

Afterword

Acknowledgements

Our research began while the archives were closed during the COVID-19 lockdown of 2021. At the time, all historical research projects had to compete for access to scarce seats in archive reading rooms and for priority in digitising material. We therefore gratefully acknowledge the patient support we received from the National Archives (Nationaal Archief) in The Hague, the Amsterdam City Archives (Stadsarchief Amsterdam), the Archives of the House of Orange-Nassau (Koninklijk Huisarchief), the Utrecht Archives (Utrechts Archief), and the Rotterdam City Archives (Stadsarchief Rotterdam). De Nederlandsche Bank helped us search the DNB collection at the National Archives as well as at the bank itself, and to select research material. During this process, DNB suffered a sad loss with the death of archivist Jonna Morillo, who had so ably assisted and motivated us at the beginning of our research project.

We are grateful, too, for all the goodwill shown by fellow researchers. Without hesitation, Randy Browne sent us archival documents about the plantation *Cornelia Ida* in Demerara. After a casual query about valuations of plantations in the nineteenth century, Eline Rademakers searched the inventories and found exactly what we were looking for that very same evening. Pernille Røge gave us helpful advice concerning plantation ownership islands colonised by Denmark. Studies of the history of plantation ownership have been made much easier in recent years by the hard work of enthusiastic researchers who have constructed extensive large databases. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database and Legacies of British Slavery have become cornerstones for this kind of research. In the Netherlands, the work of Paul Koulen on Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice proved indispensable. For Surinam, we were able to draw upon the collections built up by Philip Dikland and Okke ten Hove.

In our own research, important roles were played by Zipphora Dors, who in a short time specialised in going through plantation records; by Sakina Mouami, who ploughed her way through the political correspondence; by Leonoor Kemperman, for whom no ledger was too big; and by Camilla de Koning, who managed to dig up untraceable documents and threw herself into the letters and papers of the abolitionist movement. Their combined labour in sifting through digital and physical archives and creating extensive Excel files provided us with the facts, large and small, which have enabled us to write this new history of DNB. Many thanks to them for that. Throughout the research process we were grateful to our advisory board: Alicia Schrikker, who ably assisted us with her knowledge of slavery in Asia; Maartje Janse, who gave us important pointers on the abolitionist movement and the jumble of petitions and committees dealing with this subject in the mid-nineteenth century; Cátia Antunes, who challenged us to be ambitious in our methodology and substantive approach; and Gerhard de Kok and Pepijn Brandon, both of whom provided us with useful comments and helpful advice derived from their research project on Hope & Co and Mees & Sons. The knowledge shared by Joost Jonker and Gert Oostindie was indispensable. At the beginning of our task, they foresaw exactly where we should place our emphasis and what pitfalls we would encounter. Furthermore, at the end of the research project, they provided critical feedback. We would also like to thank Ger Bom and Jakob de Haan for their interested and helpful engagement as members of the DNB working group on the history of slavery, and Leo Balai for acting as counter-reader of the draft report.

Research questions from DNB's executive board

DNB's executive board formulated three guiding research questions concerning the bank's direct involvement with slavery, as well as any such involvement by its officials or by Johanna Borski, who was instrumental in its establishment.

- What, if any, was the involvement with slavery during the period 1814-1873 of presidents, directors, and secretaries of DNB, as well as any later holders of those offices insofar as the research shows that they received compensation for freed men? This involvement may include:

- an administrative role or financial stake in any organisation involved directly with slavery (not just plantations, but also – for example – the Amsterdam chambers of the Dutch East India Company or Dutch West India Company, or the Society of Surinam).
 - participation in the public debate on slavery, as either a supporter or an opponent. Where possible, this administrative role, financial stake, or voice in the debate should be interpreted in the context of what was customary in the period concerned.
- Did Johanna Borski (1764-1846) have any such administrative role or financial stake, or participate in the public debate (1764-1846) insofar as it related to slavery? Again, this should be interpreted in the context of what was customary in the period concerned.
 - What, if any, was the involvement with slavery during the period 1814-1873 of DNB as an institution? This may include specific slavery-related statements made by the bank to organisations with which it had formal contacts, or public statements on the topic in general, as well as policy it pursued. As far as possible, the extent to which any such statement or policy was consistent with DNB's statutory remit at the time, or whether it was acting beyond the scope thereof, should be indicated.

These questions formed the basic guidelines for our study. The team of researchers from Leiden University undertook this work entirely independently. DNB made its archives unconditionally available for the researchers.

How we define slavery

In this study, we focus in the first place upon slavery as a formal, legally defined institution in the form practised and recognised by the government of the time. The Netherlands had formally had no slavery since the late Middle Ages and consequently there was no legal basis for its widespread introduction in the colonies in the early seventeenth century. Where Dutch law did not suffice, as in this case, the colonies therefore fell back on Roman law.⁶⁴⁰ As a result, slavery in the Dutch colonial empire fell under the law of property: an enslaved person was considered in law as a *res*, a chattel, and not a legal person. Local adjustments to this legal framework were made in the various colonies over the next couple of centuries, but in

many respects, there was continuity and the Roman legal basis remained recognisable. This is what the colonial government defined as slavery and what was abolished in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Although there were local variants of slavery as well as indigenous forms of servitude, bondage, and enslavement in places under Dutch control, slavery became increasingly homogeneous during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In those colonies where policies aimed to grow agricultural produce for the world market, a specific type of production slavery emerged with the distinct characteristics that it was perpetual and that enslaved people could be bought and sold. It also had one other unique feature: people regarded as European were excluded from it. In practice, slavery in the early modern Atlantic world was restricted to people of African descent – even though this was not actually enshrined in law. The racial distinction between who could be enslaved and who could not is a key trait of this phenomenon, so we refer to it as racial production slavery. The Roman legal principle *partus sequitur ventrem* (the fruit follows the womb) meant that children born to women held in slavery became slaves of the mother's owner. Slave status was thus hereditary through the female line.

In Asia, too, colonialism resulted in the commercialisation of slavery and enslaved people were tradable chattels who contributed towards the production of commodities for the world market. As in the Atlantic colonies, property rights and racialisation determined the contours of the institution. Slavery was just one of the ways in which labour was mobilised in the overseas empire, though, and nor was it the only one based upon coercion. In the Atlantic territories too, but much more so in Asia, various forms of forced labour were imposed under Dutch rule. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in fact, the extent of slavery in the East equalled or even exceeded that in the West. However, the rise of the cultivation system and the end of the slave trade resulted in a more rapid decline in the number of people held in bondage in the Netherlands' Asian possessions than in the Atlantic part of its empire.

Developments in the Atlantic world became central to the step-by-step legal eradication of all forms of slavery. But after abolition the fight against slavery actually became a pretext for other forms of violent subjugation and forced labour in Asia. So, abolition by no means meant a farewell to colonial oppression and servitude. DNB's involvement with these diverse alternative forms of bondage has not been studied in our research, but

despite these reservations we can conclude that the abolition of slavery was an important step forward and one of the greatest achievements of the modern age.

We have taken the historical practice of slavery as a formal institution as the primary focus of our research. As such, we have deliberately chosen not to adopt the contemporary definitions of slavery and human trafficking as laid down in current legislation. The United Nations began to define slavery more broadly during the course of the twentieth century after the global prohibition of slavery as a formal institution, resulted in the permutation of slavery into a more informal practice. The definition now used by the UN would have required much broader research on our part, encompassing other forms of unfree employment such as serfdom and indentured coolie labour. We have explicitly decided not to venture into these domains. By opting for the historical legal definition, our research focuses upon the racial production slavery which was the subject of heated political debate in the nineteenth century. This is a form that has left clear traces in the historical archives and, moreover, has become the focus of a contemporary public debate. It is also the form for which the government paid compensation to the slave owners at the time of abolition. Because of this delineation, our research also dovetails well with similar work abroad.

Wording and spelling

With regard to spelling variants, the following conventions are applied in this translation. We use the historical English spelling Surinam for the former colony also sometimes known as Dutch Guiana, since 1975 officially styled the Republic of Suriname (as per the standard Dutch spelling). Likewise, we use British Guiana for the then colony which is now independent Guyana. On occasions we also use Guiana to refer to the entire region between the Amazon and Orinoco rivers. And we follow the conventional English style for the colony and the river Demerara, which the Dutch generally called Demerary or Demerarij. The same pattern is followed in other cases where placenames and the like vary over time or differ between Dutch and English: the usual contemporaneous English spelling is used. The names of plantations have not been translated.

Treating people as chattels for the purpose of exercising total control over their lives and labour always involves violence and mental terror.

Slavery gave rise to barbaric situations, even as slave owners purported to be upholding civilised values. The use of veiled and euphemistic language was one of the ways in which this dichotomy was maintained. The aim of this study is not to conceal, but to reveal what has long been ignored. In the literature on slavery, the term enslaved person (and in Dutch its equivalents *slaafgemaakte* and *tot slaaf gemaakte*) has been used widely since the 1990s to refer to those held in bondage. In the Dutch context, in his recent book on the slavery-related history of Rotterdam, *Rotterdam in Slavernij*, Professor Alex van Stipriaan explains that this usage serves “to indicate that no one is a slave, as a kind of identity, but that the person concerned is being subjected by others, even if he or she was born into slavery.”⁶⁴¹ The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam chose the same idiom for its 2021 exhibition, *Slavery*. In this study, we follow the prevailing practice with a certain degree of reserve. We use the term slaves when referring to the abstract legal category but prefer enslaved person in the case of specific individuals, so as to reiterate the coercion and resistance that slavery entailed.

As far as possible, we also avoid the use of racialising terms such as black and white to categorise people. We abstain from using denigrating terminology, except in quotes aimed to demonstrate a racialised way of thinking. We want to state explicitly that these terms formed part of a culture that perpetuated slavery.

Research on economic involvement

To answer the research questions, on the economic involvement with slavery of DNB-officials and the bank itself, we consulted a variety of primary source materials. In the case of DNB as an institution, they are found in the bank’s own archives. The most important source with regard to its economic involvement is the general ledger; from this it is possible to ascertain fairly quickly and clearly the value of the goods and securities pledged to secure credit. The archives do not reveal exactly what securities were involved, however. There are references to a register of securities, but this document has not been found. Since such pledges had to be recorded by a notary in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the deed he drew up itemising the securities concerned, it should in theory be possible to find this information in the notarial archives. Given the huge number of

notaries active at the time and how labour-intensive the process would be, however, it was decided not to pursue this line of research but instead to prioritise other matters. It is perhaps worth mentioning, though, that none of the three deeds we did find – all in one book from one notary – had anything to do with slavery.

In DNB's first years, the ledger itself mentioned what goods constituted the collateral pledged and it was therefore fairly easy to determine whether these possibly were the product of slavery. For later years, however, it became necessary to look up the details of each transaction in the journals. And later still we had to refer to the day books. Given the time-consuming nature of this work and the limited time available, it was decided to take samples at five-year intervals between the 1817/18 and 1862/1863 financial years. In order to be able to compare these with the period after the abolition of slavery, the 1872/73 financial year was also examined. In two financial years (1833/34 and 1848/49), moreover, those pledged goods relevant to the political component of our research were studied.

In relying upon the DNB archives, there is of course a source selection bias. For example, it could be that coffee was pledged more frequently than other goods because the traders in that commodity were more likely to experience liquidity issues – due to a delayed delivery, say, because of the long supply route – and so had to gage stock in order to raise cash to pay a bill. Moreover, other goods such as fresh fish were never pledged as they were highly perishable and so totally unacceptable as collateral. Because of the time it took to ship them to Europe, on the other hand, by default slave goods had to have a long shelf life and were therefore particularly suitable as collateral in the event of liquidity problems. We were aware of these shortcomings in our source selection, but had little choice than to accept them since no better sources were available.

With regard to DNB-officials' personal involvement with slavery, we have drawn upon a huge variety of material. The first step was to draw up a biographical profile of each individual, including parents, grandparents, spouse(s), and parents-in-law, and a short curriculum vitae in order to determine to which businesses DNB-executives may be linked. Those profiles were based primarily upon baptismal records, secondary literature, and databases such as biografischportaal.nl (managed by the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands) and parlement.com (of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre), as well as obituaries and business advertisements in newspapers held at the Royal Library of the

Netherlands (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) and searchable using delpher.nl. Using this biographical and professional data, attempts were then made to locate the personal records of the executives concerned in family and company archives. Since the majority of them came from Amsterdam, we also made grateful use of the digitised index of its city archives. This proved especially useful with regard to early DNB officials, since it is possible to find persons mentioned in notarial deeds dating from before 1800. Through the index, for instance, we found probate documents specifying exactly what plantation shares persons had owned at the time of their death. Despite all these efforts, it naturally remains possible that proof of individuals' involvement with slavery still exists but has yet to be found.