

New Perspectives on Early Modern Dutch Atlantic Slavery and Slave Trade

An Introduction

Matthias van Rossum

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This Special Issue explores new routes in the economic historical research on the Dutch Atlantic history of slavery and slave trade. Each of its contributions tackles important blind spots that have continued to haunt Dutch economic history despite the recent energetic revival of research and debates on the economic impact of Dutch Atlantic slavery. Together, the articles of this Special Issue challenge our perspectives, questions and methods.

Despite a rich and longstanding international historiography on the consequences of Atlantic slavery and the slave trade, in many ways, scholarship is still only at the beginning of understanding how they impacted economic, social, political and cultural developments in Europe, Africa, as well as the Americas. Only in the past decade or so, the Dutch economic historical debate has moved away from a perspective that used indications of ‘profits’ and ‘losses’ to assess the relevance of slavery and slave trade. Two classic arguments have dominated this earlier strand of work. First, that slave trade was not relevant economically because of its supposed unprofitability. And, second, in similar fashion, that the Atlantic slavery-based plantation economies did little to impact the Dutch economy because of the losses induced by moments of crisis, such as revolt and conquest (Brazil) or financial bankruptcy (Surinam).¹

¹ Pieter C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse slavenhandel, 1500-1850* (Amsterdam 2003); D. Eltis, *The rise of African slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge 2000).

These claims ignored the fact that quantifications of profits or losses do not provide a useful indication of the importance and impact of sectors of trade and production. The slave trade, for example, generated a wider flow of economic activities in the Dutch Republic through, among other things, ship construction, the production of trade goods (*cargazoenen*), the payment of wages, and also insurances, commissions, and equipment.² Similarly, the wider Atlantic slave-based plantation economy also created an economic impact, running from provisioning to trade and processing.³ So, in order to understand the contribution of slave-based economic activities to the economic development of the many regions connected by the Atlantic slavery complex, one needs to move beyond discussing incidental losses and profits alone.

Shifting historiography

In the wake of the *global* turn in both social-economic history and slavery studies, historians seem to be rediscovering an insight that is as obvious as it is fundamental – namely that all of the slavery-related and colonial economic activities that developed in the course of the European expansion occurred within the context of a political-economic order that closely tied these economic activities to the imperial ambitions of European states.⁴ The coerced transportation by European merchants of more than 12 million enslaved Africans created the basic conditions of the wider Atlantic system of coerced labour exploitation. Early modern merchant and ruling elites had large interests in developing, expanding and protecting the commodity chains that flowed from the Atlantic slavery complex. In this respect, colonialism was not merely a project of international prestige and competition, and the impact

2 Matthias van Rossum and Karwan Fatah-Black, 'Wat is winst? De economische impact van de Nederlandse trans-Atlantische slavenhandel', *TSEG/ Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 9:1 (2012) 3-29.

3 Pepijn Brandon and Ulbe Bosma, 'De betekenis van de Atlantische slavernij voor de Nederlandse economie in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw', *TSEG/ Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 16:2 (2019) 5-45.

4 For this shift, see e.g. Cátia Antunes, 'From binary narratives to diversified tales', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 131:3 (2018) 393-408; M. van Rossum, 'Labouring transformations of amphibious monsters – Globalization, diversity and the effects of labour mobilization under the Dutch East India Company (1600-1800)', *International Review of Social History* 86:4 (2019) 19-42; René Koekkoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard, Arthur Weststeijn (eds), *The Dutch Empire between ideas and practice, 1600-2000* (London 2019). Internationally, see e.g. Sven Beckert, *Empire of cotton. A global history* (New York 2014).

of the trans-Atlantic slave trade was not merely cultural or ideological.⁵ The slave trade played a strategic role in the Atlantic system, exactly because it organized the massive coerced transportation of humans from West-Africa, introducing them into the European colonies in the Americas as the commodified and unfree labour that was at the heart of the Atlantic colonial plantation production.⁶ This Atlantic slave-based production in turn catalyzed commodity chains stretching across the globe – from the production of Indian and Silesian textile, to the manufacture of Dutch and Bohemian glass, and the export trade of tobacco and coffee to European hinterlands.⁷ Eighteenth-century lobbyists to the city council of Amsterdam could, for example, easily argue that ‘no workman, whatever his trade may be, can be found in Amsterdam, whose earning does not also rely on this Colonie to some extent’.⁸

Scholars have thus started to challenge the narrow focus on the slave trade only, and the question of its perceived low profitability in Dutch scholarship and debates,⁹ and have shown ‘that Atlantic slavery has had an enormous influence on the world economy, and the role of Europe in it’.¹⁰ Instead, they have (re-)introduced an approach that uses the ‘gross margin’ of slavery related economic activities to trace the impact of the Atlantic slavery system. In 2012, Van Rossum and Fatah-Black showed that the Dutch Atlantic slave trade industry alone contributed up to 0.5 percent to the economy of the entire Dutch Republic. This intervention emphasized that, although the slave trade was a highly strategic sector, it was actually one of the smaller legs of the wider Atlantic slavery complex. We therefore called for the ‘gross margin’ based method to be used for ‘further reconstructions of the size and impact of other elements of the Atlantic system’ in order to ‘provide new insights for the debate on the role of slavery and the related economic activities in

5 Emmer, *Nederlandse slavenhandel*; Eltis, *African slavery*.

6 Van Rossum and Fatah-Black, ‘Wat is winst?’; Brandon and Bosma, ‘Atlantische slavernij’.

7 Merel Blok, ‘Schiedam en het Atlantische slavernijverleden’, *Schiedams Historisch Jaarboek* (2021) 16-37.

8 Tamira Combrink, ‘De Amsterdamse economie en slavernij’, in: Pepijn Brandon, Guno Jones, Nancy Jouwe and Matthias van Rossum, *De slavernij in Oost en West. Het Amsterdam-onderzoek* (Amsterdam 2020) 271-279, 278. Freely translated from: ‘Dus dat geen werkman, van wat handwerck hy ook zy, in Amsterdam gevonden werd, off hij verdient mede al een stuck brood by deese Colonie.’ Quote from: [Anonymous], ‘Voordelen die de Stad van Amsterdam treckt van de colonie van Suriname’, circa 1741, published in: J.G. van Dillen, ‘Memorie betreffende de kolonie Suriname’, *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek* 24 (1950) 162-167, aldaar 162.

9 Armand Zunder, *Herstelbetalingen* (The Hague 2010).

10 Kwame Nimako, Glenn Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic. Slavery, abolition and emancipation* (London 2011) 185.

the trans-Atlantic trade system and the influence on the development of early modern Europe'.¹¹

In recent years, a new wave of scholarship has shown exactly how widespread and deep the impact of this Atlantic system was on the Dutch Republic and the wider European economy. Gerhard de Kok, for example, showcased the considerable weight of the slave trade on the local and regional level. Around one-tenth to even one-third of the economies of specific port cities such as Middelburg and Flushing consisted of economic activities related to the slave trade.¹² Ulbe Bosma and Pepijn Brandon expanded on the 'gross margin' approach by calculating the contribution of slave-based activities to the GDP of the Dutch Republic (5.2 percent) and the province of Holland (10.36 percent) around 1770.¹³ Tamira Combrink showed how these commodity chains also impacted the structure of the Dutch economy. Showing that the coffee trade rose from almost nothing to a share of '9.5 percent of the total trade value' of the Dutch Republic in the span of a few decades in the second half of the eighteenth century, she argues that the export trade in slave-produced coffee was a key factor in re-orienting the Dutch economy from the Baltic and Mediterranean trades towards the Rhine trade to the German hinterland.¹⁴

In similar fashion, recent research has highlighted how specific early modern Dutch industries became entangled with the slave trade and the slavery complex. Felicia Fricke has demonstrated how the seventeenth-century Amsterdam glass factories emerged in relation to Dutch Atlantic and Dutch East India Company slave trading.¹⁵ Merel Blok has shown the eighteenth-century links of the iconic and booming Schiedam gin distilleries to especially the Rotterdam slave trade by *Coopstad en Rochussen*.¹⁶ The smoking chimneys of the Dutch involvement in slavery and slave trade literally blackened early modern Dutch cities.

11 Van Rossum and Fatah-Black, 'Wat is winst?'; translated as Karwan Fatah-Black and Matthias van Rossum, 'Beyond profitability. The Dutch Transatlantic slave trade and Its economic impact', *Slavery & Abolition* 36:1 (2015) 63-83.

12 Gerhard de Kok, 'Cursed capital. The economic impact of the Transatlantic slave trade on Walcheren around 1770', *TSEG/Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 13:3 (2016) 1-27.

13 Brandon and Bosma, 'Atlantische slavernij'; Idem, 'Slavery and the Dutch economy, 1750-1800', *Slavery & Abolition* 42:1 (2021) 43-76.

14 Tamira Combrink, 'Slave-based coffee in the eighteenth century and the role of the Dutch in global commodity chains', *Slavery & Abolition* 42:1 (2021) 15-42.

15 Felicia Fricke, 'Productie en handel van glazen kralen in Amsterdam', in: Brandon, Jones, Jouwe and Van Rossum (eds.), *Slavernij in Oost en West*, 257-263.

16 Blok, 'Schiedam'.

One key sector that became intimately linked to the slave trade and slavery was that of finance and insurance. In an analysis of insurance conditions in early modern Dutch slave trade, Karin Lurvink recently stressed that ‘slavery and the financial sector were connected’, arguing that coverage of suppressed revolts and penalization of successful revolts by insurers may even have impacted the severity of repression on board slave ships.¹⁷ Research commissioned by De Nederlandsche Bank showed that the starting capital of the bank came from owners with direct interests in plantation slavery, and that the bank ‘served the slave-based production chain’ both within and outside the borders of the Dutch empire.¹⁸ Research commissioned by ABN AMRO has pointed out that, in the eighteenth century, for the firms of Hope & Co and R. Mees & Zoonen – both predecessors of the bank – slavery-related activities made up a large part of their portfolio and that, in the nineteenth century, they became active in slavery in the US South and also in other forms of coerced colonial labour.¹⁹ Unfortunately, neither of these bank-commissioned studies looked at the role of these banks in those other forms of coerced colonial labour, the relations with slavery, or the impact of these banks on the transformation of economic development and (coercive) labour exploitation across the globe in the long run. Especially the role of coercive *corvée* labour regimes – first employed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) on Java, Sri Lanka and Ambon and later intensified as the Cultivation System – remains one of the key blind spots in Dutch research.²⁰

The Dutch Republic was obviously not alone in its strong reliance on slavery and slave-based economic activities, and the studies mentioned here join a wider landscape of new research that suggests the importance of slavery for different parts of Europe. Klass Rönnbäck recently estimated that the economic activities tied to the Atlantic slavery complex made up as much as 11 percent of the entire British econ-

17 Karin Lurvink, ‘The insurance of mass murder. The development of slave life insurance policies of Dutch private slave ships, 1720-1780’, *Enterprise & Society* 21:1 (2020) 210-238.

18 Karwan Fatah-Black, Lauren Lauret and Joris van den Tol, *Dienstbaar aan de keten? De Nederlandsche Bank en de laatste decennia van de slavernij, 1814-1863* (Leiden 2022).

19 Gerhard de Kok, Pepijn Brandon, Patrick van der Geest, Gabriëlle La Croix, Henk Looijesteijn, Brecht Nijman and Daniël Tuik, ‘Het slavernijverleden van historische voorlopers van ABN AMRO. Een onderzoek naar Hope & Co en R. Mees & Zoonen’, report published by the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, 2022.

20 Matthias van Rossum and Merve Tosun, ‘Corvée capitalism. The Dutch East India Company, colonial expansion, and labor regimes in early modern Asia’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80:4 (2021) 911-932; Jan Breman, *Mobilizing labour for the global coffee market* (Amsterdam 2015).

omy by the early nineteenth century.²¹ Earlier he showed that at, the end of the eighteenth century, the ‘three small islands of the Danish West Indies’, with a population of only 1 percent of the Danish empire, contributed a net profit equal to some 5 or 6 percent of the total public revenue of Denmark proper, which ‘was repatriated straight into the coffers of the Danish Kingdom’.²² For Portugal, earlier studies have estimated the contribution of the overseas empire at ‘around 20 percent’ of Portugal’s per capita income.²³ For the port city of Hamburg it has been estimated that the value of the slave-based commodities of sugar and coffee rose from a share of 39 percent of the total imports into the city in the 1730s to more than 62 percent in the 1790s. To indicate the importance of these links between the Atlantic complex and this single port it must be considered that Hamburg’s trade as the major port in the region represented ‘about 70 percent of all overseas imports’ of middle and northern Germany.²⁴ Following the traces of the impact of Atlantic slavery even deeper into the European hinterlands, Anka Steffen recently estimated that, at the end of the eighteenth century, the production of linen for the Atlantic slavery complex accounted for some ‘15 percent of the total value of all manufactures produced in the Prussian state’.²⁵

One classic debating strategy of scholars committed to playing down the Dutch history of slavery has been to challenge these findings and their implications by questioning whether specific percentages should be considered ‘small’ rather than ‘large’. Of course, this game of relative comparison can be a deceptive one, as any two year old infant learns to understand through play (small spoon, big spoon! Big bear, little bear!). Some examples can show the large impact of seemingly small numbers.

21 Klas Rönnbäck, ‘On the economic importance of the slave plantation complex to the British economy during the eighteenth century. A value-added approach’, *Journal of Global History* 13:3 (2018) 309-327; Idem, ‘Governance, value-added and rents in plantation slavery-based value-chains’, *Slavery & Abolition* 42:1 (2021) 130-150.

22 Klas Rönnbäck, ‘Who stood to gain from colonialism? A case study of early modern European colonialism in the Caribbean’, *Itinerario* 33:3 (2009) 135-154.

23 Leonor Freire Costa, Nuno Palma, and Jaime Reis, ‘The Great Escape? The contribution of the Empire to Portugal’s economic growth, 1500-1800’, *European Review of Economic History* 19 (2014) 1-22.

24 Ulrich Pfister, ‘Great Divergence, consumer revolution and the reorganization of textile markets. Evidence from Hamburg’s import trade, eighteenth century’, *Economic History Working Papers*, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), no. 266 (2017).

25 Anka Steffen, ‘A cloth that binds. New perspectives on the eighteenth-century Prussian economy’, *Slavery & Abolition* 42:1 (2021) 105-129. Anka Steffen and Klaus Weber, ‘Spinning and weaving for the slave trade. Proto industry in eighteenth-century Silesia’, in: Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft (eds), *Slavery hinterland. Transatlantic slavery and continental Europe, 1680-1850* (Woodbridge 2016) 88-92.

A clear point of reference for the importance of the slavery-related contributions to early modern Dutch economy can be provided by contemporary sectors that have a similar spinoff and are considered and treated as crucial for national economies. In 2006, on the eve of the globally disruptive financial crisis of 2007–2008, it was calculated that the added gross value of the entire ‘financial and insurance services’ was 7.7 percent of the UK’s GDP and 7.5 percent of the US’s GDP. In 2016, the digital economy contributed 6.5 percent to the GDP of the United States, making the sector a ‘notable contributor to the overall economy’. In the Dutch context, a comparison might be made with the port of Rotterdam which, in 2017, all dependent logistics, industry and financial services included, represented 6.2 percent of the total GDP of the Netherlands. These comparisons provide two clear arguments as to why the impact of the Atlantic slavery complex was significant. First, all of these contemporary sectors are considered too big to fail. This was perhaps most evident in the 2007–2008 financial crisis with massive bailouts and a subsequent deep economic downturn. Second, similar to the financial sector or for example the port of Rotterdam, the early modern Atlantic slave trade and economy were closely linked to a myriad of other sectors, from supplying and processing to servicing industries.²⁶

This Special Issue moves the Dutch debate on the economic impact of Atlantic slavery and slave trade beyond this numbers game, as has been mentioned as perhaps one of the shortcomings of earlier interventions in the debates by, for example, Van Rossum and Fatah Black (2012), and Brandon and Bosma (2019). In the introduction to the Special Issue ‘Europe and Slavery. Revisiting the Impact of Slave-Based Activities on European Economies, 1500–1850’, with Tamira Combrink, we therefore argued that slavery and slave trade were part of the larger structures of political economies we can only improve our understanding of if we reconstruct their roles and effects through systematic comparative and connecting global approaches that address both the quantitative and the qualitative aspects.²⁷ This implies that we should combine quantitative assessments with (new) qualitative approaches to the economic, institutional, political, cultural, and social dimensions of the histories of slavery and slave trade.

26 This argument was made in Tamira Combrink and Matthias van Rossum, ‘Introduction: the impact of slavery on Europe – reopening a debate’, *Slavery and Abolition* 42:1 (2021) 1–14; see also: Brandon and Bosma, ‘Atlantische slavernij’.

27 Combrink and Van Rossum, ‘Impact of slavery on Europe’.

New perspectives

The articles of this Special Issue explore different roads that venture out from these insights. From various perspectives, each shows how slavery and slave trade had strategic importance and were instrumental in the political economy of the Dutch Republic. Together, these contributions thoroughly deconstruct the longstanding notion in Dutch historiography that the Atlantic slave trade and slavery were unprofitable and marginal to the early modern Dutch economy.

Cátia Antunes and Ramona Negrón explore how Dutch and especially Amsterdam merchants actively strived to gain access to Spanish American slave trade markets. Their article shows how, from the 1640s onwards, Dutch slave traders became a key player in supplying enslaved Africans to the Spanish American colonies. This established the position of Curaçao as the largest Caribbean slave-trading entrepôt. For the Dutch merchants and ruling elite this slave trade was important also beyond the potential profits of the trade itself and its importance to the development of the slave-based colonial economies of the Americas. Antunes and Negrón argue that the slave trade of Dutch merchants to the Spanish empire was also motivated by the opportunities it offered to gain access to silver. The slave trade via Curaçao generated silver flows to the Dutch Republic that were crucial in meeting the VOC's high demand for bullion for its operations in Asia.²⁸

Studying the shareholders of the *Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie* (MCC), in his article, Van der Blij builds upon the important notion that direct profits from the slave trade were often of less interest to investors, and that the interest lay more in 'obtaining a beneficial position as preferred supplier to slaving companies and partnerships', as Gerhard de Kok explained in his study of the impact of the slave trade on Walcheren.²⁹ These studies have picked up on the point that it is crucial to move 'beyond profitability' to understand the role of the slave trade for the Dutch economy and instead start to explore the impact the economic spinoff of this trade created in the Dutch Republic.³⁰ Van der Blij shows that much of the outfitting and supplying of departing slave ships, as well as the buying of returning goods, was done by sharehold-

28 J. Lucassen and M. van Rossum, 'Smokkeloos en zilverstromen. Illegale export van edelmetaal via de VOC', *TSEG* 13:1 (2016) 104.

29 De Kok, 'Cursed capital', 1-27, 21-23.

30 Van Rossum and Fatah-Black, 'Wat is winst?', 3-29; Fatah-Black and Van Rossum, 'Beyond profitability', 63-83.

ers who also acted as preferred suppliers and buyers of the MCC. All of the chest makers, for example, were MCC shareholders. As is known, bills of exchange became a crucial credit instrument for slave plantation owners buying enslaved Africans from slave traders such as the MCC.

As with the study by Antunes and Negrón, this presents us with an interesting link to the wider global context of the Atlantic slavery system. Van der Blij concludes that the main customer for these bills of exchange were not the shareholders but the VOC, most likely as a way to obtain bullion, which it was increasingly shipping from the Dutch Republic to Asia in the eighteenth century, as the VOC's access to Asian sources was diminishing.³¹ This is an interesting reminder of how colonial systems of slave-based exploitation were interacting across the Dutch empire and across the globe, as the VOC did not only buy bullion in Japan, Manilla, India and Persia, but also developed silver and gold mines in Sumatra and Java that operated with the labour of enslaved people. The mines in Silida (Sumatra) were directly run by the VOC between 1669 and 1738, after which the mines were rented out to a local ruler. The more than 500 enslaved workers were bought and transported by the VOC from Madagascar, Nias and other places throughout the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago.³²

Based on an extraordinary and even revolutionary archival find, Erik Odegard studies the private involvement in the slave-based economy of the newly acquired Dutch colony in Brazil in the seventeenth century. The archives of the Raad van Brabant allow him to create a first time reconstruction of these private investments in the first large Dutch Atlantic colony. The case of Dutch Brazil is crucial in understanding the role of slavery and slave trade in relation to the early Dutch endeavors in colonial expansion. The conquest of Brazil occurred after the first large-scale experiences with slavery in the violently conquered Banda Islands (1621) and Batavia (1619). From the early 1620s onwards, the VOC then continued to set up largescale slave trade from the Bay of Bengal (Coromandel and especially Arakan), and conquered the island of Formosa, with the specific intent of producing sugar and rice. It is within this context that the West India Company (WIC) made attempts to conquer West African slave trade ports as well as the Portuguese colonies

31 James D. Tracy (ed.), *The rise of merchant empires. Long distance trade in the early modern world 1350-1750* (Cambridge 1990).

32 See on the Silida mines e.g. Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek. De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Hilversum 2015).

in Brazil.³³ For the Atlantic historiography, Odegard rightfully points out that ‘Dutch historiography tends to focus on issues like shipborne trade and commerce, but pays less attention to land-bound issues like investment in the colonial economy.’ He shows how the WIC operated as a colonial power, but one that tried to attract and foster the colonial economy under its rule through private investors. Many of these investors would continue their activities in the later Dutch colonies in the Caribbean.

Tamira Combrink shows how the increase of the Rhine trade in the eighteenth century was linked to the trade in colonial commodities such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, and other tropical items. This upstream Rhine trade from the Dutch Republic connected the Caribbean plantation economies to globalising German consumption patterns. Combrink shows that the trade within Europe consisted increasingly of the re-exports of slave-based products on the one hand, and the trade in provisioning and supply for the slave-based Atlantic production complex on the other. The Atlantic complex gave a major impulse to intra-European trade, and this contributed significantly to European economic development.

Ways forward

So where does all this leave (future) scholarship? Most obviously, it is time for economic history to further explore the relations between (Atlantic) slavery and capitalism, economic growth, underdevelopment and inequality. It is also clear that solely quantitative approaches to these themes alone will not suffice, but need to be accompanied by more qualitative approaches that allow for an understanding of the changing political-economic contexts and relations between slavery, capitalism, and politics.³⁴ The key issue is not whether such a more encompassing approach is necessary, but rather how such a research agenda should take shape. At least four relevant steps forward can be identified at this point.

33 Matthias van Rossum, ‘The Dutch East India Company and slave trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago worlds, 1602-1795’, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (February 2020). Link: <https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-403>

34 Combrink and Van Rossum, ‘Impact of slavery on Europe’; Sven Beckert, ‘Revisiting Europe and slavery’, *Slavery and Abolition* 42:1 (2021) 165-178.

First, the study of the large impact of seemingly small numbers has been set in motion, but systematic, in-depth, and long-term analyses on local, sectoral, and even national levels remain wanting. The impact of the Atlantic slavery complex has been explored mostly for a few selected economic sectors (finance, slave trade, and provisioning) and cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, The Hague).³⁵ These studies have pointed at the wider range of entanglements of many industries, both within early modern and nineteenth-century Netherlands, as well as beyond its borders. Many more links, sometimes unexpected, often un(der)explored, are waiting to be studied: from gin production to ship-building, from glass manufacture to textiles, from the processing and re-export of colonial goods to the recruitment of (military) labour, and many more.

Second, moving the study of the entanglements of the Dutch and European economy beyond the numbers game, beyond the conclusion that slavery and slave trade-related economic activities did indeed matter, entails that we should return to the question of how these connections with the Atlantic slavery complex worked, and especially what changes they set in motion. This classic theme of the impact of the Atlantic slavery complex was most famously introduced by Eric Williams,³⁶ but in later debates perhaps not served well with a too narrow focus on the direct link between slavery and industrialization. There is reason to take up these questions in a broader perspective.³⁷ The work of Tamira Combrink suggests, for example, that it was the Rhine trade in sugar and coffee that initiated a major shift in the orientation of the Dutch economy.³⁸ Similar arguments could be made for the financialization of the activities of economic elites.³⁹ Or for the effects of Atlantic slavery on the intensification of serfdom and coercion in the Silesian linen production.⁴⁰ Exactly such questions should be explored better and more in-depth, for more regions and sectors, to gain a better insight

35 Brandon, Jones, Jouwe and Van Rossum (eds), *De slavernij in Oost en West*; Alex van Stipriaan, *Rotterdam in slavernij* (Amsterdam 2020); Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Het koloniale verleden van Rotterdam* (Amsterdam 2020); Nancy Jouwe, Matthijs Kuipers and Remco Raben (eds), *Slavernij en de stad Utrecht* (Zutphen 2021).

36 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and slavery* (Chapel Hill 1944).

37 Pepijn Brandon, 'Rethinking capitalism and slavery. New perspectives from American debates', *TSEG/Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 12:4 (2015) 117-137.

38 Combrink, 'Slave-based coffee in the eighteenth century', 15-42.

39 Lurvink, 'The insurance of mass murder'.

40 'Steffen, 'A cloth that binds'.

in the transformations that were set in motion by the entanglements of the European economy and the Atlantic slave trade and slavery.

Third, it is relevant to assess how, in turn, these entanglements were also reciprocal relations. The issue of how insurance policies may have helped to shape and strengthen the violent and cruel repressions during the middle passages of the slave trade, as raised by Karin Lurvink, is an important reminder. The involvement of the Dutch economy and state with colonial slavery not only impacted the Netherlands itself, but also deeply influenced dynamics outside Europe, from the regions where slave trade was conducted, to the many middle passages itself, and the colonies enslaved people were transported to.

Last and fourth, systematic contextualizations are needed but are too often still lacking. Several important domains of contextualization can be identified that deserve renewed and closer attention in upcoming research. For example the role of the state – and especially how the policies and actions of the early modern and modern Dutch governments, from the Estates General to the Stadholder, from cities to provinces, and from chartered companies to the admiralties – shaped and safeguarded the Dutch involvements and interests in colonial slavery and slave trade across the globe. Or the role of Dutch merchant-ruling elites – and how private and familial financial and economic interests shaped not only Dutch politics and policies, but also impacted colonialism and exploitation across the globe. And, as Filipa Ribeiro da Silva recently reminded us, it is important to also look at the role of local colonial elites, and to move beyond ‘the one-way directional relationship between colonial and metropolitan economies as well as the idea that gains and gainers from the slave trade and slave-based products were only to be found in Europe’.⁴¹ One important avenue for future research would be to better connect these insights to the complex dynamics in (colonized) regions outside Europe, assessing further how slavery and colonial exploitation not only hampered economic development, but also shaped local and regional economic and social inequalities.

41 Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, ‘The profits of the Portuguese-Brazilian transatlantic slave trade. Challenges and possibilities’, *Slavery and Abolition* 42:1 (2021) 77-104, 97.