct taxation. Elsewhere, local rulers retained that prerogative and paid tribute to the Company.

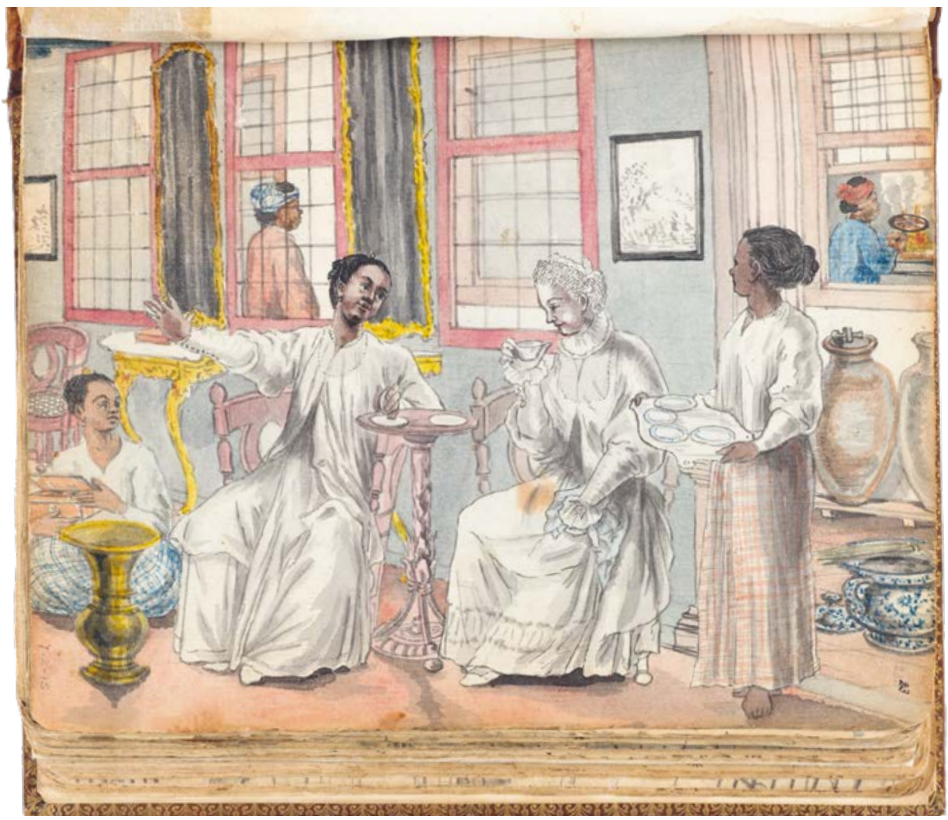
The VOC was most ruthless in Banda. After killing and deporting the local population, the Company created a slave society which ensured a regular production of nutmeg. In the fortified cities of Batavia (Java), Makassar (Sulawesi), and Kota Ambon (Maluku), urban communities sprung up that we now characterize as colonial enclaves. The relations in these cities were based on racial differences; the Dutch ruled, while people of Asian descent constituted an enslaved underclass. Between those two layers, there was a diverse mix of people ranging from Bugis traders and soldiers to Chinese and Arabic merchants, to European and Eurasian *vrijburgers* (people declared free citizens by the VOC, in some cases after having worked for the Company), and *Mardijkers* (freed people who had converted to Christianity). Typically, at least half the population of these colonial enclaves consisted of enslaved people. This certainly held true of Batavia, the colony's main trading center, which grew into a city of about 20,000 inhabitants in the seventeenth century. The 1670 census counted no less than 13,000 enslaved people.[3]

Azia van Batavia was likely born in Batavia at the end of the eighteenth century. Her mother lived there in slavery. The lives of the enslaved women in this period were documented by clergyman and artist Jan Brandes, who captured domestic scenes from his own home in watercolor. He painted women in the kitchen, who served tea, just as Azia would later do as a "tea maid" at Buitenzorg Palace.

Brandes's watercolors also show how children born into slavery were sometimes allowed to play with their owner's children. We can imagine that Azia's early youth might have looked something like that of Bietja, who



can be seen playing with Brandes's son, Jantje, in this watercolor.[4] As idyllic as this may seem, girls were in a vulnerable position in colonial society. As young children, they might be allowed to play with the other kids, but as adolescents and young adults they risked falling prey to their owner's lust. Sometimes, one of these young women had the "good fortune" of her owner marrying her, or at least acknowledging paternity of her children and granting her freedom at some point. This happened in nearly all European families that settled in Southeast Asia over the course of time.[5]



Jan Brandes was a Dutch clergyman and artist who settled in Batavia in 1778. Brandes's watercolor on the left shows his son, Jan, playing with Bietja, an enslaved girl. On the right, we see a tea party in a European home, with a "tea servant" serving the guests.

The scenes depicted by Brandes and such Eurasian family histories paint a picture of the fate of women in this society, but they tell only part of the story. Recent demographic research on Kota Ambon by historian Gerrit Knaap shows that two-thirds of the enslaved population there were men. A comparable ratio existed in Batavia. Enslaved men had to do hard physical labor for the VOC in the forts, on the roads, and in the ports. They also had to serve as foot soldiers in the army. Many worked for private families, too. In Kota Ambon, a wide variety of colonial inhabitants owned enslaved people: VOC employees, Europeans, Chinese, Makassarese, and Ambonese. Usually, it was the households of high-ranking VOC staff that employed the largest numbers of enslaved people, meaning a dozen or more. However, the ethnic group in which the most families owned enslaved people—65 percent—was the Chinese. Presumably, they relied on slave labor to keep their trade businesses going.

In the villages of Ambon, the numbers of enslaved men and women were roughly equal. Between 10 and 15 percent of the population consisted of enslaved people, considerably less than in the city. As a result, the institute of slavery had a less profound influence on social relations and the local culture in the villages than in the colonial enclaves. In Knaap's view, the many violent crimes and rebellions by groups of enslaved people in the city of Kota Ambon indicate that the enslaved people there were treated more roughly and violently than in the villages.[6] There are very few concrete examples of slavery resulting from punishment, debt, or poverty in the local community. Enslaved people came from elsewhere; both the colonial and the local populations in Ambon were dependent on go-betweens for the supply of enslaved people from other areas.

In Batavia, it was no different. Azia van Batavia's parents or grandparents were almost certainly brought to Batavia from somewhere else, but we simply do not know from where. What we do know is that areas like Ambon and Batavia obtained a lot of their slave labor from regions such as Timor, Bali, and Makassar in the eighteenth century.

The Gray Area between Trade, War Booty, and Gifts

There is no way that Pasop van Timor—whose first name means "watch out" in Dutch—received that name from his parents. His name was imposed on him the first time that he was sold, and a deed was drafted. Owners often gave their enslaved people names like this as a lame joke,

probably for their own amusement. From a twenty-first-century historian's perspective, this epitomizes the dehumanization that befell enslaved people in the process of being enslaved and put on the colonial slave market. In Pasop's case, this probably began in or near the island of Timor.

Timor was a small trading post where the Dutch presence remained limited. It is one of the few places in the archipelago where the slave trade was a core activity for the Dutch. In Timor, most trade was conducted with local principalities. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *dagregisters* [official journals] from Timor speak of the exchange of gifts; the local ruler would "bestow" enslaved people, beeswax, and sandalwood upon the VOC, and the VOC would reciprocate with a "gift" of weaponry, alcohol, and textiles. However, this seemingly regulated form of barter was in fact not the result of a neat balance of supply and demand. Dutch demand was paramount; if necessary, the Company used violence to ensure that it received the gifts it needed.

According to historian Hans Hägerdal, the trade in humans existed on the island before the VOC ever set foot there, but it intensified due to the continuous demand from the Dutch. Moreover, this high demand fueled the warfare between the various kingdoms, which sold off the enslaved people whom they had captured as war bounty to the Dutch.

Because the Timorese kingdoms were unable to meet the voracious Dutch demand for enslaved people, more and more principalities became entangled in the web of the European slave trade. If the supply of people was too low for what the Dutch needed, they sometimes organized punitive expeditions on which they captured and enslaved locals. An analysis of the late seventeenth-century Timorese journals shows that the export of enslaved people fluctuated between 25 and 300 a year. Travel logs from the eighteenth century speak of an average annual export of 200 people.

It is of course far from certain that all trade in humans was recorded in the official journals. In addition, local intermediaries were active in the region, trafficking enslaved people to Batavia. There were also some outliers in terms of the number of people traded, such as the shipment of 777 people to Batavia in 1757, following a punitive expedition by the VOC. The sale of this group of people earned the VOC about 50,000 guilders—roughly equivalent to 500,000 Euros today.[7] Hägerdal argues that the slave trade in that region led to a deep-rooted animosity toward outsiders, such as the Dutch, because they were responsible for the deportation of fellow islanders. The developments in Timor show that it is nearly impossible to

disentangle the effects of trade, warfare, and diplomacy. It might be better to reason the other way around and conclude that it is an illusion to think that people in Timor ended up in slavery without violence and kidnapping being involved.

Kidnapping and Market Forces

In its nearly two centuries of existence, the VOC set many different rules regarding slavery in its colonial enclaves. These rules determined the position of the enslaved in relation to their master, set punishments for attempting escape, and limited the enslaved's freedom of movement when off of the slave owner's property. Such rules give an impression of the tensions that existed between the enslaved and their enslavers.

Administrators introduced laws and regulations in an attempt to curb the violence and arbitrariness that went hand in hand with enslavement; notarial deeds played a crucial role. Selling an enslaved person was only permitted if two witnesses could confirm in the presence of a notary public or local officials that the person in question was indeed lawfully enslaved.[8] It is in this kind of document that we come across the names Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose van Makassar. The idea behind notarial deeds was that they would protect people who had been unlawfully enslaved, through kidnapping, for instance. In practice, however, these documents had precisely the opposite effect; they became a means of legalizing slavery and of whitewashing a history of forced captivity and violence.

A good example is the deed that legalized the sale of Paloepose van Makassar. The trader who registered his purchase of Paloepose, Jacob Happon Rosenquist, was a scion of a notorious slave trading family who traveled back and forth between Makassar and Batavia.[9] Witness Johan de Siso was from a similar family, who were infamous in Makassar for their brutal treatment of the people whom they held in slavery and traded. In 1795, twenty enslaved people rose up against the family. Their revolt failed and they were shot dead during their attempt to flee. Nevertheless, this violent incident did prompt a number of administrators to reflect on the state of the slave trade in Makassar.[10]

In practice, acting as a witness for a deed of sale was a favor which slave traders regularly did for each other. That is how it worked in the case of Paloepose van Makassar. In other cases, people were pulled from the street and paid to testify. The enslaved person's background and whether they

were legally enslaved did not matter. A deed of sale paved the way for people to be deported from Makassar to the slave market in Batavia, regardless of how they were enslaved. This was an open secret, just as everyone knew that most of the enslaved in Makassar had ended up there through kidnapping. At first glance, kidnapping might have seemed relatively small-scale, because individual abductions resulted in the capture of just a few people. They added up, however, and the crime became a major industry; an estimated 3,000 kidnappees were exported yearly from Makassar throughout the eighteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, the colonial port city of Makassar had about 6,000 inhabitants, half of whom were free and half enslaved—just like in Batavia and Kota Ambon.[11]

The kidnappings were mundane: fishermen were snatched from their boats at sea under cover of darkness, people were abducted outside villages at dusk, and children were lured into captivity with cookies. The latter befell two nine-year-old boys, Tapan and Tsjanga, who were from the area of Bulukumba, about 160 kilometers from Makassar, in 1786. After eating the cookies which they were offered aboard a pirogue, they were bound and shipped off to Makassar. There, they were sold to Jan de Siso, another member of the De Siso family mentioned earlier. A month later, fellow villagers from Bulukumba found the boys and liberated them. The kidnappers were subsequently arrested and prosecuted.

The case file, now in the Jakarta archive, shows that the kidnappers themselves were all being held in some form of slavery—some of them had debts, for instance—so, for them, capturing people was a way of earning money to buy back their own freedom. The kidnappers were convicted, but the main culprit, Jan de Siso, could simply go on with business as usual. This, too, was typical of the situation in Makassar and South Sulawesi. There are also known cases of VOC administrators who were deeply complicit in kidnapping operations.

Just like in Timor, the colony's huge demand for enslaved people led to a spiral of violence in Makassar. As we see in the file about Tapan and Tsjanga, everybody in colonial society was implicated in the slave trade. The sad observation that the kidnappers resorted to this practice to buy themselves out of slavery illustrates how firmly in the grip of slavery and unfreedom both local and colonial societies were. Even Dutch contemporaries understood that this vicious cycle was exacerbated by the constant demand for slave labor in the colonial enclaves. Thus, it was not only the kidnappers who had a stake in kidnapping but also the buyers who perpetuated this

violence. And it was the enforcers of the law who facilitated it all with their notarial deeds.

Paloepose, too, may well have been abducted from a boat at some point and sold to Happon Rosenquist, before he was registered as a slave, shipped off to Batavia, and ended up in Daendels's Buitenzorg Palace.

In Conclusion

We have no idea what became of Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose after 1811, when the English assumed control of the Dutch possessions and British Lieutenant Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles moved into Buitenzorg Palace. What we do know is that from that moment on, gradual steps were taken toward the abolition of slavery and the slave trade.

After the British occupation, the Dutch returned in 1815 and reluctantly continued this abolition policy. New bureaucratic instruments such as slave registers were intended to help regulate and restrict the slave trade. However, the demand for labor did not decline; in fact, it grew, and Dutch administrators knew all kinds of loopholes in their own laws and cleverly exploited the thin dividing line between serfdom and slavery that already existed in the local communities. Enslaved people in Banda were renamed bonded servants; in Bali, foot soldiers for the army were recruited through deals with the same local rulers who had previously sold enslaved people for the same market price; debt slaves were now called *pandelingen* (peons) and were used as labor in large-scale infrastructural projects. Slavery also remained a punishment for convicts until well into the twentieth century, although the convicts were now called "chaingangers" rather than "slaves."

The deeds of sale from Buitenzorg give us a glimpse of the practice of slavery under Dutch colonial rule. It was a violent world that was partly perpetuated and sometimes reinforced by the great demand for enslaved people in the Dutch colonial enclaves. The idea of a well-regulated, civilized slave trade and humane slavery was a colonial illusion, and forced labor was commonplace in the colony. These things were patently obvious to Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose. But due to a combination of colonialist denial and the deliberate whitewashing of Dutch complicity in all aspects of slavery, historians long thought that colonial and local slavery were best studied separately. Now that historians are asking new questions about the complex entanglement between colonial and local slavery and its legacy, we are gaining a better understanding of this painful history. Our knowledge is

still limited and fragmented, but the archives are full of clues that can help us piece together, and gain more insight into, the role of the Netherlands in the history of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago.

Notes

1 Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), Buitenzorg 495, "Slaventransporten behorende tot den inventaris van Huize Buitenzorg, 1808."

2 Anthony Reid, "Introduction. Slavery and Bondage in Southeast Asia," in *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia,* ed. Anthony Reid and Jennifer Brewster, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) 1–35.

3 Bondan Kanumoyoso, "Beyond the City Wal: Society and Economic Development in the Ommelanden of Batavia, 1684–1740" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2011); Henk Niemeijer, *Batavia: Een koloniale samenleving in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2005); Eric Jones, *Wives, Slaves, and Concubines: A History of the Female Underclass in Dutch Asia.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Remco Raben, "Batavia and Colombo: The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities 1600–1800" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 1996); Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek:. De geschiedenis van Nederlandse slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2015).

4 Merve Tosun, "Women at Home and Men Outdoors? Locating Enslaved People in EighteenthCentury Batavia," in *Gendered Empire: Intersectional Perspectives on Dutch Post/Colonial Narratives,* Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis 39, ed. Nancy Jouwe, (Hilversum: Verloren, 2020), 41–56; Remco Raben, "Looking at Silence: Enslaved People In and Outside the Picture," in *Revisualizing Slavery: Visual Sources About Slavery in Asia,* eds. Nancy Jouwe et al, (Edam: LM Publishers, 2021), 27–32.

5 Reggie Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht: Slavernij in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2015); Reggie Baay, *De njai: Het concubinaat in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2008).

6 Gerrit Knaap, "Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire in Southeast Asia: Seventeenth-Century Amboina Reconsidered," *Slavery & Abolition*, 43, no. 3 (2022): 499–516.

7 Hans Hägerdal, "Warfare, Bestowal, Purchase: Dutch Acquisition of Slaves in the World of Eastern Indonesia, 1650–1800," *Slavery & Abolition* 43, no. 3 (2022): 553–73. The present-day value was calculated using https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.

8 Alicia Schrikker, *De vlinders van Boven Digoel: Verborgen verhalen over kolonialisme* (Amsterdam: Prometheus 2021), Chapter 5: "Ellendige slachtoffers van gierigheid en tirannie."

9 Suze Zijlstra, *De voormoeders: Een verborgen Nederlands-Indische familiegeschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Ambo Anthos, 2021). Jacob Happon Rosenquist is one of Zijlstra's ancestors. In her family history, she explores Rosenquist's and her other ancestors' role in the slave trade in Makassar.

10 Mr. R. Blok, governor of Maccassar, trans. J. von Stubenvoll, *History of the Island of Celebes .... to which Have Been Added a Report Concerning the Slave Trade of Macassar, Drawn Up by a Dutch Committee, Appointed for That Purpose: ... Vol. 3* (Calcutta: Calcutta Gazette Press, 1817).

11 Heather Sutherland, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in South Sulawesi, 1660s–1800s," in *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia,* ed. Anthony Reid (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 263–85; for more context, see Gerrit Knaap and Heather Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders: Ships, Skippers and Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Makassar* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).