

# Globalization and Coerced Labour in Early Modern Asia and Africa

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## ABSTRACTS

Die frühneuzeitliche Globalisierung ging mit der gleichzeitigen Ausbreitung von Systemen der Ausbeutung von Zwangsarbeit einher. Dieser Artikel versucht, unser Verständnis der Auswirkungen der frühen Globalisierung zu vertiefen, indem er vergleichend die Auswirkungen der steigenden globalen Nachfrage nach (Zwangs-)Arbeit auf Systeme der Unfreiheit und Sklaverei, insbesondere in Westafrika und Südasien, untersucht. Wir argumentieren, dass die sich entwickelnden Systeme des globalisierten Handels während der Frühen Neuzeit einen transformativen Einfluss auf viele lokale Formen der Sklaverei und Leibeigenschaft in Afrika und Asien hatten, indem sie diese mit den globalen Forderungen nach geschlossener, kommodifizierter Sklaverei verbanden. Wir schlussfolgern auf dieser Grundlage, dass lokale Systeme der Sklaverei und Leibeigenschaft und globale Systeme der kommodifizierten Sklaverei nicht getrennt und unverbunden waren, sondern nebeneinander existierten und auf drei Ebenen interagierten: auf der Ebene der Staatsbildung und -expansion, der Anpassung sozio-politischer Systeme zur Steigerung des Sklavenexports als Reaktion auf die Anforderungen eines globalisierten Arbeitsmarktes und der Modifizierung lokaler Arbeitssysteme von Sklaverei und Leibeigenschaft. Dies unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit neuer, global-vergleichender Ansätze, um unser Verständnis der mit Zwang verbundenen Wurzeln des globalen Kapitalismus und der langfristigen Transformationen der Sklaverei zu vertiefen.

Early modern globalization was accompanied with a simultaneous expansion of systems of coerced labour exploitation across the globe. This article seeks to deepen our understanding of the impact of early globalization by using a comparative approach to examine the effects of the increasing global demand for (coerced) labour on systems of bondage and slavery, especially in West Africa and South Asia. We argue that the developing systems of globalized trade during the early modern era had a transformative impact on many local forms of slavery and bondage

in Africa and Asia by connecting them to global demands for closed, commodified (or 'chattel') slavery. We conclude that that local systems of slavery and bondage and global systems of commodified slavery were not separate and unconnected, but co-existed and interacted at three levels: that of state formation and expansion; the adaption of socio-political systems to increase slave exports in response to the demands of a globalized labour market; and the modification of local systems of slave and bonded labour. This underlines the need for new global-comparative approaches to deepen our understanding of the coercive roots of global capitalism and the long-term transformations of slavery.

## 1. Globalization and Slavery

The early modern period, lasting from circa 1500 to circa 1800, witnessed both an acceleration of globalization and an expansion of systems of coerced labour exploitation. In his classic work *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith notes that by uniting “the most distant parts of the world, by enabling them to relieve one another’s wants, to increase one another’s enjoyments, and to encourage one another’s industry, their general tendency would seem to be beneficial. To the natives, however, both of the East and West Indies, all the commercial benefits which can have resulted from those events have been sunk and lost in the dreadful misfortunes which they have occasioned.”<sup>1</sup> In his anti-colonial critique, Smith’s contemporary, Jacob Haafner, points out that European expansion had led to “unprecedented acts of murder and repression”, followed by generations who no longer “take goods and possessions by robbery or public violence, but manage to collect them through thousand inventions and deceitful tricks, by unbearable burdens, extractions and extortions”.<sup>2</sup>

How should we understand this simultaneous rise of globalization and coercion? Was it a mere coincidence, a matter of bad timing, as Smith would have us believe when he argues that “these misfortunes” arose “rather from accident than from any thing in the nature of those events themselves”.<sup>3</sup> Or was it the consequence of systematic exploitation, as Haafner suggests? Recent debates on slavery, globalization, and capitalism underscore the need to revisit these questions that are central to understanding not only the coercive roots of global capitalism but also especially the global history of slavery within and beyond the Atlantic world. Herman J. Nieboer and Evsey D. Domar’s classic theory explains slavery as a response to a situation in which land is abundant.<sup>4</sup> According to Peter Kolchin, “the most persistent theory has been one that sees a shortage of labor produced by a high land-to-population ratio (low population density) as the crucial in-

1 A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, vol. II, 5th edn, London 1789, p. 459.

2 J. Haafner, *Verhandelingen over het nut der zendelingen en zendelings-genootschappen*, ed. by J. A. de Moor and P. G. E. I. J. van der Velde, Verloren 1993, p. 37. The original essay was published as volume XXII of the *Verhandelingen van Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap*, Haarlem 1807.

3 Smith, *An Inquiry*, p. 459.

4 H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System: Ethnological researches*, The Hague 1900; E. D. Domar, *The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis*, in: *Journal of Economic History* 30 (1970), pp. 18–32.

gradient leading people to force others to work for them”.<sup>5</sup> With respect to global expansion, Howard Lamar remarks that “the frontier will always be an area of bondage where labor is concerned”.<sup>6</sup> However, such perspectives are problematic in two important ways. First, slavery has never been limited to situations marked by low population density and an abundance of land. It is difficult, for example, to reconcile the fact that regions such as Java and the Banda archipelago, characterized by both low population densities, had systems of plantation slavery (Banda) or a mixture of slave and wage labour relations (Java), while in West Africa, regions such as the Bight of Biafra, having a relatively high population density, had highly intense systems of export slavery.<sup>7</sup> Second, slavery has never existed as a single universal form of servitude but instead has always encompassed a range of bonded relations that may share similarities but also have distinctive local, historical, and contextualized manifestations. The Nieboer-Domar thesis has, in short, been challenged by the argument that slavery developed in different ways in different places for different reasons.<sup>8</sup> Slavery likewise cannot be reduced to geographically defined forms of bondage such as “European”, “Asian”, or “Atlantic” slaveries. The way in which slavery operated in a particular milieu has always been deeply affected by time, circumstances, economic forces, and other factors.<sup>9</sup>

The complexities of slavery highlight the need to focus on how expanding networks of global trade during the early modern period not only connected consumers and producers in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas in multifaceted patterns of interdependence, but also affected social and labour relations and especially systems of bondage and slavery.<sup>10</sup> Recent economic history tends to downplay the nature and extent of global contact during the early modern era, characterizing this period as one of “soft” globalization compared to the “real” or “hard” globalization that flourished during and after the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> An interesting response to this approach comes from historians

5 P. Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom*, Cambridge 2009, p. 17.

6 H. Lamar, *From Bondage to Contract: Ethnic Labor in the American West, 1600–1890*, in: S. Hahn/J. Prude (eds.), *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*, Chapel Hill 1985, p. 295.

7 G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World*, Cambridge 2010.

8 O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge 1982.

9 S. W. Mintz, *Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?*, in: J. Bieber (ed.), *Plantation Societies in the Era of European Expansion*, Hampshire 1997, p. 306; N. Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, Cambridge 1995.

10 D. O. Flynn/A. Giráldez, *Born with a “Silver Spoon”: The Origin of World Trade in 1571*, in: *Journal of World History* 6 (1995) 2, pp. 201–221; J. De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge 2008; M. Berg, *Asian Luxuries and the Making of the European Consumer Revolution*, in: M. Berg/E. Eger (eds.), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Luxury Goods*, London 2002; C. Evans/G. Rydén, “Voyage Iron”: An Atlantic Slave Trade Currency, Its European Origins, and West African Impact, *Past and Present* 239 (2018) 1, pp. 41–70; J. E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development*, Cambridge 2002; G. Riello/T. Roy, *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850*, Leiden 2009.

11 Jan De Vries emphasizes that the early modern period already witnessed “soft” globalization characterized by “sustained interactions”, “interdependence and integration”, and (some levels of) “time and space compression”, but agrees with Jeffrey G. Williamson and Kevin O’Rourke and that in the absence of “price convergence”, there was no “real” or “hard” globalization. The critique of De Vries on the use of “price convergence” as an indicator

who emphasize globalization's impact rather than its forms. Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez argue that we can speak of globalization when “[major zones of the world] exchange products *continuously* [...] and on a scale that generated *deep* and *lasting* impacts on all trading partners”.<sup>12</sup> However, Flynn and Giráldez do not delineate the criteria for continuous, deep, and lasting very clearly. The task of doing so has been taken up especially by cultural historians who examine the impact of global connectedness in terms of cultural exchanges and adaptations, such as changing consumption patterns and cultural habits.<sup>13</sup> Despite the rise of fields such as global labour history, the systematic study of the far-reaching impact of early globalization on the lives of normal people across the globe remains poorly developed. The need to correct this deficiency is all that much more important given the labour-intensive character of these early global connections and the related commodity chains that affected people's lives in various ways. Just as Anne E. C. McCants responded to the criticism that globalization in the early modern period was restricted to the trade in “small luxuries” by reminding us that this trade nevertheless led to “mass consumption”, so the (global) history of labour should remind us that the *mass mobilization* of labour was required to produce and transport these items.

This article seeks to deepen our understanding of the impact of early globalization by using a comparative approach to examine the effects of the increasing global demand for (coerced) labour on systems of bondage and slavery, especially in West Africa and South Asia, two regions that supplied most of this era's captive labour. In so doing, it breaks with the historiographical propensity to deal with different forms of slavery in the early modern period as parallel but unconnected phenomena by proposing a framework for understanding the dynamics and sociopolitical consequences of slavery and bondage from a wider world perspective, a framework that highlights the need to distinguish between *local* and *global* systems of slavery. More specifically, we argue that the developing systems of globalized trade during the early modern era had a transformative impact on many local forms of slavery and bondage in Africa and Asia by connecting them to global

of globalization, although hidden in fn. 36, is crucial. On the question when and under what conditions prices converged, he notes that “[t]hey rarely do. Tests for price convergence in the twentieth century are few and inconclusive [...]. The nineteenth century offers the most celebrated examples of commodity and factor price convergence, but most convergence is limited to areas brought within colonial and imperial trading structures. Since this was also the century of divergence between industrial/temperate and tropical economies, it might be best to say that nineteenth century convergence was limited to the convergers. It was not a global phenomenon.” See J. De Vries, *The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World*, in: *The Economic History Review* 63 (2010) 3, pp. 710–733; J. G. Williamson/K. H. O'Rourke, *When Did Globalisation Begin?*, in: *European Review of Economic History* 6 (2002) 1, pp. 23–50; J. G. Williamson/K. H. O'Rourke, *Once More. When did Globalization Begin?*, in: *European Review of Economic History* 8 (2004) 1, pp. 109–117; J. G. Williamson/K. H. O'Rourke, *After Columbus: Explaining Europe's Overseas Trade Boom, 1500–1800*, in: *Journal of Economic History* 62 (2002) 2, pp. 417–456; M. D. Bordo/A. M. Taylor/J. G. Williamson (eds.), *Globalization in Historical Perspective*, Chicago 2003.

12 D. Flynn/A. Giráldez, *Path dependence, time lags and the birth of globalisation: A critique of O'Rourke and Williamson*, in: *European Review of Economic History* 8 (2004) 1, pp. 81–108 (emphasis added).

13 A. McCants, *Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking About Globalization in the Early Modern World*, in: *Journal of World History* 18 (2007) 4, pp. 433–462.

demands for closed, commodified slavery – an impact that resonated throughout these regions' social, economic, and political systems.<sup>14</sup>

In his transformation hypothesis, Paul Lovejoy argues that the demand for coerced labour from the Americas fundamentally shifted the nature of the institution of slavery in certain regions of Africa from forms of bondage set within lineage systems to one in which slaves formed a vital role in local production, developing into what he called a “slave mode of production” in which the economic, social, and political institutions were based on slavery.<sup>15</sup> This theory has come under criticism from historians who claim that external demand, although significant in the development of some states and societies, merely stimulated an expansion of *existing* forms of bondage/coercion. Three main points have emerged in response to Lovejoy's work.

Firstly, it has been pointed out that the presence of the trans-Saharan slave trade meant that many societies across West Africa were already geared towards export slavery before the rise of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, until the mid-nineteenth century, trade within Africa was controlled mainly by Africans. Europeans largely abandoned attempts to use military force by the early fifteenth century as it was ineffective and the procurement of slaves had to rely on African merchants or coastal middlemen. As the trade in the hands of Africans expanded rapidly, it is argued that this must have been because there were existing systems to build on.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, in many parts of Africa land was plentiful but required high labour inputs, and labour was relatively scarce during important times in the year. These conditions generally lowered the cost of land and made labour extremely valuable. It has been argued that this meant that various forms of labour coercion were, at least from an economic standpoint, were the only means of increasing (or just maintaining) production, which therefore suggests that slavery was an integral factor in the region's economies long before the arrival of Europeans.<sup>18</sup>

14 The argument advanced here is a synthesis of the authors' earlier work. See A. Dalrymple-Smith, *A Comparative History of Commercial Transition in Three West African Slave Trading Economies, 1630 to 1860*, unpublished PhD thesis, Wageningen University, 2017; M. van Rossum, *Connecting Global Slavery and Local Bondage: Rethinking Slavery in Early Modern Asia*. Paper presented to the international workshop “Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago Worlds (16th to 19th Century): New Research, Results and Comparisons”, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 9–10 November 2016; M. van Rossum, *Global Slavery, Local Bondage? Rethinking Slavery as (Im)Mobilizing Regimes from the Case of the Dutch Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago Worlds*, in: *Journal of World History* 31 (2020) 4, pp. 693–727.

15 Lovejoy is clear that this analysis does not apply to every part of Africa. For example, the Islamic states of the savannah or East Africa developed very different systems of bondage/slavery. P. E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 18–20. This was developed in the dependency tradition of scholars such as Walter Rodney. W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London 1972.

16 H. S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge 2010, p. 108.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 108. Klein estimates that the trans-Saharan route was more substantial up until the mid-seventeenth century, pp. 53 and 106. J. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, Cambridge 1998, p. 39.

18 According to Thornton, “the legal basis for wealth in Africa lay in the idea of transferring ownership of people”, which explains the rapid expansion of the slave trade (p. 95). The legal and cultural arguments are contested by Austin, who argues in a case study of Asante that while no cultural barriers existed to the development of a wage economy, the economic costs of free labour were so much higher that there was a “hobsons choice” with regard to slavery. G. Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante*,

While acknowledging that African societies had both agency in their interactions with Europeans and in dealing with existing systems of bondage/slavery, the dependency-influenced approach of Lovejoy and Walter Rodney still holds important lessons for exploring the history of slavery and coerced labour globally.<sup>19</sup> Combined with rising prices, the European-African trade in goods desired by Africans encouraged an expansion in slave-producing activities, in slave exports, and in subsequent sociopolitical changes. The impact, of course, varied enormously by area, region, and time. Acquiring and transporting slaves was expensive, so new mercantile networks allowed for the “perfection of institutions of capture”.<sup>20</sup> Markets developed for female slaves in Africa to complement the strong demand for males in the Americas.<sup>21</sup> In some areas with less centralized institutions (“acephalous” societies), external demand for slaves was responsible for a rapid increase in participation in global trade networks. This could be through the greater use of enslavement as a judicial punishment or through pressures to engage in trade to acquire important trade goods.<sup>22</sup>

Our analysis takes inspiration from the more developed interpretation of Lovejoy’s theory in which external pressures on areas with long-established systems of both local and often global slavery systems led to societal and institutional transformations. During the accelerating, but still very labour-intensive globalization of the early modern period, we argue that these transformations were not only African or Atlantic but also world-wide processes. In Africa, however, the impact varied according to the local context and therefore needs to be investigated from a comparative perspective across time and space. More importantly, we argue, these processes not only affected the economic trajectories of specific regions but also had a deep impact on wider global and local social systems of slavery and (coerced) labour that needs to be investigated.

As will become clear in the following pages, this approach differs from recent work by Jeff Fynn-Paul that emphasizes the importance of “slaving zones” to understanding slavery as a global phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> We believe that this model’s explanatory value is limited because the premises upon which it rests, such as the argument that the tension between social and political power structures and the protection of societal “insiders” rights is crucial to shaping slave regimes and the regulation of enslavement globally, are little more than truisms about how societies define an individual’s identity and status as an “insider”

1807–1956, London 2005, pp. 155–170. This analysis is supported by Stillwell more generally for sub-Saharan Africa. S. Stilwell, *Slavery and Slaving in African History*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 124–132.

19 See, e.g., T. Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 20–21, 279–281.

20 Patrick Manning explains that people were exported in such large numbers from a labour scarce environment because “every man has his price”, and European traders were willing to provide what Africans wanted. P. Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades*, Cambridge 1999, p. 33.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

22 Nwokeji, *Slave Trade*; W. Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves*, Portsmouth 2003.

23 J. Fynn-Paul, *Slaving Zones in Global History: The Evolution of a Concept*, in: J. Fynn-Paul/D. A. Pargas (eds.), *Slaving Zones: Cultural Identities, Ideologies, and Institutions in the Evolution of Global Slavery*, Leiden 2018, pp. 1–19.

or “outsider”.<sup>24</sup> We need to go beyond such truisms to understand why different forms of slavery and bondage existed and functioned the way they did.

We have three specific concerns about this paradigm. First, we believe that the model’s link between monotheism and the “perfecting” of the “no-slaving zone” is weak; while this link may apply to the Mediterranean, it holds little, if any, explanatory value for the rest of the world. As the story of the Japanese sailor Magotarō, who was shipwrecked and enslaved in Southeast Asia in the 1760s, illustrates, strong states, such as early modern Japan, were able to protect their subjects from enslavement or mistreatment well beyond their borders.<sup>25</sup> Second, the slaving zones argument focuses mainly on the ideologies of slave-importing societies and largely ignores the dynamics and practices that developed as slave-exporting societies began to interact with global systems of commerce, for example enslavement, commodification, and transformation of slaves’ status and identity. Third, this paradigm obscures the extent to which societies that formally ban the enslavement of its own members developed other mechanisms to extract bonded or forced labour from societal “insiders”, such as punitive contracts, debt systems, conscription, and various forms of *corvée*, or forced, labour. In short, global systems of (commodified) slavery must be understood in relation to other forms of bondage and exploitation. Rather than applauding monotheism’s role in creating “perfect no-slaving zones”, it might be more fruitful, for example, to consider the links between imperial expansion and the development of elaborate forms of contract or *corvée* labour or impressment systems protected by penal sanctions.

## 2. The Impact of Globalization on Labour and Slavery

While long-distance trade had linked various regions in Eurasia with one another for millennia, the early modern period witnessed a new phase of globalization that was brought about by the intensification of maritime connections between different parts of the globe, beginning at the end of the fifteenth century when Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed to India.<sup>26</sup> The establishment of direct shipping links between Europe, Africa, and Asia, first by the Portuguese and then by other Europeans, had a profound impact on trade and politics in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archi-

24 The concept of “open” and “closed” slavery is crucial to understanding insider-outsider dynamics. See J. L. Watson, *Slavery as an Institution: Open and Closed Systems*, in: J. L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, Berkeley 1980, pp. 1–15. For recent scholarship on the nature and dynamics of societal membership, see U. Bosma/G. Kessler/L. Lucassen (eds.), *Migration and Membership Regimes in Global and Historical Perspective*, Leiden 2013.

25 W. G. Aston, *Adventures of a Japanese Sailor in the Malay Archipelago, A.D. 1764 to 1771*, in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22 (1890), pp. 157–181; M. van Rossum, *Werkers van de Wereld. Globalisering, arbeid en interculturele ontmoetingen tussen Aziatische en Europese zeelieden in dienst van de VOC, 1600–1800*, Hilversum 2014, pp. 92–93, 251–254.

26 J. R. Bruijn/F. S. Gastra (eds.), *Ships, Sailors and Spices: East India Companies and Their Shipping in the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries*, Amsterdam 1993.

pelago.<sup>27</sup> Although Asian merchants remained active and important players in the Indian Ocean and maritime Asian worlds, the expansion of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* during the sixteenth century,<sup>28</sup> the creation of the Dutch East India Company's commercial empire in the seventeenth century, and the activities of the British East India Company and the French *Compagnie des Indes* during the eighteenth century spurred a dramatic expansion on direct, long-distance commercial links between Europe and East, South, and Southeast Asia.<sup>29</sup> The European discovery of the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century likewise created new intercontinental circuits of exchange during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially with the development of labour-intensive monoculture plantation systems in the Caribbean and North America and the attendant creation of an Atlantic "world" that linked Europe, the Americas, and West and West Central Africa in increasingly complex ways.<sup>30</sup> As others have noted, the dispersal of American goods and foodstuffs that accompanied the "Columbian exchange" had a transformative impact on societies and cultivation across the globe.<sup>31</sup>

With the expansion of early modern global trade and labour-intensive production, many parts of the world witnessed an increase in the demand for labour, sometimes in well-populated areas but also in less densely or even newly cultivated regions. Some of this demand was met by population increases brought about by the introduction of new American food crops, such as the potato in Europe or sweet potatoes and maize in China.<sup>32</sup> In many areas, however, local populations were insufficient to meet this increased demand for labour. This trend was most obvious in the Americas, where European diseases decimated indigenous populations. At the same time, exploitation of the continent's mineral and agricultural riches required ever increasing amounts of labour. The failure of experiments using Native Americans and indentured European drove an increasing reliance on enslaved Africans, who, counterintuitively, were found to be the cheaper and more cost-effective labour option.<sup>33</sup>

27 K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, Cambridge 1985; G. Borsa (ed.), *Trade and Politics in the Indian Ocean*, New Delhi 1990; R. Mukherjee/L. Subramanian (eds.), *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta*, New Delhi 1998; U. Das Gupta (ed.), *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta*, New Delhi 2001; M. Kearney, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, London 2003.

28 See, e.g., P. Machado, *Oceans of Trade: South Asian Merchants and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1850*, Cambridge 2014.

29 van Rossum, *Werkers van de Wereld*, chap. 2.

30 See, e.g., Ph. D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, 2nd edn, Cambridge 1998. On conceptualizing the Atlantic world, see A. Games, *Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities*, in: *American Historical Review* 111 (2006) 3, pp. 741–757.

31 A. W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange. Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, Westport 1972.

32 N. Nunn/N. Qian, *The Potato's Contribution to Population and Urbanization: Evidence from a Historical Experiment*, in: *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126 (2011) 2, pp. 593–650; Ch. C. Mann, *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*, New York 2011.

33 D. Eltis/S. L. Engerman, *Dependence, Servility, and Coerced Labor in Time and Space*, in: *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, Vol. 3, Cambridge 2011, pp. 1–21; D. Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 65–75.



African slaves had long been exported across the Sahara to markets in North Africa and the Middle East,<sup>34</sup> but it was the Portuguese and Spanish conquest of the Americas and the subsequent development of intercontinental systems of oceanic trade that transformed the African slave trade into a global phenomenon. Portuguese attempts to circumvent Arab and African control of the trans-Saharan gold trade led them to establish direct trade contacts with the area around present-day Ghana, where they found that they could trade for slaves from elsewhere in West Africa, who in turn could be used to work on the sugar plantations that had been established in Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands.<sup>35</sup> From here it was an easy step to ship slaves to the Americas. The demand for African slave labour expanded rapidly during the seventeenth century as other European nations began to acquire and exploit territories in the Caribbean and on the American mainland.<sup>36</sup> Charter companies such as the Royal African Company in England and the West India Company in the Netherlands and private merchants provided the capital and commercial expertise and connections needed to satisfy the enormous demand for labour in the Americas with slaves from Africa.<sup>37</sup> African rulers and commercial interests responded to this demand by increasing supplies of chattel labourers for export, while efficient trade networks connected the African hinterland with the coastal ports that funnelled millions of enslaved men, women, and children towards plantations in the Caribbean, Brazil, and elsewhere in the Americas.<sup>38</sup>

Until rather recently, scholarship on slave trading in the early modern era has been confined largely to the Atlantic. Historians of slavery in Asia subscribed to the view that debt slavery was the principal form of slavery in that part of the globe, and it was therefore unnecessary for Asian states to import labour since various forms of *corvée* labour were available in many areas. Inspired by Anthony Reid's work on Southeast Asia, this literature views slavery in Asia as occurring mainly in urban households rather in Atlantic-like plantation systems.<sup>39</sup> An integral part of this argument is that "most slaves were probably objects of conspicuous consumption by elites – whose wealth and power they were purchased to reflect".<sup>40</sup> This model of "Asian" slavery has fuelled the idea that "slaves were neither a good investment nor the path to capitalism" but rather part of a circular "wealth-slavery-buffalo-feasting-bride price complex" that was relatively "mild" in form.<sup>41</sup> The same argument has been extended to slavery in European establishments

34 P. E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd edn, Cambridge 2012. For an overview of slavery in Africa, see also S. Stilwell, *Slavery and Slaving in African History*, Cambridge 2014.

35 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*; I. Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante*, Athens 1993.

36 H. S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2nd edn, Cambridge 2010.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 77–82; Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery*, pp. 114–136.

38 Lovejoy, *Transformations*, esp. pp. 88–107.

39 A. Reid, Introduction, in: Id. (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, New York 1983, pp. 1–43.

40 G. Campbell, *Slavery in the Indian Ocean World*, in: G. Heuman/T. Burnard (eds.), *The Routledge History of Slavery*, New York 2011, pp. 52–63.

41 P. Boomgaard, *Human Capital, Slavery and Low Rates of Economic and Population Growth in Indonesia, 1600–1910*, in: G. Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, London 2004, p. 93; Reid, Introduction.

in Asia. Eric Jones, for example, argues that slavery in Batavia was marked by “the ‘cozy’ intimacy of pure household slavery”, which only diminished as “plantations radiated outward from late eighteenth-century Batavia”.<sup>42</sup>

Recent scholarship suggests, however, that the presence of slavery and slave trading in early modern Asia was on far greater than previously acknowledged.<sup>43</sup> This research not only challenges the Atlantic-centrism that dominates slavery studies but also highlights the need for historians to reassess current perspectives on slavery in Asia. The need for such a re-evaluation is underscored by recent studies that indicate that early modern Asia was not awash with “backward” or “despotic” political and economic regimes but with strong and dynamic interconnected economic and political systems.<sup>44</sup> This new perspective has led several historians to argue that forms of coerced labour, and slavery in particular, played a key role in maintaining profitable market-oriented systems of production,<sup>45</sup> arguments that challenge earlier assumptions that “Asian” slavery was concentrated in cities and households, was a relatively “mild” form of servitude, and was driven largely by individuals’ desire to maintain or enhance their status in society.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the steadily expanding body of scholarship on slavery and slave trading in Asia in recent years,<sup>47</sup> a number of historiographical problems continue to limit our understanding of slavery in this part of the globe. First, the study of forced labour in Asia remains fragmented. Slavery and related forms of bondage in different regions continue to be

42 E. Jones, *Wives, Slaves and Concubines: A History of the Female Underclass in Dutch Asia*, DeKalb 2010, p. 144.

43 G. J. Knaap, *Slavery and the Dutch in Southeast Asia*, in: G. Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit*, Leiden 1995, pp. 193–206; M. Vink, “The World’s Oldest Trade”: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean, in: *Journal of World History* 14 (2003) 2, pp. 131–177; R. B. Allen, *Satisfying the “Want for Labouring People”: European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*, in: *Journal of World History* 21 (2010) 1, pp. 45–73; R. van Welie, *Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire: A Global Comparison*, in: *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 82 (2008) 1/2, pp. 45–94; R. B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*, Athens 2014; M. van Rossum, “Vervloekte goudzugt”: De VOC, slavenhandel en slavernij in Azië, in: *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 12 (2015) 4, pp. 29–57.

44 See, e.g., A. Stanziani, *After Oriental Despotism: Eurasian Growth in a Global Perspective*, London 2014; P. Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600–1850*, Cambridge 2011; M. N. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, London 2003; A. G. Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, Berkeley 1998.

45 M. Mann, *Sahibs, Sklaven und Soldaten. Geschichte des Menschenhandels rund um den Indischen Ozean*, Darmstadt 2012; M. van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek: De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de VOC*, Verloren 2015.

46 E.g., G. Campbell, *Slavery in the Indian Ocean World*, in: Heuman/Burnard, *The Routledge History of Slavery*, pp. 52–63; Boomgaard, *Human Capital, Slavery*, pp. 83–96; Reid, *Introduction*.

47 In addition to the works noted in fn. 34, see B. Kanumoyoso, *Beyond the City Wall: Society and Economic Development in the Ommelanden of Batavia, 1684–1740*, unpublished PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2011; W. O. Dijk, *An End to the History of Silence? The Dutch Trade in Asian Slaves: Arakan and the Bay of Bengal, 1621–1665*, IAS Newsletter 46 (2008), p. 16; G. J. Knaap/H. Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders: Ships, Skippers and Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Makassar*, Leiden 2004; P. Machado, *A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave-Trade, c. 1730–1830*, in: Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery*, pp. 17–32; S. Arasaratnam, *Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century*, in: K. S. Mathew (ed.), *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, New Delhi 1995, pp. 195–208; R. C.H. Shell, *Children of Bondage. A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838*, Johannesburg 1994. For earlier research, see H. Sutherland, *Slavery and the Slave Trade in South Sulawesi, 1660s–1800s*, in Reid, *Slavery, Bondage*, pp. 263–285; A. van der Kraan, *Bali: Slavery and Slave Trade*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 315–340.

studied in isolation from one another. Second, the study of slave trading in Asia remains underdeveloped. While a number of important studies exist, they remain focused on specific regions, slave traders and trading routes, and topics, such as the importation of African slaves into various regions in South and Southeast Asia.<sup>48</sup> Richard Allen's pivotal study of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean world demonstrates the need not only to undertake more research on slave trading in Asia but also to examine these trades in broader, comparative contexts.<sup>49</sup> Lastly, unlike in the Atlantic world, we possess little data on the size, composition, and structure of slave populations in different parts of Asia through time; the structure, organization, and volume of local and regional slave trades; the size and operation of slave markets; or slave prices.<sup>50</sup> As the participants recognized in a recent workshop on establishing an Indian Ocean and maritime Asia slaving voyages database,<sup>51</sup> the *Slave Voyages* transatlantic slave trade database, which contains information on more than 35,000 slaving voyages to the Americas between the early sixteenth century and the mid-1860s, highlights both the need to acquire such data and the value of doing so.<sup>52</sup>

### 3. Rethinking Slavery and Slaving Trade: A Global Perspective

The differences that existed between systems of slavery and bondage in various parts of the globe during the early modern era cannot be understood without taking into account the connections between and responses to the circuits of global trade that developed during this period. In this respect, it is clear that many of the processes that transformed slave systems in the Atlantic world also occurred in Asia. The development of global markets in commodified labour was driven by three key mechanisms:

1) Trade networks were able to connect areas where local populations could not furnish the labour needed to meet the global demand for agricultural and other commodities (e.g. sugar, spices, gold, and silver) with regions capable of supplying that labour, often in the form of slaves.

48 See, e.g., J. Pinto, *Slavery in Portuguese India, 1510–1842*, Bombay 1992; S. Chakravarti, *The Dutch East India Company and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century: An Outline* by Pieter van Dam, an Advocate of the Company, in: *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 39 (1997) 2, pp. 73–99; Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade"; M. Carter, *Slavery and Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean*, in: *History Compass* 4 (2006) 5, pp. 800–813; T. Seijas, *The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish Manila, 1580–1640*, in: *Itinerario* 22 (2008) 1, pp. 19–38.

49 Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

50 The contrast between Asia and other historical areas of interest is enormous. See, e.g., the data presented in the *Slave Voyages* database of transatlantic slaving voyages ([www.slavevoyages.com](http://www.slavevoyages.com)). For other general topics, see the data on the Sound Toll trade (<http://www.soundtoll.nl>); on shipping in Europe (<http://navigocorpus.org/>); on Dutch shipping ([www.dutchshipsandsailors.nl](http://www.dutchshipsandsailors.nl)); on inequality ([www.clio-infra.eu](http://www.clio-infra.eu)); and on prices and wages (<http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/>).

51 International workshop "Towards an Asian Slave Trade Database," International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 27–28 September 2018.

52 See fn. 41. See also D. Eltis/D. Richardson (eds.), *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, New Haven 2008.

2) Powerful European companies, commercial organizations, often with state support, developed the infrastructure and financial mechanisms that fostered and facilitated trade between coastal ports and the hinterlands that supplied these ports with captive men, women, and children for export to global labour markets.

3) Local merchants, traders, and political elites were highly responsive to the social, economic, and political opportunities that participating in slave trading on a global scale presented, and they developed the commercial networks and modified existing systems of servitude or forced labour that permitted individuals to be commodified and sold outside of the region.

The net effect of these mechanisms was often to radically transform local and/or regional social, economic, and political systems. The many parallels between these transformations in Africa and Asia require us to look beyond the regionally based dichotomies that have hitherto characterized slavery studies and adopt a global perspective that takes common processes and differences across time and space into account. Central to understanding the different forms of slavery that existed globally in the early modern period is the need to distinguish between “open” and “closed” forms of slavery. As James Watson argued almost 40 years ago, “open” forms of slavery are based on social ties that provide slaves with an opportunity to become part of their owners’ kinship systems. “Closed” forms of (hereditary) slavery, on the other hand, are rooted in relations of possession shaped by property rights that turn slaves into permanent outsiders.<sup>53</sup> This partly coincides with the distinction between local forms of bondage and more globalized, commodified forms of slavery in which slaves “can be bought and sold”.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. Global Systems: Mobilizing Slavery

Practices existed throughout the globe that can be labelled as *commodified* or *market slavery*, which are clearly distinct from the many *local* systems of slavery and bondage based on social ties or status in which a person was not, at least theoretically, supposed to be sold or transferred outside the area in which they lived. Commodified slavery occurred in both European and non-European systems in which enslaved people were regarded as property that could be bought and sold and in which property rights were regulated through more or less formalized rules maintained by local authorities, imperial trading companies, or other actors. A crucial characteristic of commodified systems of slavery was that there were limited, if any, restrictions on the sale and long-distance movement of the enslaved. In essence, market slavery could be and frequently was highly mobile in nature.

Slave mobility was a feature of international trade in both Africa and Asia before the expansion of European trade networks that began in the early sixteenth century. The expansion of Islam into West Africa during the eighth and ninth centuries, for example,

53 Watson, *Slavery as an Institution*, pp. 9–13.

54 Boomgaard, *Human Capital*, p. 87.

helped to incorporate this region into a wider trading world that encompassed North Africa, the Middle East, and southern Europe. Between the ninth and seventeenth centuries, an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 West African slaves, mostly women and children, were transported across the Sahara into the Mediterranean basin.<sup>55</sup> In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese began to seek slaves for their possessions in the Atlantic, but it was expansion of northern European empires in the Caribbean and the Americas that led to the enormous increase in demand for African slave labour. The number of slaves exported from Africa to the Americas rose accordingly from an estimated 277,500 during the sixteenth century to 1,876,000 during the seventeenth century before soaring to almost 6.5 million during the eighteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

The number of slaves traded to and within Asia is difficult to determine, but it is clear that slaves of East African and Malagasy origin reached South and Southeast Asia both before and after 1500, while those of Indian and Indonesian origin entered long-distance trading networks that supplied states and urban centres in South and Southeast Asia with labourers who worked as domestic servants, craftsmen, and artisans; cultivated, harvested, and processed commodities such as cloves and pepper; and served as soldiers and sailors.<sup>57</sup> Richard Allen estimates that European merchants traded a minimum of 450,000 to 565,000 slaves within the Indian Ocean basin between 1500 and 1850, estimates that future research will undoubtedly revise upward.<sup>58</sup> Future research will also undoubtedly increase current estimates of the numbers of slaves traded by Asian, Arab, and African merchants in this wider oceanic world. Recent research on the Dutch East India Company empire, for example, suggests that at least 660,000 and perhaps as many as 1,135,000 slaves were imported into company-controlled areas in Asia and South Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>59</sup>

## 5. Local Systems: Immobilizing Bondage

A range of local systems of slavery and bondage existed throughout Asia and Africa before and during the early modern period. These systems were characterized by a variety of socially defined forms of bondage that, while they ensured slave owners' access to and control of their bondsmen's unfree labour, kept these subjects *inside* local sociopolitical systems. Although sociolegal conventions might allow slaves or bondsmen to be transferred between masters, these rules and regulations often formally restricted the transfer

55 <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates> (accessed 18 September 2018).

56 Voyages database (accessed 10 June 2018).

57 On the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean, see J. E. Harris, *The African Presence in India*, Evanston 1971; S. de S. Jayasuriya/R. Pankhurst (eds.), *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*, Trenton 2003. Paul Lovejoy estimates that Arab and Swahili traders exported 200,000 slaves from East Africa to the Middle East and South Asia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and 400,000 slaves during the eighteenth century (*Transformations*, p. 46). See also Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–19.

59 Van Rossum, *Vervloekte goudzugt*, p. 41.

or exportation of enslaved or bonded subjects elsewhere. In essence, despite their differences, these forms of slavery and bondage were marked by a high degree of immobility that tied slaves and other bonded labourers socially and spatially to their local community and polity.

Such systems that took forms ranging from debt slavery to *corvée* labour were found in various parts of the globe. States and societies along India's Malabar Coast, for example, tied bonded people to the land and allowed landowners to sell their bondsmen although never beyond specified boundaries.<sup>60</sup> On the Indonesian island of Timor, Hans Hägerdal notes that while local people worked the fields and tended the cattle of the island's lords and grandees and could not move from these lands, "neither could they be bought and sold, and they are therefore similar to those people who were called serfs in Europe". The bonded labourers, known as *lutu-hum*, lived side by side with chattel slaves, known as *ulun-houris*, usually acquired as war captives. Except in the case of "princely lineages", a master's slaves would automatically be freed and incorporated into his clan if he died without heirs.<sup>61</sup>

Bonded labour in the form of *corvée* labour systems were widespread on Java, in the Moluccas, on Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), and elsewhere. These systems obligated local subjects to perform tasks for their rulers, such as collecting and delivering wood, working on public projects, and growing crops. In most of these systems, people were not regarded as property or enslaved but viewed as subjects whose obligations stemmed from their low position in society. Debt slavery, which was common in Southeast Asia, frequently included similar requirements but on a more individualized rather than broader societal basis.

As noted above, slavery was likewise common in West Africa before the arrival of Europeans but, with the exception of states in the Sahel region such as Songhay and Bornu, did not occur on a large scale.<sup>62</sup> Most slavery was domestic and most slaves were women and children. Generally speaking, slaves could expect that they or their descendants might be incorporated into local lineage systems.<sup>63</sup> Slave systems tended to be more closed in larger states, but the political and ecological fragility of the Sahel zone meant that slave status in these systems typically did not last for long. Even at the height of the transatlantic slave trade, localizing systems of slavery were commonplace in West Africa. States such as Asante and Dahomey treated areas outside their boundaries as zones in which people could be exploited to the fullest extent while maintaining a very different attitude towards their own people.<sup>64</sup>

60 J.-A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, trans. H. K. Beauchamp, Oxford 1899, p. 57.

61 H. Hägerdal, *Lords of the Land, Lords of the Sea: Conflict and Adaptation in Early Colonial Timor, 1600–1800*, Leiden 2012, pp. 270–271.

62 Lovejoy, *Transformations*, pp. 27–33.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

64 A. Adoma Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Century*, Legon/Accra 2004; E. G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*, Charlottesville 2012, pp. 145–146; P. Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades*, Cambridge 1990, p. 35.

In both Africa and South Asia, substantial systems of debt slavery and pawning existed in the pre-modern and early modern eras. Given the abundance of land and the scarcity of labour in much of Africa south of the Sahara, people and their labour were often regarded as the most valuable form of capital and were therefore the most suitable means of securing loans and paying off debts.<sup>65</sup> In South Asia, poverty or judicial entanglements often drove many into debt and to “pawn” themselves or their family for a limited period of time.<sup>66</sup> However, such pawns had rights and could not, in theory, be sold beyond the borders of a community unless traders were willing to violate local laws or the pawn was judged to be unable to pay off the debt that he had incurred.<sup>67</sup>

## 6. West African and South Asian Connections: The Local Impact of Global Slavery

We end this article with a brief outline of comparative case studies that we believe will illustrate the advantages of appreciating the ways in which globalized commerce had an impact on closed and open systems of slavery and transformed social, economic, and political life in various parts of the world during the early modern period. More specifically, we want to suggest that this method of analysis demonstrates that the experience of West Africans and South Asians with slavery did not differ as much as previous studies have suggested.

Three broad themes are central to this exercise, the first of which is that the global demand for coerced labour had a transformative impact by encouraging a certain type of state development that rested on the existence of a military caste or class for whom slavery provided both a justification and a reward for sustained aggressive expansion. In West Africa, states in the region of the Bight of Benin, most notably Dahomey, used the proceeds from slave raiding and the sale of captives to acquire goods that rulers used to reward followers and develop larger and more effective fighting forces. The result was an enormous expansion of commodified, mobilizing systems of slavery in regions surrounding these kingdoms that resulted in significant population declines in these adjacent regions while simultaneously leaving local, open slave systems in place. A similar transformation seems to have occurred in the Arakanese kingdom on the Bay of Bengal. The kingdom controlled the area between Dhaka and Pegu by military force and received tribute in the form of slaves from local rulers in the region. The Dutch East India Company’s demand for slaves fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship between Arakan and Bengal during the early seventeenth century.<sup>68</sup> The greater economic rewards

65 J. C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830*, Madison 1997, pp. 51–53; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, pp. 13–14.

66 P. E. Lovejoy/D. Richardson, *The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600–1810*, in: *Journal of African History* 42 (2001) 1, pp. 67–89.

67 See, e.g., R. J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters*, Cambridge 2014.

68 S. E. A. van Galen, *Arakan and Bengal: The rise and Decline of the Mrauk U kingdom (Burma) from the fifteenth to*

that came from enslaving prisoners of war for sale to the Dutch not only strengthened a military ideology among Arakanese elites but also greatly expanded the scale and scope of warfare and slave raiding in the border zones of Bengal that separated the Arakanese kingdom and the Mughal Empire.

A second general theme is how sociopolitical systems in politically fragmented or even stateless areas adapted to the demand for commodified slaves. In the small-scale polities and stateless societies found in the region of the Bight of Biafra, a massive increase in commodified slavery during the eighteenth century was achieved not only by large-scale violence but also by local elites greatly expanding the use of enslavement to punish those found guilty of crimes such as adultery or the non-payment of debts. Highly efficient slave-trading networks based on cooperation between local “big” men and trading organizations developed to meet the insatiable demand for plantation labour in the Americas.<sup>69</sup> India’s Malabar Coast was also highly fragmented politically. Local systems of servitude tied slaves to the land and their landlords and formally banned the export of bonded subjects. However, as in West Africa, the increasing demand for enslaved labour from European, Arab, and other merchants during the early modern period likewise affected local systems of slavery as Malabar slaves began to be exported to different parts of the Indian Ocean world and Southeast Asia.<sup>70</sup> Earlier prohibitions on the sale or export of slaves tied to the land fell by the wayside, which in turn encouraged the practice of selling debtors to slave traders and abducting locals, especially children,<sup>71</sup> for sale to merchants engaging in the export trade. The net effect of these practices was to create channels of commodified, export slavery within the context of the closed systems of bonded labour, which were an important basis of local economic and political institutions.

A third theme focuses on how states and societies seek to accommodate the external demands of a globalized economy through the (re)development of “traditional” or localizing systems of bondage to produce commodities rather than slaves for export to global markets. Along West Africa’s Gold Coast, the Asante kingdom dominated regional exports of both gold, over which it had a regional monopoly, and captives. Here, as in other regions, the increasing demand for captive labour during the eighteenth century led to many more people being enslaved and sold to Atlantic traders. However, the attendant decline in locally available labour also led to a decline in gold production that was crucial for the kingdom’s economy and a basis for elite power. As a result, the Asante began to

the seventeenth century AD, PhD thesis, Leiden, 2008; S. Subrahmanyam, *Slaves and Tyrants: Dutch Tribulations in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U*, in: *Journal of Early Modern History* 1 (1997) 3, pp. 201–253.

69 G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World*, Cambridge 2010; S. D. Behrendt/A. J. Latham/D. Northrup, *The Diary of Antera Duke, An Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader*, Oxford 2010; K. O. Dike/F. Ekejuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650–1980: A Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria*, Ibadan 1990.

70 K. K. N. Kurup, *Slavery in 18th Century Malabar*, in: *Revue historique de Pondichéry* 11 (1973), p. 56–60; S. Joseph, *Slave Labour of Malabar in the Colonial Context*, in: S. Bhattacharya (ed.), *Essays in Modern Indian Economic History*, Delhi 1987, pp. 46–54; M. Carter, *Indian Slaves in Mauritius (1729–1834)*, in: *Indian Historical Review* 15 (1988) 1/2, pp. 233–247; Allen, *European Slave Trading*.

71 On the enslavement of and trade in children, see Allen, *European Slave Trading*, *passim*.



see more economic, social, and political value in using their slaves to produce gold for export to Atlantic markets and kola nuts to meet growing demand among the new Islamic states of the interior for this prized and religiously acceptable stimulant.<sup>72</sup> The impact of the growing global demand for tropical and other commodities can also be seen on the island of Ceylon, where *corvée* labour was used to produce export commodities such as cinnamon as well as for military labour and infrastructure projects. This labour was traditionally performed for the king of Kandy and were taken over by Portuguese colonists who conquered the island's coastal regions during the sixteenth century. The Dutch wars to conquer the island during the mid-seventeenth century resulted in the depopulation of many coastal regions, one consequence of which was the Dutch importation of slaves from other parts of South Asia. However, this practice did lead to an end of the *corvée* system. The Dutch period in fact witnessed an expansion of *corvée* labour in order to increase cinnamon exports and to provide the labour needed to support experiments to develop other export crops such as indigo.<sup>73</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

Traditional historiographical wisdom argues that the nature of slavery in (South) Asia and (West) Africa was fundamentally different during the early modern period. However, we believe that the expansion of global networks of trade during this period created an accelerating demand for coerced labour that had comparable effects in both Asia and Africa, and that understanding slavery as a global phenomenon requires us to adopt a new analytical framework that takes the increasingly globalized demands for (coerced) labour and commodities that developed during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries into account. Doing so means that we must acknowledge that local systems of slavery and bondage and global systems of commodified slavery were not separate and unconnected but coexisted and interacted at three levels: that of state formation and expansion; the adaption of sociopolitical systems to increase slave exports in response to the demands of a globalized labour market; and the modification of local systems of slave and bonded labour. That the numbers of commodified slaves in the Atlantic and maritime Asian worlds may have been much closer than previously believed underscores the need for new comparative approaches to deepen our understanding of the dynamic transformations that shaped the slave experience, both locally and globally, in ways that continue to resonate in the early twenty-first century.

72 I. Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order*, Cambridge 1975; T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, Cambridge 2003; G. Austin, "Between abolition and jihad: the Asanti response to the ending of the Atlantic slave trade, 1807–1896," in: R. Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 93–118.

73 M. van Rossum, *Labouring Transformations of Amphibious Monsters: Exploring Early Modern Globalization, Diversity, and Shifting Clusters of Labour Relations in the Context of the Dutch East India Company (1600–1800)*, in: *International Review of Social History* 64 (2019) 27, pp. 19–42.